

Mark 6:34-55 • Earthly Circumstances vs. Heavenly

Introduction

As an introduction, have someone read the following passages:

Luke 4:3-4: *And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"*

John 6:48-51: *"I am the bread of life. "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. "This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."*

³⁴When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.

[Read 6:34]

Q: When Jesus sees people in need, which need does He usually address first –physical or spiritual?

A: Spiritual.

Q: Do we have other examples from Jesus' ministry?

A: Forgiving the sins of the paralytic before healing him.

Mark 2:9-11: *"Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home."*

[Read 6:35-37]

³⁵When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and it is already quite late; ³⁶send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

³⁷But He answered them, "You give them something to eat!"

And they said to Him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?"

Q: In light of the passages just read from Luke above and our recognition that Jesus sees spiritual needs as taking priority over physical needs, what is Jesus probably trying to communicate to the disciples?

A: Possibly that He's **BEEN** feeding them, in essence meeting their needs. If He is able to take care of the heavenly part, why should they have difficulty with the earthly part? They've seen this principle at work before.

Q: What is the situation the disciples are trying to articulate to Jesus? How do they see the current situation?

A: Circumstances are impossible.

³⁸And He said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go look!”

And when they found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.”

³⁹And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass.

⁴⁰They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. ⁴¹And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all.

⁴²They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish.

⁴⁴There were five thousand men who ate the loaves.

⁴⁵Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away.

⁴⁶After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray.

[Read 6:38-44]

Q: Were the conditions truly impossible as once thought by the disciples?

A: Of course not.

Q: What did Jesus use to meet everyone’s needs?

A: Nothing more than what was available and already present.

Q: Therefore, where did the power reside? What proved to be more powerful than the circumstances?

A: Simply Jesus Himself.

[Read 6:45-46]

Q: Were the disciples operating on their own? Was this a situation where they were doing whatever they pleased, however they wanted?

A: They were obedient to Jesus’ direction, going and doing as He commanded. In other words, they were completely obedient to His will.

Q: Where did Jesus go?

A: He went to a mountain.

Observation: The lake is only about 7 miles across at its widest point. Jesus would have probably had them in view from the mountain the entire time.

Q: If this observation is true, what is the reality of the circumstances of the disciples in the boat?

A: They have never left Jesus’ gaze. In fact, they’re still under His watchful eye and even being prayed for by Him.

⁴⁷When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. ⁴⁸Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them.

[Read 6:47-48]

Q: Given what we know about the size of the lake, how are they progressing so far?

A: Not well. It's taken them about 8 or 9 hours to row no more than 3 ½ miles.

Q: How had circumstances changed for the disciples?

A: Trick question. Earthly circumstances changed in terms of the weather. Heavenly circumstances never changed one bit. Jesus *always* had them in His sight, had them *completely* bathed in His prayer.

Q: When, precisely, did Jesus leave the mountain?

A: When the disciples' earthly circumstances changed and they needed Him most. Jesus responded to their need.

Q: So when did Jesus respond to their need in reality as opposed to the disciples' perception?

A: He was already on His way *before* they probably realized the full extent of their need. (Encourage discussion of the application of this in our own life.)

Q: Why do you suppose that Jesus was intending to walk right by them?

A: To reinforce the message that they were never away from His protection, that **EVERYTHING** was under His control the whole time, both before and after the storm, and that they could complete the mission He gave them regardless of how things looked. They were **STILL** completely within His will.

⁴⁹But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; ⁵⁰for they all saw Him and were terrified.

But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid."

⁵¹Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, ⁵²for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.

[Read 6:49-50]

Q: Ever been in a situation where the answer first looked "bad" or at least "unnerving" and it turned out to be part of the solution? Has God ever met a need in an unconventional way you did not anticipate?

A: [Strictly rhetorical – let the group yak it up.]

[Read 6:51-52]

Q: Another way of stating the situation is that because of what they witnessed in the feeding of the 5,000, they should NOT have been amazed. Why?

- Jesus was always in control.
- They were always under His direction (both in distributing the food and in rowing the boat to the other side).
- They were never out from under His supervision and protection (either while feeding the people or under His gaze from the mountain).
- Jesus used what was present to divinely accomplish His will.
- Jesus was in control of the circumstances and, by example, showed that heavenly circumstances took care of the earthly ones.

⁵³When they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. ⁵⁴When they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, ⁵⁵and ran about that whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was.

[Read 6:53-55]

Q: What are the defining characteristics which make the people's reaction to Jesus completely different from the disciples'?

- They recognized Jesus.
- They ran **TO** Him.
- They accepted that Jesus was able to meet all their needs exactly as He was, with exactly what was on hand.
- They did not let earthly circumstances – the condition of their sick friends and relatives – outweigh the reality of heavenly circumstances – the presence of Jesus to heal.

Application: Look at this entire time line, the people, the events, and tell us what moment you most identify with right now at this point in your life. Pray for each other to take the focus off earthly circumstances and place them on Jesus.