

OTT Generosity

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[0 : 00] I haven't seen these for a while, and I don't know if they still do them, but does anybody remember the Magic Eye books? Remember the Magic Eye books or posters? They're that optical illusion where at first when you look at it, it just looks like a mess of colour. It just appears like a random pattern. I don't know if you remember those, but there was a knack to it that if you kind of looked through the paper, there was a hidden image underneath.

I remember those from the 90s. Nods, do you remember those? Or you could get Magic Eye books where there's lots of different ones that you could do. But I don't know if you remember the very first time someone showed me one, and you look at it and you have no idea what they're talking about. If you can't, and if you can't do it, everybody else can do it apart from you. You look at it, it just looks like nothing. And you kind of feel out the loop, because what they can all see, you can.

I eventually remember there was a trick, or this was the way that you tried to do it when you couldn't, is that you put the paper as close to your nose as you could, and as you slowly pulled it out, you tried to keep your focus what it was, and eventually part of the image would appear. And then you'd realise you had to blur your focus, and you could catch the image, and you realised what it was, and then there was somebody else who couldn't do it.

[1 : 31] I think I remember my grandad, or my dad, could never do it, and just thought it was crazy the whole time. What's this newfangled rubbish that all the kids are doing?

But it's about, we had to focus to make the image appear. And over the last few weeks, as we've been looking through Mark 5-8, one of the big things that has kept coming up is that the disciples repeatedly, they repeatedly can't see Jesus.

They can't see him. They know, they do, we realise they know that there is something about him, but they can't see him truly. They know that they have to, that they should keep looking, but they just can't see who he is.

And it is, it's surprising these chapters, because you think, you keep on thinking, that they're gonna, it's gonna clip eventually, that they're gonna see it, that they're gonna have the, it's just all gonna open up for them.

And surprisingly, because you think of, I keep tracing it back, all that they've experienced over the last few weeks. They saw him feed 5,000. They saw him walk on water.

[2 : 39] They've seen healed people, cast out demons. You think, so you think, maybe this week, maybe this chapter, this is the moment when the lights are gonna come. They'll understand. And the reason you think, in today, you think, surely this is the moment.

This is definitely the moment. Because the miracle is almost identical to the one that they've seen a few weeks ago. In fact, if you look through chapter 8, the wording of it, it follows almost the exact same pattern as that of the feeding of the 5,000 in chapter 6.

Even the structure of it all, some of the sentences, they're in the same place. So the surprising thing is that they still don't get it. You get, again, Jesus and the crowd are in the wilderness.

Again, they have nothing to eat. Again, Jesus says, they need something to eat. You expect at this point that at least one, you expect just, even if they don't all get it, maybe just one of them, one of the 12 will see what's going on, pipe up and go, how about this is just like the other way, isn't it?

We had nothing to eat. There was a large crowd. That young lad had some fish and a few loaves. And we've got some loaves. And there's a few fish. And we're in the same predicament. Let's pray and give thanks. And Jesus will feed everyone.

[3 : 56] But they don't. Verse 4, they say, but where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them? Jesus goes on in exactly the same fashion as before.

But there's so many, and there's so many details here in this passage that they're worth pointing out to bring colour to what's going on. Jesus wants them to know, as he did before.

He wants the crowd to know his generosity, his grace that is in abundance. That he's over the top generous. And what we see differently to this passage, this is one of the key differences, is that before when he fed the 5,000, it was in Israel here.

Now he's in the Decapolis, which is a Gentile, non-Jewish area. We saw that last week, how he healed the demon, the mum who had a daughter had a demon in her.

And she said, at least she accepted that she was willing to be known as a dog for Jesus. Here he's doing the same thing. He's declaring that he wants to feed not just the Jews, but all people.

[5 : 05] And he's over the top generous. Whereas the first miracle demonstrated that Jesus was the same God who fed the Israelites in the wilderness with manna from heaven.

The second feeding miracle is there to show that he's the God who prepares the banquet feast on the mountain of the Lord for all people. It actually comes, it's supposed to remind us exactly of a prophecy that comes from Isaiah.

Isaiah 25 reads, on this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich foods, and here it is, for all people. It's a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats, and the finest of wines that in the remoteness of the desert, on a mountain, on a hill, he sits them down for a banquet.

And there's detail in the text here that makes that clear. He tells the crowd to sit down, and that word for sit down actually has the connotation of reclining to eat, like he would at a banquet.

And the point is that this banquet is one of abundant provision. Jesus gives thanks for the bread and for the few fish. The twelve distribute the food, and everyone's satisfied with seven baskets of food left over.

[6 : 21] But that word for left over is, it's the word, if you're interested, it's *klasmato*. But it actually means abundance. It means there was an abundance of food at the end.

There is an abundance of provision from Jesus. And it all starts, what we read is it all starts because verse two, Jesus has compassion on them. That word for compassion is the same word we often get.

It's the gut-wrenching compassion, the bowels of mercy. It's a depth of feeling and care that is so significant that it almost pained him.

It pained him to see their need for their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. It's the gut-wrenching compassion. It's the compassion that leads Jesus to be abundant in his grace, in his provision for them.

Where the crowd do nothing to receive, but just recline to feast with them. The heart of Jesus towards people is that when he sees them, he really sees them.

[7 : 30] He sees who they are and what they need and he's over the top, OTT generous. Seven basketfuls of abundant provision left over. The same happened before with 12 baskets.

Now we're going to look at the disciples' response to all this later on. But at this point it is worth pausing and reflecting on that. I don't know if you've ever been on the receiving end of what you think is over the top kindness.

Or generosity. And we do actually struggle with it, don't we? And say things like, I don't want to, I don't want people to sort of, I don't want to be needy.

I don't want to be on the receiving end because we don't want to put people out. They've got enough on their plate. Even the phrase itself, over the top, indicates that if you're under the receiving end of such kindness, it's over the top, you're overwhelmed, you're kind of embarrassed because you've needed somebody to go out of their way to sacrifice themselves for you.

And that can be because what we feel then afterwards is kind of like a debt to the person who has gone over the top with kindness and blessing that we never asked for or expected.

[8 : 53] That's why we sometimes struggle with it. And sometimes we might even feel like that towards Jesus. Because Jesus Christ is over the top with his provision, his grace, his kindness.

It is in abundance and it's because his resources are unlimited. He could have given them a hundred baskets. If you don't need it. And Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. And so his heart towards us, towards you, is no different to anything else. His heart towards us today is of deep gut-wrenching compassion.

That when he looks and he sees our needs, it pains him to know that we're in that kind of need. He knows exactly what we need individually.

And he knows exactly what we need as a body of people. And it leads him to be over the top, generous with us. And all we need to do is sit and require the peace to do.

[10:01] And here he feeds us with his word. To feast on him. Because he's the spiritual food we need.

Jesus sends the crowd away after. And we get this. What happens is, as we read the passage, there is this kind of incident. This kind of... It seems to come out of nowhere. It seems to disappear quickly as well. But it seems to be sandwiched in the middle of Jesus feeding. And then Jesus talking to the disciples. And then this incident with the Pharisees sandwiched in the middle.

We know that it's not in the same location when he talks to the Pharisees. Jesus gets in the boat. He goes with his disciples to Dalmanutha. Which isn't actually there anymore. Historians think it was a region on the west.

On the west coast of the Sea of Galilee. And when he gets there, the Pharisees began to test him. You could perhaps say they were trying to argue or debate with him.

[11:03] And they asked, verse 11, for a sign from heaven. Jesus' reaction is quite interesting. Verse 12. We read, he sighed deeply. What we're really meaning there is not sighing out of, as before, when you might say, like, a sigh of compassion.

He's sighing because he's exasperated with them. It's a completely different reaction to the crowd. And then it's almost, when we read what he says, it's almost like he's talking to himself. Why does this generation ask for a sign? Then directly to them, what he's saying is, you're not getting a sign from heaven. And then after doing all that, he just gets back in the boat and off he goes.

To Beth's side. The irony with this incident is that Jesus is the sign from heaven. They want a sign. What they want is some, or what they say they want is some extra special proof that what he's doing is from the Father. But Jesus is extra special and he is from heaven.

[12:14] He's saying to them, you will get anything else but me. I'm enough. He's enough, but they don't see it. They see him, but they don't see him.

He is the optical illusion. He's like the magic eye pictures. He's there, but they can't see him. And he moves on quickly. He doesn't bother wasting his time. I mean, it's not worth him wasting his time for.

And so we've got this incident sandwiched in between. And then he goes, oh, quickly. We're back with him chatting with the disciples. However, the incident with the Pharisees is not forgotten because he comes back up.

So we're there back in the boat. It seems, I don't want to look back at you, but it seems like whenever they get in a boat, something dramatic or embarrassing happens to them. So verse 14, the disciples, they've forgotten to bring up bread to go around.

And we're not letting on the details, but it appears there's been some, there's some sort of debate, finger pointing going on. Because Jesus jumps in, verse 15. Be careful. Jesus warned them.

[13:24] Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod. The disciples are none the wiser. It's Jesus being cryptic again. You can imagine them start looking at one another, shrugging their shoulders.

What's he talking about? Verse 16, they ask, is it because we've got no bread? They're missing the point on multiple levels. It is the yeast of the Pharisees has nothing to do with them forgetting bread. I don't know much about baking bread. The expert in the room is the expert in the church. I think he's not in the room.

Catherine. But even in my lack of bread knowledge, I think more, or any of our lack of bread knowledge really, most of us know what yeast does. It causes bread to rise.

And we know that as it's mixed in with the dough, in order for it to rise, it spreads throughout the whole lump of dough. When you see a loaf, you realise that the yeast, naturally, in the way that it's knitted together, it goes to every part of the dough.

[14:30] And that's what causes the whole loaf to rise. It spreads. And so I take the warning from Jesus to me to be connected to the conversation he had with the Pharisees in the previous verses when he'd met them in Dalmanutha.

The conversation he had with them pointed out their spiritual blindness, their doubt, their lack of belief. But you do have to pause a minute and consider the disciples' relationship to the Pharisees.

You have to consider the social standing that the Pharisees had. They were respected elders of the community that controlled the order of how people lived and what they did. They had power and were listened to.

And the 12 disciples were raised in that environment. The Pharisees had been the elite. They would have, as children, been told by their parents to listen to, to look up to.

What they said in the synagogues or in the temple was heard and listened and respected. And so the doubts, the questions, and the unbelief of the Pharisees had some kind of sway.

[15:39] It was a yeast that could spread and would spread. But it wasn't a yeast that gave life. It was more, we know, it was more like a mold, a fungus that made something impalatable.

Jesus' warning, even the 12. Even the 12 can be susceptible to doubt because on one level they trust the religious elite.

And they still have been with Jesus every day. The blindness of the Pharisees, this yeast, leads others into darkness. Jesus' reaction, his rebuke, you might say, comes not from a place of anger but of deep concern.

To how easily they continue to miss the point and how easily they're swayed. Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Your heart's hardened.

You have eyes but fail to see and ears but fail to hear. He reminds them of the two miracles and specifically what he's pointing out is the abundance of grace and over-the-top generosity.

[16:44] How many baskets were left? 12. How many baskets today? 7. Do you still not understand? He's just fed everyone. He can feed them.

He can satisfy them. He's everything they need. He is their sign from heaven. It doesn't matter what anyone else says or thinks. He's asking them to remember or consider. What they've witnessed of him.

What he's shown them. To open their eyes to who he is. Last week we saw the deaf and the mute man healed. And after this, next week we'll see the healing of the blind man.

And what we realise is that those miracles are there to point out that the disciples, spiritually speaking, are more blind and deaf now than they ever were. There's two points that we really want to consider from what we've looked at.

The first one is warning. It is a warning. Be warned, he says. To be warned and to be wary of the spiritual opinions of others. The unbelieving yeast, the mold, the fungus of the Pharisees is a danger.

[17:52] And the unbelieving opinions, arguments perhaps and doubts of others, sometimes even leaders in the church, can and will cause us to question who Jesus is.

Question all sorts about him. Who is he? Cause us to question his goodness or his power in the middle of suffering. Question his decisions or question whether he cares about you.

Question his nearness to you or when illness hits. Or someone turns away from Jesus that you care about. It can cause us to question when we hear other people's doubts and arguments.

In those moments, we're very vulnerable. We're very vulnerable. And if we listen to the wrong people in those moments, it can shake and rock us. Even the more spiritually mature, the disciples are with Jesus every day, can be rocked by listening to the wrong voices.

And so beware of the people you allow to speak, that you give attention to. Podcasts, TV, what you watch. And the real danger, the real danger, is if you think, oh, that won't happen to me.

[19:05] I'm much more discerning than that. I'm able to filter out what's true and what's not. I'm able to pick out the good bits and leave the bad bits behind. And the true correct bits and ways of thinking.

I'm well attuned to that. And if that is what you tend to think, I think this warning is particularly for you. And I want to provoke a response purposefully, that if the disciples couldn't, if they weren't able to, what makes any one of us think that we are somehow on a higher level of discernment than they are?

Take the warning. Don't allow the yeast to get into your mind. Can you recognise yeast? If there's question marks over a teacher of the Bible, and you can't see it, or you think perhaps you know better, you know otherwise, the proud response would be to assume you're right.

The humble way would be to look into it and try to understand why. And if there is yeast there, don't let it spread. Be warned.

The second point is remember. He sees the disciples, the disciples don't remember. Don't you remember the abundance, the overtop grace, the kindness, the compassions, I showed you, and all these people, because for everything else they've seen him do.

[20 : 35] We're like leaky buckets, aren't we? We're like buckets that have had holes put in them. If we don't spend time remembering what Jesus has done in history, and what Jesus has done in our lives, and we constantly need to keep filling ourselves up with Jesus.

And every time we stop, it will, this is what just, we're our, we're forgetful, and life happens, and it distorts how we think about the truth, and reality, and our lives, it leaks out.

We need to keep remembering, and fill ourselves up. There are times when our hearts are hardened by life, and in those moments, what do we do? We remember Jesus Christ.

Look at what he's done. Look at what he's done in history. Look at what he's done for you. Look at what he's done at the cross. And isn't that, we have even more reason to remember, because we know that he's alive.

We know, we have even more reason to know that his abundant grace is, it is abundant. It is unlimited. Romans 8, how will he now not give us all things?

[21 : 41] The death of Jesus, the father giving up his son, it confirms his abundant giving, and his over-the-top generosity and grace.

What more could he give? If he's willing to give up his own son, is there anything else he will withhold? It's true all the time, and it's relevant all the time.

It affects how we live, because it means that the living God is able, is able, the living God is able to provide in all situations and in abundance.

Any situation. When things look bleak, when you're grieving, when you're stressed out, when you're fearing people's rejection or opinions, when you're worried about your kid's present or future, Jesus has given himself for you.

How will it, will God withhold from you in this situation, in this circumstance in your life? He won't. Actually, what he gives, his grace, is abundant.

[22 : 41] It is over-the-top generous. And so, we're coming for landing, thought about three, we thought, mainly, we've just thought about how good God is, how good Jesus is.

He's just, how much he wants to give and pour into your life and bless you and not withhold from you. He's abundant in his generosity. It's over-the-top grace.

And so, be warned of those who cause you to doubt that, who cause you to doubt what Jesus is like for you and to you. Be warned of who you listen to. And keep remembering that in your life.

Keep spending time with him and meditating on what he's done in history and what he's done in your own personal life, your daily testimony. God's good.

God's good. And he loves you. And he loves us. And he loves this church. And he will always continue to give us everything that we need, both individually and as a body.

[23 : 39] Let's pray. He loves you. Hold on to me. Hold on to me. Okay. Hold on to me. Hold on to me. Well anyway, let's pray here.

Hold on to me. Hold on to me. Hold on to me. Hold on for FR