

LESSON FIVE

TITLE The Servant Beyond Galilee

SCRIPTURE Mark 6:1-56

MEMORY VERSE

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

MAIN IDEA OF TEXT

Jesus brings abundance to the desolate places and belief to the unbeliever.

BEGIN this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of his Word, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your study.

1 GRAB THEIR ATTENTION

TEACHER TIP

Start your lesson by telling a story that relates to the main idea of the lesson to grab the attention of your participants. In this section, we have provided you with two options, but feel free to develop your own.

OPTION 1: "PSALM 16 (FULLNESS OF JOY)" BY SHANE AND SHANE

The Texas-based band Shane and Shane has been leading believers into praise and worship for decades. Perhaps some of their more creative projects were for the *Psalms and Psalms II* albums. The collection of these worship songs, each based on a different psalm, puts melody to the beauty and emotion contained in the words of the psalms.

Listen to Shane and Shane's song "Psalm 16 (Fullness of Joy)" from the *Psalms II* album, paying attention to their words, which call our attention to the abundance of joy and pleasure available to us in our relationship with God.

*Preserve me, O God
For I find rest in You alone.
I say to the Lord,
"You are my Lord; I have no good
Apart from You."*

*All sons and daughters,
Brothers, sisters, my delight;
Let's sing together,
"No other gods shall satisfy."
God, You satisfy.*

*In Your presence,
There is fullness
Of joy,
Of joy.*

*You give me counsel;
My heart instructs me in the night;
You are before me.
Because You're for me,
I'm alright; it'll be alright;
It'll be alright.*

*In Your presence,
There is fullness
Of joy,
Of joy.
At Your right hand,
There are pleasures
Forevermore,
Forevermore.*

*My heart is glad and my soul rejoice;
My flesh it dwells secure;
Because You put on flesh,
Lived a blameless life,
My curse on the cross You bore;*

*Then You ripped the doors off the City of Death
And the chains fell to the floor.
Now the serpent's crushed;
It has been finished,
And You reign forever more.
You are my portion,
My cup, and you make my lot secure;
The lines have fallen
For me in pleasant places,
A beautiful inheritance.*

(Play song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8mLTdQQXg4> or play lyric video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uvf13Qjt4lg>)

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *What do the lyrics of this song tell you about the character of God?*
2. *In what ways have you recently experienced the fullness of joy in your relationship with God?*
3. *If Jesus satisfies the deepest desires of our hearts, do we truly lack anything? Explain your answer.*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text: The lyrics of Shane and Shane and the words of Psalm 16 proclaim that life with God is an abundant one, a life filled with joy and pleasures forevermore. Once Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). The abundant life is what Jesus calls us into, and he shows us that in him the deepest desires of our hearts are satisfied. In him we always have more than enough. We have an abundance.

This week we are going to see how Jesus brings abundance to the desolate places and the fact that he calls the unbeliever to believe in who he is and what he does. We will focus on one particular miracle, the feeding of the five thousand, and what that miracle powerfully demonstrates about the abundant life Jesus came to give us.

OPTION 2: THE CALLING FROM THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY

In the film, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, the main character, Walter Mitty, is an employee at Life Magazine. He spends day after day at the office archiving photo negatives for the magazine. The work is tedious and boring. To escape the boredom, Walter inhabits a world of exciting daydreams and adventures in which he always plays the hero. Walter also likes a girl in the office, Cheryl, and would love to date her, but he is too shy and self-conscious to ask her out. Walter's life changes dramatically when he gets the chance to go on a real, full-life adventure. The magazine's new owners send him on a mission to find world-famous photographer Sean O'Connell and get the perfect photo for the cover of the magazine's final print issue.

Watch the trailer to this film and get a glimpse into the many adventures, both real and imagined, of Walter Mitty.

(Play trailer for the film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJBFB5GE8Ow>)

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. What is a life of adventure with God? How would you describe it in your own words?*
- 2. Where has God called you to courageously step out into the unknown with him?*
- 3. In what ways have you recently experienced the abundant life that Jesus promised to give us?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text: "Life is about courage and going into the unknown." Cheryl's words in the trailer capture the kind of life Jesus calls us into. It takes courage to step into the unknown with God, and so much of Jesus's earthly ministry was about him calling his disciples to step into the unknown with faith and trust in him. The result was a life that was full and filled with adventure.

It is the same for us today. Jesus continues to call us to step courageously into an adventure and into the unknown places in life. Jesus gives us the promise that life with him is an abundant one, even in the desolate places of life. Once Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). The abundant life is what Jesus calls us into; and he shows us that, in him, the deepest desires of our hearts are satisfied. In him we always have more than enough. We have an abundance.

2

SET THE STAGE

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find the historical, cultural, and literary context you need to properly interpret and apply the text.

OUTLINE

1. The Journeys of Jesus and His Disciples (6:1-13)
 - A. Jesus rejected in Nazareth (vv. 1-6)
 - i. The crowd is amazed by Jesus's teaching (vv. 1-2a)
 - ii. The crowd refuses to accept Jesus (vv. 2b-3)
 - iii. Jesus is amazed by the crowd's lack of faith (vv. 4-6a)
 - B. Jesus commissions and sends twelve of His disciples (vv. 7-13)
 - i. Jesus teaches in many villages (v. 6b)
 - ii. Jesus sends out his disciples two by two and gives them authority (v. 7)
 - iii. Jesus gives instructions to his disciples (vv. 8-11)
 - iv. Account of the disciples' ministry and miracles (vv. 12-13)
2. John the Baptist Killed (6:14-29)
 - A. Herod hears conflicting reports on the true identity of Jesus (vv. 14-16)
 - B. John put in prison (vv. 17-20)
 - C. Herod orders John the Baptist to be beheaded (vv. 21-29)
3. Miracles of Jesus (6:30-56)
 - A. Jesus feeds the five thousand (vv. 30-44)
 - i. Jesus's disciples return and give a report (v. 30)
 - ii. Jesus and his disciples go to a solitary place (v. 31)
 - iii. Jesus has compassion for the large crowd following him and begins to teach (vv. 32-34)
 - iv. Jesus and his disciples discuss how to feed the crowd (vv. 35-38)
 - v. Jesus feeds the five thousand with only five loaves and two fish (vv. 39-43)
 - B. Jesus walks on water (vv. 45-56)
 - i. Jesus sends his disciples ahead of him in a boat to Bethsaida (vv. 45-46)
 - ii. The disciples see Jesus walking on water and are afraid (vv. 47-50a)
 - iii. Jesus reveals himself to his disciples who are amazed (vv. 50b-52)
 - iv. The crowd follows Jesus wherever he goes in the region, seeking a miracle from him (vv. 53-56)

CONTEXT

Jesus has shown his sovereign power over the natural and supernatural world by commanding the wind and waves to be quiet, by casting out demons, by healing the sick, and by raising the dead. All of this points to

Jesus as the true king who controls the domain of his kingdom which is all creation.

FALLEN CONDITION FOCUS

The world brings desolation and destruction upon those who serve God.

GOSPEL RESPONSE

Jesus brings abundance to those desolate places through his power. We can trust him no matter the situation.

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find exercises you can use to lead your class through the process of Observation, Interpretation, and Application. As the teacher, work through all the exercises below to ensure you gain a good understanding of the text.

The Apostle Paul once wrote about the condition of our world and the fact that we are to wait in hope for the work of God to be completed. We are to wait in faith that King Jesus will one day establish himself as king over God's kingdom and will finally rid the world of the sin, death, and destruction it has had to endure since the Fall:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Romans 8:18-25

We live in a world that has been given over to the effects of sin, which include decay, destruction, and death. There are many places in life where we experience that this world is not the way it is supposed to be, and things do not work the way they should. But this is the world that Jesus entered, and it is the world in which he declared his good news about the kingdom of God, ushering in a new era with his arrival. Instead of desolation and destruction, Jesus promises abundance to those who would trust him, believe in him, and follow him into the adventurous life of a disciple.

Even within the desolation and destruction of our fallen world, there is hope and there is Jesus's promise of abundance. Jesus promised that when we believe in him and what he came to accomplish, we can experience abundance in life, even amid the desolation and destruction of this broken world.

6 Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. ² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?" ³ Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and

the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

4 Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." 5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6 He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. 7 Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.

8 These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. 9 Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. 10 Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. 11 And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."

12 They went out and preached that people should repent. 13 They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

14 King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

15 Others said, "He is Elijah."

And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago."

16 But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!"

17 For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, 20 because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

21 Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22 When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests.

The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." 23 And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

24 She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

"The head of John the Baptist," she answered.

25 At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

26 The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27 So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, 28 and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. 29 On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. 33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

35 By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. 36 Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

37 But he answered, "You give them something to eat."

They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages[e]! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

38 "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see."

When they found out, they said, "Five—and two fish."

39 Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. 41 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. 42 They all ate and were satisfied, 43 and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. 44 The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

45 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

47 Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. 48 He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, 49 but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried

out, 50 because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 51 Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, 52 for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

53 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. 54 As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. 55 They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56 And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: CHART THE PASSAGE

This passage contains significant words and actions of Jesus. Read through the passage and make a list of the things Jesus says and does. List locations with descriptions and the people with whom Jesus interacts.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: IDENTIFYING KEY THEMES

Read the passage and write down what you think are the key themes as single words or short phrases. Remember that identifying key themes at the beginning of your study will help you develop a good overall grasp of the passage.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 3: UNDERLINE THE VERBS

Much of Mark's focus in his gospel is on Jesus and his actions. Read through the passage three times. On the third reading circle the verbs and note who or what they are associated with.

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 1: CHART THE PASSAGE

Go back to your list. What do the significant things Jesus said and did reveal about his character and purpose?

How do the person and work of Jesus compare and contrast to the people and locations that Mark describes?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 2: IDENTIFYING KEY THEMES

Refer back to what you wrote down as key themes in the passage.

How do the themes speak to Jesus's work as a servant?

Which themes do you think people today would connect with the most?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 3: UNDERLINE THE VERBS

What do the verbs associated with Jesus reveal about his character as a compassionate Savior and Provider?

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find questions to choose from that will help your group consider how God is calling them to respond to the text. Help your group set measurable action steps.

APPLICATION: HOW DO I RESPOND?

QUESTION 1: Jesus gives us hope in the desolate and destructive places of life. Where do you most need his hope in a particularly desolate or destructive place in your life?

QUESTION 2: How would you live differently if you believed that Jesus calls you into an adventure that, while difficult, would result in you experiencing God's abundance?

QUESTION 3: What is one thing you can start doing to be a person who lives with both faith and trust for what God has for you in your life?

QUESTION 4: Think of someone who needs to hear the good news that Jesus meets us in our desolate and destructive places. How could you share Jesus's good news with them?

QUESTION 5: How could our group become a people of good news who declare that Jesus is changing the reality we live in and bringing more people to a knowledge and experience of his saving and transforming ways?

4

CHALLENGE

TEACHER TIP

End your time of study with one final challenge and prayer. Your final challenge should pull together everything you covered in this lesson and call your participants to action.

Life is not as it is supposed to be, but we can find hope and comfort in Jesus who shows us that he can heal what is broken and satisfy our deepest needs and desires. In this week's passage, we see Jesus satisfying the hunger of others. These hungry people gathered in a desolate place because they knew Jesus provides. But there is a greater soul hunger we must address. In each of us is a soul hunger to be satisfied. Jesus has promised that he alone can satisfy that hunger. The question, then, is whether to trust him to satisfy that hunger and be our ultimate comfort and satisfaction.

Who is Jesus to you? Is he a miracle worker who heals the sick and brings the dead back to life or is he something more? You have the opportunity to see Jesus as he truly is, as someone who does more than simply perform miracles. Jesus came to show us God as he is and what he is like. He came to reveal to us who God is and how he works. If we pay attention, we can see God's work through Jesus in a whole new light and celebrate his saving and transforming work.

Where in your life do you experience the terrible effects of the Fall? Where do you experience brokenness and desolation? Wherever it is, Jesus gives you hope that this is not the way life is supposed to be, and he is working to bring about change and transformation in the world and in each of us.

LET'S PRAY

COMMENTARY

MARK 6:1-2

In his commentary in the ESV Study Bible, Hans F. Bayer helps us understand Jesus's motivation in teaching in the synagogue and how it helped him understand his mission in God's plan of salvation.

Jesus goes to his hometown of Nazareth (see note on Matt. 13:54) despite tensions with his natural family (see Mark 3:21, 31-35). As is so often the case, Jesus begins to teach (see 1:21, 39; 3:1; 4:1; 6:34; 8:31; etc.). On synagogue, see note on Luke 4:16 and The Synagogue and Jewish Worship. Jesus was most likely asked to give a message following the reading of Scripture (cf. Luke 4:16-30, which most commentators understand to be the same incident, though this is not certain; see notes on Luke 4:17; 4:18-19). Where did this man get these things? This verse testifies to the genuine humanity of Jesus. Until he began his ministry, his deity was so hidden that even people in his hometown, who had known him well since childhood, had no idea that he was also fully God.

MARK 6:6B-30

Jesus came from humble beginnings and Mark highlights that in his gospel. D.A. Carson highlights this truth in his commentary in the NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible.

Mark is the only Gospel that describes Jesus as a carpenter. The derogatory question reflects Jesus' hearers' offense at his appearing more special than they felt was warranted. Although Jesus apparently made a favorable impression in his youth (Luke 2:52), they were quite unprepared for his wisdom and mighty deeds (cf. the response of Mary and the family in 3:21).

MARK 6:31-44

James A. Brooks helps the reader resonate with the experience of the disciples of Jesus at a very peculiar time.

Mark 6:6b-30 provides another example of the author's frequent practice of sandwiching accounts. The account of Herod's reaction to John and Jesus (6:14-29) is inserted into the account of the mission of the Twelve (6:6b-13, 30). The mission of the Twelve may have been one way in which Herod came to know about Jesus. Herod's execution of John suggests the extent to which opposition to the Christian mission may extend. The martyrdom of John anticipated that of Jesus. Disciples of Jesus must be prepared for the supreme sacrifice. Furthermore, the two accounts contrast the indulgence and cruelty of a secular ruler with the dedication and sacrifice of the disciples.

Despite several features that obviously had validity only for one occasion, Mark saw in the mission of the Twelve a charter for all subsequent Christian mission. The account emphasizes that all missionary work must be authorized and empowered by Jesus as an extension of his own mission.

Jesus sent out the Twelve to spread the gospel to more people than he alone could reach and to prepare the disciples for their later mission. No doubt Jesus sent his disciples on one or more preaching tours. The historicity of the account is supported even by one of the criteria of authenticity used by the “new quest” of the historical Jesus, namely that of multiple attestation. According to some analyses at least, an account of a mission of disciples is found not only in Mark but also in Q (the source presumably used in common by Matthew and Luke) and in the special material of both Matthew and Luke.

MARK 6:32-44

In his commentary in the Bible Knowledge Commentary, John D. Garassmick gives the reader insight into the participant’s experience and what Jesus was trying to convey in his message.

These verses are a transition from the successful mission of the Twelve to the resultant presence of a large crowd in a remote place. Two phrases in the fulfillment of Jesus’ directive provide the connecting links: by themselves (kat’ idian, Gr. idiom meaning “privately”), a phrase Mark used for Jesus’ private instruction of individuals (cf. 4:34a; 6:31-32; 7:33; 9:2, 28; 13:3); and to a solitary (eremon, “remote”) place (cf. 1:3-4, 12-13, 35, 45; 6:31-32, 35). The place where they sailed, though unnamed by Mark, was near Bethsaida Julias, a city across the Jordan River on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee (cf. Luke 9:10).

Many people anticipated their destination and arrived there on foot ... ahead of them. Their planned rest was interrupted by people in need.

When Jesus ... saw the large crowd, He felt compassion (not annoyance) toward them. This inner emotion moved Him to help them (cf., e.g., Mark 6:39-44). He viewed them as sheep without a shepherd, lost and helpless, without guidance, nourishment, or protection. In several Old Testament passages (Num. 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; Ezek. 34:5, 23-25) the sheep/shepherd image is associated with the “wilderness” (eremos; cf. Mark 6:31-32). This crowd, representing the nation of Israel, received compassion, extensive teaching concerning God’s kingdom (cf. Luke 9:11), and the provision of their needs (Mark 6:35-44) from Jesus, the true Shepherd (cf. John 10:1-21).

These verses present a significant dialogue between Jesus and the Twelve after He had taught the crowd all day. Since it was late (after 3 p.m. Jewish time) and they were in a remote (eremos; cf. vv. 31-32) place, the disciples asked Jesus to dismiss the people ... so they could buy food in the surrounding ... villages before sunset.

Unexpectedly, Jesus told them to feed the crowd. He emphasized the word you (hymeis). The disciples’ caustic reply showed the inadequacy of their resources and the impossibility of meeting His demand. According to their calculations, to feed such a crowd would take, literally, 200 denarii (NIV marg.). The denarius, the basic Roman silver coin used in Palestine, was the average daily wage for a farm laborer. Consequently 200 denarii was roughly equivalent to eight months of a man’s wages, a sum beyond the disciples’ means.

Jesus insisted they find out what bread was available, probably back at the boat and also in the crowd. The disciples returned with the answer: a mere five loaves of bread and two fish (salted and dried or roasted).

Mark's vivid description of the miracle indicates an eyewitness report, perhaps Peter's.

To insure orderly distribution, Jesus commanded the disciples to have everyone sit down in groups on the green grass (suggesting springtime). The words "in groups" in verse 39 could be rendered "table company by table company" (symposia symposia, lit., "drinking or eating parties"). But the words "in groups" in verse 40 are literally, "garden plot by garden plot" (prasiai prasiai); they are used figuratively, picturing well-arranged plots of people, perhaps colorfully dressed, seated on the grass in groups of 100s and 50s. The command was a challenge to faith for both the disciples and the crowd.

Jesus, serving as Host, spoke the customary Jewish blessing over the five loaves (round wheat or barley cakes) and two fish (cf. Lev. 19:24; Deut. 8:10). The words gave thanks are from eulogeo (lit., "to praise, extol" [God], or "to bless"; cf. Mark 14:22). The object of the blessing in such a prayer was not the food, but God who gave it. Jesus looked up to heaven, regarded as where God is (cf. Matt. 23:22), in dependence on the Father for a miraculous provision of food.

Then He broke the loaves into pieces, divided the fish into portions, and gave (lit., "kept giving") them to His disciples to set before the people. How the miracle itself took place is not stated, but the imperfect tense of the verb "gave" indicates the bread multiplied in Jesus' hands (cf. Mark 8:6).

The provision was miraculous and abundant. Mark emphasized that all ate and were fully satisfied. This was confirmed by the fact that the disciples collected 12 basketfuls (kophinoi, small wicker baskets; contrast 8:8, 20) of leftovers, probably a basket for each disciple. The count of 5,000 men (andres, "males"), a very large crowd by local standards, did not include women and children (cf. Matt. 14:21), who were probably grouped separately for the meal according to Jewish custom.

The usual theme of astonishment at the close of a miracle story is not included here. This, plus subsequent comments in Mark 6:52 and 8:14–21 on this event, indicate that Mark regarded it as an important disclosure to Jesus' disciples of who He is. But they failed to understand its meaning (cf. 6:52).

MARK 6:45–52

Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss, in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, give insight into Jesus's purposes with his disciples and with his ministry.

While Mark records no reaction of the crowd to the multiplication of the loaves and fish, John speaks of an attempt to make Jesus king (Jn 6:15). Historically, Jesus may have feared a messianic uprising as a result of the miracle and for that reason "immediately" made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida. Yet no messianic aspirations are explicitly mentioned by Mark, who has presented the miracle as a compassionate banquet provided by Jesus and an act of self-revelation directed toward the disciples.

As noted in the previous section (v. 32), Bethsaida's location on the northeastern side of Lake Galilee suggests that the disciples are sailing eastward across the northern part of the lake (but see Notes v. 32). The city was officially called "Bethsaida Julias," named after Julias, the daughter of the Roman emperor Augustus, by Herod Philip when he elevated the village to the status of a city (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.2.1 §28).

After sending his disciples away in the boat, Jesus stayed to dismiss the crowd. Part of his purpose may have been to calm their messianic aspirations.

Mark's mention of Jesus' praying may be further evidence of the critical nature of the situation. On only three occasions in this gospel does Jesus withdraw to pray, and each time some sort of crisis is involved: (1) after the excitement and activity of a busy Sabbath in Capernaum (1:35), (2) after the multiplication of the loaves and fish (6:46), and (3) in Gethsemane after the Lord's Supper (14:32–36). Each incident involves the temptation not to carry out God's mission—a mission that would ultimately bring suffering, rejection, and death. These crises seem to represent an ascending scale and reach their climax in the agony of Gethsemane.

The time of this incident is "evening" (v. 47). Since it was "already very late" in the afternoon (v. 35) before the feeding of the five thousand, "evening" here must mean late at night. How Jesus "saw" the disciples straining at the oars (v. 48) is not clear, whether through supernatural insight in the darkness (so Garland, 261), by the glow of moonlight (so Cranfield, 225), or in the light of early dawn (so France, 271). What is clear is that Jesus came in response to the struggle they were having. Apparently, the wind was blowing from the north or northeast and had blown the disciples off their course. They were "straining at the oars"—an indication of a stiff headwind. Jesus came to them "walking on the lake" at about the fourth watch (sometime between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m.). According to Roman reckoning (which Mark follows), the night was divided into four watches: 6:00 to 9:00 p.m., 9:00 p.m. to midnight, midnight to 3:00 a.m., and 3:00 to 6:00 a.m.

Like the calming of the storm and the multiplication of the loaves, walking on water has strong theophanic significance. In the OT God himself "treads on the waves" (Job 9:8) and makes a way through the sea (Ps 77:19; Isa 43:16).

The Greek phrase *kai ethelen parelthein autous* could be translated "he wanted to pass them by," for the verb *thelo* (GK 2527) normally carries the sense of desire or intention. This reading gives the impression that Jesus' intended to walk right past the disciples. Various suggested alternative interpretations follow.

1. The NIV, taking the Greek verb *thelo* in the sense of *mello* ("about to"; cf. Cranfield, 226), renders the phrase "he was about to pass by them."
2. The text may represent not the intention of Jesus but the impression of an eyewitness as to what was happening: "it seemed to the disciples as though he intended to pass them by" (cf. France, 272).
3. The verb "pass by" may carry the sense of "spare from catastrophe" (cf. Am 7:9), so that the idiom means something like "he wanted to save them" (H. Fleddermann, " 'And He Wanted to Pass by Them' [Mark 6:48c]," *CBQ* 45 [1983]: 389–95).
4. The verse may mean that Jesus intended to pass by them to show himself and so reveal his power and protection. The point is that Jesus' ability to walk on water should dispel all possible fears the disciples might otherwise have (cf. Hurtado, 90–91).
5. There may be an intentional echo of OT passages in which God reveals himself by "passing by" or "passing before" his people (cf. Lane, 236; Garland, 263–64; Marcus, 426). In Exodus 33:18–23 Moses asks to see God's glory, and the Lord replies that no one can see his face and live; however, God will "pass by" the cleft of the rock and Moses will see his back: "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence" (Ex 33:19 [TNIV]). Similarly, in 1 Kings 19:11–12—when Elijah despairs that he is the only faithful person left in Israel—the Lord says "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is

about to pass by.” God then reveals himself, not in a mighty wind, an earthquake or a fire, but in a quiet whisper. We have here, then, the language of theophany. Jesus intends to “pass by” in order to reveal his divine glory to the disciples.

Although a decision regarding the meaning of the phrase is difficult, the last option seems the most likely, especially in the light of the strong theophanic significance of walking on water and the exodus imagery here and in the immediately preceding feeding miracle.

Although the disciples did not recognize Jesus at first—they thought they had seen some sort of ghost (*phantasma*, v. 49)—Jesus calmed their fears with words of assurance: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid” (v. 50). It has been suggested—in line with the theophanic nature of the whole episode—that the statement “It is I” identifies Jesus with God’s self-revelation as the “I am who I am” (Ex 3:14; cf. Jn 8:58). A direct allusion to Exodus 3:14 seems unlikely, however, since in the context the words are intended to assure the disciples that he is not a ghost, not dramatically to reveal his divine nature. Such an explicit self-identification would be highly unusual in Mark’s narrative, where Jesus repeatedly reveals divine attributes through his actions but never explicitly declares his own deity. It is probably better to regard the expression here simply as Jesus’ way of identifying himself (“It is I—Jesus”).

Here another miracle is presupposed. When Jesus climbed into the boat, “the wind died down.” Though less explicitly than in 4:35–41, Jesus again reveals sovereign lordship over the wind and waves. The response of the disciples to both miracles is that they “were completely amazed.” As so often in Mark, the power of God at work through Jesus results in shock and amazement (1:22, 27; 2:12; 5:15, 20, 42; 6:2; 7:37; 11:18). Yet here the implications are negative. By this time the disciples should not be shocked at Jesus’ actions but should be comprehending the power of the kingdom of God at work in him.

Mark relates his explanation of the disciples’ panic at seeing Jesus walking on the water and their amazement at the calming of the wind to their failure to understand the multiplication of the loaves. Had they understood about the loaves, i.e., that the sovereign Lord of the universe was in action there, they would have been prepared to understand his walking on water and calming waves. Their problem was a christological one. Not unlike Jesus’ opponents—the “outsiders” of 4:10–11 (Isa 6:9–10)—“their hearts were hardened” (v. 52). From this point on, Mark will paint the disciples in increasingly dark tones. In 8:14–21 Jesus will directly confront their inability to understand the feeding miracle, again with language reminiscent of Isaiah 6:9–10. Like the persecuted church of Mark’s day, the disciples will need to decide whose side they are really on—and what price they are willing to pay for their allegiance to the kingdom of God.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Hans F. Bayer, *Mark*, The ESV Study Bible.

James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary.

D.A. Carson, *Mark*, The NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible.

Rodney L. Cooper, *Mark*, Holman New Testament Commentary.

Donald English, *The Message of Mark*, The Bible Speaks Today.

Timothy Gombis, *Mark*, The Story of God Bible Commentary.

John D. Grassmick, *Mark*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

Geoffrey Grogan, *Mark: Good News from Jerusalem*, Focus on the Bible Commentary.

Grant Osborne, *Mark*, Teach the Text Commentary Series.

Leland Ryken, Introduction to *Mark*: Literary Features, The ESV Study Bible.

R.C. Sproul, *Mark*, The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version.

Charles Swindoll, *Mark*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary.

Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Mark*, The Bible Exposition Commentary.