

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Bible and the Church

Pray today about the way that the Bible is taught to children, particularly in Sunday School or in other sessions or workshops for children and young people. Pray for those who teach, the teaching and for those who write the material which is used. Pray that the work will inspire a love of His Word in the hearts and minds of children and young people.

Meditation

What is the truth behind Your love, O Lord?
A love which made the world and chose a people,
Led a broken nation through the desert,
Spoke through the lives of people good and great,
And wept and bled when all seemed lost because of sin;
Then triumphed in a plan of unsurpassed beauty,
Sending Jesus to our world to save the lost,
Your Son, who took the world's rejection on the Cross,
That good might conquer death and show itself the victor:
A love that rose from death in triumph, showing all the world
That its best and only hope is in its Saviour!

It is a love that only finds a home in you and me,
Because our past and present make us ever lost
Unless we place our future's hope in Him
Who longs, in love, to be at home in us.

Bible Study - Mark 8:1-10

¹ In those days, a great crowd had gathered yet again without anything to eat, so He gathered his disciples around and said to them, ² I feel deeply for the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have had nothing to eat. I send them away to their homes hungry, they will collapse with exhaustion on the way because some of them have come a long distance. ⁴ His disciples replied, How can anyone find enough bread to feed all these people here in this deserted place?

⁵ So Jesus asked them, 'How many loaves do you have?' They said, 'Seven, and He directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then He took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people; and they gave them out to the crowd. ⁷ They had a few small fish, and after He blessed them, He instructed that these should be distributed as well, and the crowd ate and were satisfied. The disciples picked up the broken pieces of bread, over, amounting to seven baskets full. ⁹ There were about four thousand people there, and He sent them on their way. ¹⁰ Straight away after this, he got up and went to the region of Dalmanutha

book recorded for Mark 6:30-44! Now it may well be that our immed should to wonder whether the story has anything more to teach us than w should at least investigate the matter. Jesus Himself thought there between the two miracles as we can see from later on in the Gos Sunday School or in other sessions or workshops for children and young people. Pray for those who teach, the teaching and for those who write the material which is used. Pray that the work will inspire a love of His Word in the hearts and minds of children and young people.

From the some of the most ancient of records of Christian comme century AD) comes the suggestion that the feeding of the five tho of the Lord towards Jewish people, and the feeding of the four th mercies to the Gentiles. Both stories describe the open-hearted needy people despite the circumstances of their impoverishment, f for Jews and Gentiles, and so he recorded both incidents, eac which related to the people who were present. For example, the five thousand), and at the end, the twelve baskets full of leftovers of God's new Israel. However, the second crowd came from thousand), and the baskets numbered seven, where seven was co 'completeness'; in this case, what remained was enough for the wh There are other significant features of the stories which all point in t study these later on. Through them, Mark tells us that Jesus min alike, despite His professed call to the Jews (Matt 10:6). In addition 8 shows that around each miracle there is a pattern of similar storie us about the message of Mark's Gospel (see below). What is hap Mark is coming to a crucial climax prior to Jesus' entry into Jer discover in the next few days what this is. The true significance of t four thousand is that it alerts us to the structure of Mark's Gospel w the death and resurrection of our Lord. Yes, it is important!

Going Deeper

There are a number of things which we must now do in order to : referring to the details of the feedings of the five and four thou us. Second, look at the structure of stories around the two feedin tells us. The feeding of the four thousand certainly helps us unders **Comparing the feeding of the five thousand and the four thous** In the first sentence of our passage, Mark places the word 'again' i drawing attention to the story. He seems to be saying to us, 'p: es, so, don't miss a second time.' The beginning of our passage (8:1f. He tells the story (6:30-35). On the earlier occasion, the crowd disciples as they sought to find a place to spend some time togeth and around the Jewish towns alongside Lake Galilee. Je because people were like sheep without a shepherd'; a typically people in the Old Testament times, desperately seeking their true lead

nappen, but we can well understand that God was working by HIS Spirit with these details performed some healing miracles, He could help people understand their deeper meaning. What Mark presents to us is not really the numbers coming death and resurrection (see 8:31f., 9:10-13). The numbers are not the point of the stories in this way, they give us a clear n which defined the Jewish people; this was the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy); and in the second story, our passage has several physical signs of spiritual realities. Second number seven being commonly recognised as representing 'wholeness'; in this case this message to all people everywhere and thirdly, 'J world', i.e. Gentiles. The New Testament has numerous occasions when the number seven and its derivatives are used in this way. The number of nations in the whole world was considered to be 'seventy'; then in Acts 6:3, the apostles appointed seven deacons to take care of the needs of the church, largely because of the needs of the Gentile widows (7:24-30), and the disciples ('Hellenist' widows in Acts 6:1f.); also, the number of Gentile churches who received the message from God in the book of Revelation was seven (Rev 1:4,11).

Application

One other difference is usually mentioned as significant, and this is the word used for 'basket'. In the first story, an apparently distinctive Jewish word for 'basket' is used, which usually refers to a bag used by beggars for collecting whatever scraps they could find (Greek 'kophinos' from which the word 'coffin' is derived!). However, the word for basket is different in our story, the four thousand, being a common Greek (Gentile) word for a wicker 'fish-basket' (see 8:8). Some people feel that this explains the somewhat casual inclusion of additional small international churches as well as Christian organisations; possibly, these were left over fish supplies brought by the people which the disciples managed to find. They were small and insignificant to the people who had confronted the religious authorities of His own day, God's people miraculously made enough out of them to feed the whole crowd, along with the bread.

If the differences between the two stories are significant, then those things which are common to both will also tell us something. Jesus was emotionally concerned for both sets of people and the power of faith which our Lord commends and to which the disciples displayed a lack of understanding at what was going on (6:27, 8:11). Jesus directed the people to sit down in an orderly manner (6:39, 8:6), Jesus blessed the bread and distributed it (6:41, 8:7), the crowd ate and were 'satisfied' (6:42, 8:8), and Jesus personally dismissed the people (6:45, 8:9) before getting into a boat (6:46f. 8:10). It is far more likely that something like this miracle happened on a number of occasions in Jesus' ministry, just as Jesus undoubtedly healed and delivered far more people than is recorded in His Gospels. Some of the details may have become mixed up in the oral re-telling of the stories, but the Spirit has worked through everything that happened to bring both Mark and Matthew to us.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss in your group whether you think that what is said of a pair of incidents which indicate God's love for the whole world (see Matt 14:13-21 for the feeding of the five thousand and 15:32f. for the feeding of the four thousand). Do you think Jesus' ministry was to Jew and Gentile alike? How should we interpret in this light, and preferably with reference to each other!

2. Examine the scriptures mentioned in the last section of the commentary and think these stories fit together.

3. Is it right to look for meaning in all the details of the stories? The commentary by Dennis Nineham in the Penguin series. He suggests that once the two 'feeding' stories are recognised as 'couplets', then we can also see another pattern emerge in Mark's Gospel involving the stories which follow the feeding of the four and the thousand.

Discipleship

The text asks us to consider the fact that the Gospel is for all people and to challenge yourself to consider this in detail, take a newspaper for an article in turn. Consider how the Gospel might make a difference

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