

How to Start a Spiritual Revolution

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Series: Mark (Introducing Jesus)

Introduction: Open your Bible to **Mark 6:30-45**. We are asking a question this morning, “How Can We Start a Spiritual Revolution”.¹ Most revolutions are begun in blood and violence.

- Under Mao Zedong’s revolution in China, approximately 4 million died through execution or starvation.
- Under Pol Pot’s revolution in Cambodia, 3 million people were either put to death or starved to death in prison camps.
- Under Joseph Stalin in Russia, Stalin deported millions to forced labor camps, or Gulags, where inhuman conditions resulted in the deaths of some 2.7 million people. He starved the Ukrainians and 10 million died as a result.

But we come to a different kind of revolution in Mark 6. It took place among the revolutionary zealots of Jesus’ day. It certainly doesn’t seem like a revolution, but you are going to see in its context, Jesus is coming to revolutionary, political Jewish zealots, 5000 of them men, and he is teaching them about another kingdom. These revolutionaries want death to Rome. Jesus brings instead of revolution of spiritual life. Let’s read and see what happens.

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

“The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32 And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. 33 Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. 35 And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. 36 Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” 37 But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii [*eight months wages*] worth of bread and give it to them to eat?” 38 And he said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” 39 Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. 41 And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. 42 And they all ate and were satisfied. 43 And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. 44 And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.”

¹ The outline and much of the material of this message are utilized from Timothy Keller’s treatment of this same passage on May 7, 2006 entitled: “The Good Shepherd”.

[Prayer for Guidance]

This is a very famous passage—Jesus feeds the multitude. What we are going to see in this passage is...

1. about a revolution
2. it is a completely unexpected and spiritual revolution
3. it is led by impossibly unqualified revolutionaries
4. it is based on a shocking revolutionary act

I. This passage is about a **revolution**. This doesn't seem like a revolution. This is one of those "warm fuzzies". Usually when we read this, it is in a children's Sunday School setting and you might come away thinking Jesus simply "had a picnic". That's not what this passage is about at all.

Context: At the time that all this was happening, the apostles had just been sent out two by two throughout Galilee preaching repentance and performing miracles.

Let's pick up in **Mark 6:30-33**, "The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32 And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. 33 Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them".

A. **The Place of the Revolution:** When Jesus left the towns and villages of Galilee to go across the Lake to find peace and quiet—he was on His way to *the hotbed of resistance to the Roman Imperial rule*. It was in the hill country, the remote and rural regions that all the freedom fighters were hiding out. This is the place where every one was sympathetic to the Zealots. The Zealots stood for the violent overthrow of Roman rule.

B. **The People of the Revolution:** They come to the other side of the lake, and here's this enormous crowd literally out in the middle of nowhere. This is a very unpopulated region, so it's like the entire region has turned out. When it says 5000 men, it probably is referring to heads of families, so there were actually more like 15 – 20,000 people. But it might mean that only the men showed up. Because why were they there? Why were they gathered in the middle of nowhere? John comes right out and says what Mark only hints at.

John 6:15, "Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself."

This was the place where everyone wanted a revolutionary leader. Jesus shows up, and they come out. Why? They want a revolution. Look at the abuse of power that was going on in Israel. Israel's beloved prophet's head was laying on a platter. They didn't want Herod! They wanted Jesus, but for the wrong motives.

So, point one is this: the people wanted a revolution. They wanted Jesus to be their revolutionary leader.

- II. This is a totally **unexpected and spiritual kind of revolution**. Jesus looks upon them in **verse 34a**, **“When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd”**. Jesus is actually quoting Moses’ prayer to God at the end of his life in **Numbers 27:16-17**. He was asking the Lord to give the children of Israel a political and military leader. **“Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation 17 who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep that have no shepherd.”** Almost every place in the Old Testament that speaks of Israel as “sheep without a shepherd” is talking about the need for a political and military leader. So the people in this passage want Jesus to be another Moses or Joshua.

So when Jesus looks upon them, He knows their political position. He sees their heart. They want immediate relief from political oppression. They want to be liberated from Rome.

- A. **It is unexpected revolution because of Jesus’ Compassion**. And what is Jesus’ response? **Verse 34**, **“When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things”**.

1. He had **compassion** on them. This is unexpected. The word compassion means literally to ache or to hurt for someone—I ache for you. Jesus’ love not only affects Him emotionally, but physically. Consider these people. They are Jewish political zealots! These are remote guerilla military war lords in the ancient Middle East. Jesus’ answer to freedom fighters is not to hand out weapons and begin training. That is occurring all around the world to this very day.

Jesus Christ gives out His Word and bread and He gives His disciples “bread distribution training”. And that’s His response! What Jesus is doing is repudiating the liberation models of His day. One commentator said this, “It is clear from this account that Jesus will not march to the popularist and militarist drum beat. Here in Mark 6, He disavows the zealot model of liberation”.

2. He began to **teach** them many things. When Jesus gives the Word and bread, what is He saying? When we look at bread today in our modern society, do you know what it means? What is the deep meaning. To us bread is simply this: carbohydrates. But in ancient times when there wasn’t quite as many options in food, and it wasn’t as certain what or if you’d eat that day, bread meant life. Bread meant life.

- B. **It is a spiritual revolution because of Jesus’ Solution** (John 6:27-51, Mark 6:34). **Verse 34**, **“When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion**

on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things". And then later on he begins to feed them—every one of them!

1. The **Preciousness** of the our Revolutionary Leader. In contrast to human revolutions, what Jesus was saying is, "I'm a revolutionary leader, but other revolutionary leaders come dealing out death. I come dealing life". So when He comes giving His Word and bread He's actually giving them spiritual life in two ways: life through **Word** and life through **His Work**.
2. The **Power** of our Revolutionary Leader. So Jesus teaches them, and then He feeds them, and He is pointing to the life giving nature of the Gospel. The Word of God is constantly referred to as more important than life-giving bread. "**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God**" (**Matthew 4:4**).

John 6:27, 32, "**Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you...32...it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven...**"

Verses 49-51, "**Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.**"

3. The **Promise** of our Revolutionary Leader. Here is what Jesus is saying: You have a hunger in you deeper than physical hunger. Physical bread cannot fill it. If you look at the book of Ecclesiastes, we find that nothing but Jesus Christ can fill it. Pleasure will not fill it. Curiosity and knowledge will not fill it. Work and money and friends and family—none of these things can satisfy your hunger. And if you don't get that emptiness filled by Jesus, you are going to starve forever!

All your revolutions trying to get physical bread and physical status are going to go awry. What you need is a revolution in your soul. Your greatest emptiness and fear and frustration is not political, it's spiritual!

He says, "You've got a hunger only I can meet". One confused, but honest atheist said it this way, Jean Paul Sartre (French existentialist philosopher):

"That God does not exist I cannot deny. That my whole being cries out for God, I cannot forget."²

Sartre says: I don't believe in God, but I'm hungry for God. The hunger that Sartre was experiencing was beyond what anyone or anything can satisfy.

² Jean Paul Satre. *Voce evangelica*, vol 28 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1989), 1995.

So Jesus is the liberator of those zealots. He liberates them from slavery to all their earthly addictions through His Word. All those desires were driving them to a physical revolution. But if they would go to Jesus, they would be filled and satisfied and truly liberated through His Word. **John 8:32**, “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

4. The **Purpose** of Jesus’ miracles. What do the miracles mean in Jesus’ ministry?

(1) The miracles were not performed simply to demonstrate Jesus’ **awesome power**. Yes they did point to the fact that He is the Creator God. He has almighty power, but the purpose of the miracles was to tell people of redemption. It wasn’t simply to meet their need. A person whose need is met is still going to die. The amazing truth we come to in all of the miracles is that Jesus can help me when I am dead.

(2) The miracles of Jesus also invade our lives and give us a **picture of final redemption**. Jesus did not make this world with pain, sickness, or sorrow. We brought this on ourselves through sin. And when Jesus comes in healing and raising the dead and feeding the hungry, he’s temporarily restoring the original order—he’s giving us a taste of heaven! These miracles point to the New Heavens and New earth which Jesus will bring with power at His Second coming. There will be no hunger, no poverty, no injustice.

Application 1: Jesus miraculously provides for your needs now so that you will have hope that one day you will never be hungry.

Application 2: There are many people who put their trust in a political system—some even in a revolution to fight disease and hunger and injustice and death. No one can deliver on this but Jesus. He demonstrates in His miracles the great power of the world to come so that now, though you experience disease and hunger and injustice, you will eat your eternal bread now!

III. This is a revolution led by impossibly unqualified revolutionaries. This week I was at a conference, and in years past, we were fed a great lunch right on the grounds. But this year it was different. It said, “Lunch on your own”. That’s what the disciples were thinking about. They were listening to the God of the universe in human flesh.

There are roughly 20,000 people present. We read in **verses 35-37a**, “And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. **36** Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” **37** But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.””

What?! Feed 20,000? Not gonna happen! **Verse 37b-40**, “And they said to him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii [*eight months wages*] worth of bread and give it to them to

eat?” **38** And he said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.”

- A. Jesus uses **impossibly unqualified people** in His service. Do you have supernatural powers to heal, to feed, to raise the dead? No! But you know someone who can save and one day bring all that.
- B. Jesus uses the **inadequate resources** we have and multiplies them. You would expect Jesus to create beautiful trays of food with all kinds of delicious courses. But that’s not what Jesus does. The Lord always begins with the resources we already have, which are inadequate. **Verse 38**, “he said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.””
- C. As Jesus’ servants **obey** in impossible circumstances, His blessing is multiplied. **Verses 39-42**, “Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. 41 And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. 42 And they all ate and were satisfied”. Only as His servants go out in obedience and faith does Jesus actually meet the needs of the people. His power is appropriated through the disciples.

Application: What does Jesus call us to do? What we understand here is that Jesus’ work in our world is impossible. It will take a miracle.

- If you go to your friends and family with the message of Jesus, you know that they won’t want to listen. It’ll take a miracle for them to listen.
- Or perhaps you are looking for the spiritual healing of broken people in your life, but the brokenness is so bad, it will take a miracle to transform their life.

If you go out knowing the work is impossible, knowing you are inadequate and unqualified, but you go out in the faith of Christ to do it anyway, then and only then will Jesus do his transforming work through you!

“It is not God’s intention that we should in ourselves be adequate to our tasks. Rather, He wants that we should be inadequate. If we only accept the tasks that we think are adapted to our powers, we are not responding to the call of God. The church is always in a crisis, and always will be. Difficulties, insoluble problems, lack of people and money, a menacing outlook, endless misunderstandings and misrepresentations. We are not only to do our work despite these things, They are precisely the conditions requisite for the doing of it”.

All the problems, all the difficulties, all the limitations, all the impossibilities—we are not only to do our work for Him in spite of these things, they are the requirements for doing His work.

- Jesus said to Paul in **2 Corinthians 12:9**, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” So what is Paul’s answer? “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

Are you inadequate? Are you impossibly unqualified? You are just the person God wants to use in His work! Only the inadequate are adequate.

- **1 Corinthians 1:26-30**, “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Only when you know you are inadequate and you know it will take a miracle for God to do something God calls you to do will He begin to work through you.

So this is:

1. Jesus starts a revolution
2. It is a totally unexpected and spiritual revolution
3. Third, it is led by totally unqualified revolutionaries

IV. Finally, this spiritual revolution is based on a **shocking revolutionary act**.

All revolutions start with a shot—with some revolutionary act. You invade the city, or some key leader is assassinated, or you storm the Bastille, or you have the shot “heard ‘round the world” at Concord that starts the revolutionary war. So revolutions historically start with acts of violence. So did Jesus’ spiritual revolution. But wait a minute, I thought you said Jesus is a revolutionary leader that brings life, not death. That is right. It is life for us. But what is this revolutionary act on which this is all based?

You can see it in **verses 41-42**, “And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. 42 And they all ate and were satisfied”.

Jesus “blessed and broke”. In the parallel passage in John 6, as Jesus teaches later, after the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 on the other side of the Lake again in Capernaum, he gives the interpretation of the miracle.

Look at **John 6:22**—it says the next day Jesus left, but the crowd followed him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. **John 6:24**, “So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor

his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. 25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” 26 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.”

John 6:47-51, Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

The point of the miracle is that Jesus Christ is the bread that will feed the world’s hunger! He is the spiritual bread that will take away their sins and give them a satisfying relationship with God!

Jesus’ shocking revolutionary act is that He gives His life. Remember in **Matthew 26:26**, “Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” 27 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Jesus is saying to everyone who is coming after Him, trying to make Him king. “You want a new Moses. You want a Moses that will feed you with bread in the wilderness. You want a Moses that will rule over you and liberate you from oppression and injustice. You want a new Moses.

Well, Jesus is not just a new Moses—He is the ultimate Moses. Jesus comes to bring the ultimate Exodus—not to begin a revolution against Egypt or Rome and liberate you for a while. Jesus is saying, “I have come to lay down my life for you, so that you might be forever forgiven of your sins and free from condemnation.” Jesus comes to free us from sin and death itself.

How does Jesus liberate us? Jesus on the Cross, looking at the people killing Him—His enemies, His killers—all rejecting Him—He says, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:24) and then He DIED!

In other words, He blessed the people who were killing Him, and allowed Himself to be broken, so that they could be freed and liberated from their sin and satisfied with the Bread who gives eternal life!! Jesus is the bread of life! He is the revolutionary who gives life!

Conclusion: Are you part of this spiritual revolution? In closing, I want you to see verses 43-44, “And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. 44 And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.” Everyone whom eats of Jesus is satisfied. If you give

yourself to Christ, the blessings far outweigh the sacrifice! When you ask and give and go for Jesus Christ, He “is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20).

In Christ’s kingdom, we become “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).

Are you a spiritual revolutionary?

Do you want to be a spiritual revolutionary and overthrow the spiritual powers of this world?

1. Remember. “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).
2. Remember it is a peaceable kingdom we seek: “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33).
3. Remember, it is a spiritual kingdom we seek. “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).

Jesus said in **John 18:36**: “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”

When you see Jesus Christ as your substitute—broken for you—absorbing sin—absorbing your condemnation—that is what liberates you from fear and sin and death! How can you be a spiritual revolutionary? Three thoughts...

1. To be a spiritual revolutionary, there needs to be a spiritual, life-giving revolution in your soul. If you are without Christ, you need to remember that Jesus is the bread. He is the Savior. You are broken and starving, and you will die if you don’t get the bread. He’s not going to teach you how to make bread. He doesn’t want you to try and save yourself. He is the bread of life!

Maybe you’ve embraced Jesus as your substitute, and you know God accepts you because of Him, but you are struggling in giving your life to others and surrendering your life to Him. Remember, only the inadequate are adequate. Only the weak are strong. So courageously obey the Lord and give yourself to others.

2. Be a revolutionary by freely giving your **time and your money** to brothers and sisters in Christ who are in need. Jesus said, “As much as you have done it to the least of my brothers, you have done it unto me”. Create a culture of generosity in this church. Start tithing—be radical and support the work of missions and the local church. Start serving in some area of the church. Give freely to the needs in people’s lives. Don’t just pray that God will provide for someone, be a revolutionary and hand that person a check. Act as if this world is coming to an end, because it is. It is hard work to be generous, and it makes you vulnerable, but this will subvert the world’s culture. You

won't be able to sock it away. You'll be laying up treasure in heaven. That's difficult, but you will create a kingdom culture in this church that is different from the world. Are you a spiritual revolutionary?

3. Be a revolutionary in your **Relationships**—forgive everyone who wrongs us. Work like crazy to keep our relationships right. You have to forgive and give of yourself to those who hurt you. You may have to go back numerous times until it is made right. We are not always comfortable letting people know our feelings and that we are having struggles with them. But we must do it. We must clear the air. It brings a culture of love and acceptance. It is hard work and it makes you vulnerable, but this will subvert the world's culture. It's a loss of power, often a loss of reputation, but by doing it you will subvert the world in this church and in your life.