

John 6:8-15 "Loaves and Fishes"

The last time we were together Jesus and His disciples were on a mountainside near the Sea of Galilee. A great crowd of people had followed our Lord because of the miracles He was performing among them. And yet we also had pointed out that miracles were not the main objective of Jesus in this situation; rather His teaching concerning the Kingdom of God.

Mark makes mention of this in his gospel.

MAR 6:34 "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.*"

But as we saw last time it was getting late in the day and the disciples of Jesus wanted to send all of these people away so they could get something to eat. But Jesus decided to feed them Himself. Thus the statement we saw in the last part of our study.

JOH 6:5-7 "When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

You'll remember that Philip was one of the first disciples called out by Christ. And without hesitation Philip followed our Lord, and in fact he was so convinced that Jesus was the Messiah that he went to Nathaniel to exhort him to follow the Lord.

JOH 1:45-46 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.

Philip's attitude was, 'come and see for yourself Nathaniel if this is not the Messiah.' Philip was already convinced from the little he saw and heard from Jesus and yet this same Philip in a real life situation is not able to trust this same Messiah to feed the multitude. Thus his response to Jesus, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

This was a test for Philip which he immediately failed. The correct answer for all of us Monday morning quarter backs was, 'why would we have to buy bread for these people Lord when there is no way we could come up with that kind of cash. Why don't you miraculously feed them?'

It's interesting that Jesus uses this kind of a test with things like bread and fish. These are the things people can obtain in the normal course of life. I suppose if it were left to Philip he could have eventually come up with a solution to this problem, but it would have involved a solution according to his own wisdom; something like taking up a collection among the throngs of people.

And we too are prone to do this when it comes to following our Lord who tests us, not so much for Him to see what our own wisdom can come up with, but to demonstrate to us our level of trust that He alone has the solution to which He wants us to adhere; not unlike Mary's attitude when she told the servants at the wedding feast at Cana, 'do whatever my son tells you to do.'

She was willing to trust that Jesus not only had the will to come up with the solution, but He also had the power to accomplish it.

Interestingly enough, after Philip failed the test, Jesus didn't beat him into submission. He didn't publicly rebuke him in front of the other disciples and belittle him for such a lack of faith. Instead, He kept quiet and let another disciple put his foot in his mouth as the test continued.

JOH 6:8 "Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 9 "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

This is a fascinating development in faith. Philip missed the test entirely by suggesting that a sufficient amount of money was the solution. If we only had enough cold hard cash we could solve this problem.

Andrew comes along and suggests that maybe we can work with some existing food. Now, we should point out that Andrew was just as skeptical as Philip. Philip made the comment that eight months wages wouldn't be enough.

And as if to support Philip's conclusion Andrew agrees, but in kind of a "thinking out loud" response he points out a specific amount of food, and then immediately retracts that suggestion, conceding with Philip that it wouldn't work.

So, at least two of Jesus's disciples are batting a thousand as it relates to failing this test. At this point the other disciples are scratching their heads because Philip and Andrew have voiced their solutions. There doesn't appear to be any other way to go.

And this is where the beauty of our Lord's grace and mercy and compassion comes into play. As I said earlier, Jesus doesn't rebuke them or get agitated because of their lack of faith. Simply because they couldn't come up with the correct plan of attack doesn't mean Jesus is hamstrung when it comes to solving the problem.

And again, I liken this to what goes on in our lives today. How many times has our Lord placed us in a situation where we are forced to trust that He will come through? And more times than not we pursue the one plan which excludes our God as we go off and try to solve it in our own wisdom and power.

And yet, how many times, despite our lack of faith, does our God come through for us? Now granted, He usually comes through in a way we least expect it, but He comes through none the less and usually in a way where we marvel at His wisdom and grace.

This again goes contrary to a lot of aberrant teaching in the church today which suggests that unless we have enough faith God cannot and will not act on our behalf. I've actually heard some proponents of such teaching say that God is duty bound not to act because He is essentially restricted to us believing His word. If we don't believe we don't receive.

How many of Christ's closest disciples believed that He was either willing or able to feed this multitude, let alone the multitude itself believing? Where was the faith from the multitude? It was non-existent.

And yet, despite the clear absence of any faith from anybody on that mountain side, what does Jesus do?

JOH 6:10-15 "Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. 11 Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. 12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." 13 So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by

those who had eaten. 14 After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." 15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself."

This is unbelievable. No one is willing to trust Jesus to meet this need and yet Jesus meets it anyhow. Why? Because He loves the world so much that not only will He give His life, He is also willing to meet our most mundane everyday needs.

Don't ever think that God is unaware of your needs or that He could never be concerned with such needs. I've heard people say, and I've probably said it myself at some point, something to the effect, "God will take care of the big stuff, but He expects me to take care of the little stuff."

In other words, when it comes to moving mountains or keeping us safe from poisonous snake bites while we're on missionary journey's, God will step in as only He can. But when it comes to stuff like solving a washing machine problem or fixing the garbage disposal He leaves that to me.

Well, God certainly expects us to act according to the common sense He's given us, but that doesn't mean we exclude Him from any part of our lives even when that involves the garbage disposal going out. We can start by thanking Him that He gave someone the smarts to invent such a device.

We can thank Him for the means to be able to buy another one. Or we can ask for the means to buy another one if we don't have the money. Simply because we think that part of our lives seems to be unimportant to God doesn't mean it is, any more than bread and fish was unimportant to Jesus in this situation in our text.

The other thing we should never be discouraged about is how small our ability to do something for the Lord is. Andrew makes the comment that this boy had five barley loaves and two small fish.

By the way, the word barley appears three times in the New Testament. Once in the book of Revelation and twice right here in our text. Now the significance in our text for this word barley is that this particular grain was not a grain which most people ate. Wheat and other types of grains were the mainstay, whereas barley was usually reserved for feeding your animals.

The term for two small fish in our text indicates that this boy was not carrying around a couple of large trout. In fact, the implication is that of the type of fish which would actually be used as a relish to be put on this bread. Finger food like anchovies or sardines would come closer to what John is talking about here.

Now, the particular thing to notice here, from a spiritual standpoint, is that we can be tempted to think that God could never use our small contribution to His kingdom. We might be tempted to think that our feeble attempt to use whatever gifts we've got could never be used by God in any significant way.

And yet, God is never restricted by our inabilities. On the contrary it seems that God is willing and able to take whatever we have and use it in such a way as to bring honor and glory to His name as He allows us to be His servant.

God is simply looking for willing hearts to be used by Him, no matter how insignificant we may think we are in His kingdom. If He can take five loaves of bread that most people would use to feed their animals and two small fish which would barely satisfy a small boy, then God is certainly willing and able to use whatever gift He's given us for His glory.

But we need to be willing to take what little thing we do possess and give it to God to see what He'll do with it. Imagine if that little boy had said, there's no way you're taking my lunch. Does that mean Jesus wouldn't have fed the multitude? Absolutely not. But He may have used a little food from another one of the thousands in that crowd.

If we won't serve, or we won't minister, or we won't use our gifts the Spirit has given us, God's work will still go forward. Unfortunately, it may go on without our involvement instead of us being blessed through God using us.

No one in the kingdom of God through faith in Christ is insignificant. If the only thing you can do is pray for the church then do it faithfully. If the only thing you can do is make a meal for someone in need then do it as unto the Lord. If the only thing you can do is put up and take down the chairs before and after the service, then do it knowing that God can take such seemingly small things and increase them in His kingdom.

My guess is that most of us can do more than the minimum. You and I look at this little boy and we see only the paltriest of food. To

that little boy, it may have been all he had for that entire day. He gave it all. He held nothing back. It was no small thing to him.

Whatever we have God wants it all. And by that I mean taking the attitude that God gave us whatever we have and if He so desires to ask for it back we would be willing to give it knowing that He will never leave us or forsake us. If we'll but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness we'll find that all of our needs will be met in one way or another by God.

If anyone in our text has exemplified any faith it would be this little boy who was willing to be used of our Lord. It's real easy to use what others possess, (kind of like our government with our taxes), but it's another thing to give up what is most dear to us.

It would be easy for Andrew to take this boy's food and use it for God and then turn around and say, what a great thing I did for God. It's another thing to voluntarily take our own last dime and use it for God.

Now, I'm not suggesting that is what Andrew did, but if given the option how many people would rather let someone else get their hands dirty in the work of the Lord while tagging along and then take part of the credit?

So, back to our text. Jesus has taken what appears to be nothing in the larger scheme of things, (a little bread and fish), and has a plan to use it mightily for God's glory.

JOH 6:10-11 "Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. 11 Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish."

If you've watched any of the news over the last few years where the United States or other allies have provided humanitarian aid for people in need around the world, invariably whenever food is distributed the images show mobs with their hands held high in the air hoping someone will throw them something.

That's not what is happening here with these hungry people. God is a God of order and so it shouldn't surprise us that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, prepares this meal for thousands of people in an orderly fashion.

"Have the people sit down." With this command Jesus involves the work of His disciples. He always involves the work of His people and allows us to share in what He is doing.

Now, what we don't see in the gospel of John are some of the details which Mark brings out in his gospel relating to this particular incident.

MAR 6:39 "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."

Even in this setting the Son of God is concerned with the details of ministry. And the details in this incident involve how these people are to sit down. The crowd didn't come up with the bright idea to divide up into groups of hundreds and fifties, and neither did the disciples of Jesus.

The point here again is that God is not unconcerned with such mundane things like how this crowd should sit down. From a practical standpoint this was essential for an orderly and quick distribution of this food to so many people.

In ministry today these are things we shouldn't discount. We should not approach ministry in such a way where it might resemble something akin to a Chinese fire drill. If we don't have all of the answers as to how the logistics of a ministry should be handled then we need to go to God and ask Him, because He does have the answers.

But then, like the disciples here in our text, we need to be willing to follow the lead of our Lord as He provides the means to practically accomplish His will. For example, to suggest that the leading of the Spirit doesn't involve the practical outworking of the Spirit in ministry is to miss how God works among men.

I once had a man tell me that I shouldn't devote so much time to studying and preparing a message like this on Sunday mornings. He contended that I would better serve God in such a capacity if I depended more on the anointing of the Spirit as He moved my mouth to speak to God's people.

My response to him was, how can you be so presumptuous not to think that much of the anointing of the Spirit came Monday through Saturday as I spent time with God in prayer and His word studying to show myself approved?

We are still required to engage our minds and our wills and our obedience as God has revealed His will in His word. To simply expect God to pour His mind into ours through some form of osmosis as we open ourselves to the moving of the Spirit would never have resulted in the distribution of the food to these thousands of people.

Someone had to literally walk this miracle over to the crowds and instruct them how to distribute it. That “someone” was the disciples who were serving the crowds. And this by the way is usually how servants serve. Often they’re the last to eat if you will. They’re too busy meeting the needs of others.

Now the question has been raised as to how this miracle took place. Was the miracle in the hands of the disciples as they distributed the bread and fish or was it in the hands of Jesus as He simply continued to supply the food from where He sat? Well, verse eleven seems to give us the answer.

JOH 6:11 "Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish."

If we were to look at this miracle in a practical way we would have to say that Jesus was the One distributing the food and the disciples kept coming back to Him to get more. As to how this was done it appears that there was more than one basket to fill. In all likelihood there were those who had baskets in their possession and they may have brought them to Jesus and He filled them up.

In fact we’re told in verse 13 that there were enough fragments left over to fill twelve baskets. But the reason it was necessary for the disciples to keep coming back to Jesus to get more food was to show them and the multitude that it was Jesus alone, not the disciples, who was the great provider.

And it should never be lost on us that even in something as simple as bread and fish it is God who ultimately provides such things for us and all people. And like our Lord who gives thanks to the Father it would behoove us to be thankful as well, be it for our food, our home or anything else in life which ultimately comes from the hands of a gracious and merciful God.

JOH 6:12-13 "When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." 13 So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with

the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten."

What do we see here? Well, a couple of things. The first thing we see is that the Son of God was not stingy with the bounty that He created. The food was not rationed out. They were allowed and actually encouraged to eat as much as they wanted until they were full.

God is certainly more than capable of meeting our needs abundantly. This doesn't suggest that He will always give us everything we think we need, but He will certainly meet our most basic needs in His way and in His time. You'll notice that there was no desert and coffee offered to the multitude after the meal. Oh well.

By the way, we do it the opposite here after the service. We offer coffee and donuts and leave the main meal up to you.

But the other thing we notice, according to verse 12, is that God doesn't like waste. If there is an abundance which we can't immediately use we are encouraged to save it and use it at a later time or give it away to someone who can use it.

How many of you have ever heard the phrase at the dinner table when you were small, "eat all your food, there are starving children in China or Africa" (or you pick the country).

Well, there is something to be said for that. Christians, by their very new nature, are people who desire to meet the needs of others, just as their God does. We can do that in a variety of ways. More times than not it is God who has provided above and beyond what we need with the intent of taking the surplus and helping others.

The apostle Paul expresses this desire as Luke records this in Acts.

ACT 20:35 "In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

The writer of Hebrews makes the point that God Himself notices how we serve Him as we serve others.

HEB 6:10 "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them."

Whether it's helping others with food and clothing or money to support missionaries in need, or being there on the holidays to provide gifts to children in need, nothing goes unnoticed by God as we do it unto Him; not with the idea of bringing attention to ourselves.

JOH 6:13 "So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten."

Interesting that the Scriptures don't seem to indicate that any of the fish was put into baskets, only the bread. Again, from a practical standpoint it may have been difficult to save a food which spoiled quickly. The other thing which could be indicated by this is that the fish was eaten up entirely.

Be that as it may bread could last a few days. Keep in mind Jesus was passing out fresh bread, this wasn't day old stuff. As to the significance of twelve baskets some commentators suggest that twelve speaks to the twelve disciples or the twelve tribes of Israel. There doesn't seem to be a firm consensus on this, so we won't speculate here.

JOH 6:14-15 "After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." 15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself."

You'll notice that the people saw the miraculous sign Jesus did. Again, this supports what we said earlier that the miracle was viewed by the crowds as having been provided by the hands of Jesus, not in the hands of the disciples who distributed the food. And it was quite clear to the people, to the point that they drew the conclusion that Jesus was the Prophet spoken of by Moses.

DEU 18:15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him."

But instead of allowing Jesus to lead them, they decide to force Him to become something He had no intention of becoming.

JOH 6:15 "Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself."

What a sad commentary on how the Jews missed it. They missed their Messiah because they had formed a Messiah in their own

image. Their perception of the Messiah was a King who would rule them from Jerusalem and deliver them from the yoke of Rome.

But Jesus would make it clear that His kingdom is not of this world. His Messiahship was to be that of a deliverer most certainly, but it would be a deliverance from the penalty of sin unto an eternal kingdom where He would rule and reign from David's throne, if you will, on the new earth after His second coming.

Everyone wants to dictate to God as to what they think God should do, from how He should act as a Messiah, to how He should meet our needs. Even His own half-brothers seemed to know better.

JOH 7:3-5 "Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. 4 No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." 5 For even his own brothers did not believe in him.<BR>6 Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right."

Jesus would not submit to the crowds and therefore He withdrew into the mountain area. And yet as it pertains to what Jesus desires to do, to save sinners, He will never withdraw from men. Praise God His will was done and continues to be done. May our desire be the same as His and may we rely on Him for all things no matter how big or how small.

Paul sums it up when writing to the Philippians.

PHI 4:19 "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.<BR>20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen."