

Feeding the 5,000: It only takes a little

Last week, we started to describe Jesus' miracle in Mark 6 where He feeds the crowd that had at least 5,000 men, plus all of the women and children who were present. We started, but I didn't get very far—in fact, I only got through the first verse of the story: The one that appears in Mark 6:34 in which Jesus looked upon the huge crowd that was before Him and saw that they were like sheep without a shepherd. And this same verse goes on to explain that He addressed their shepherd-less condition by **“teaching them many things.”** And apparently the people in this crowd were very receptive to what Jesus had to say because they listened to Him for a very long time. Time had just flown by as they were hanging on every word that Jesus spoke until it was the end of the day. And now a great logistical problem emerged that Jesus' disciples readily perceived. This big problem is stated in the following verses of Mark, Chapter 6 where it tells us: 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 they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” Mark 6:35-36 (NIV)

Sometimes we find ourselves facing some really big problems in life just like the disciples did as they looked out over this hungry crowd. And these problems come in a variety of forms and pose the most vexing difficulties. For example, maybe you look at a lost family member, or even a close friend, and wonder if they will ever come to Christ and be saved. Or, perhaps the huge problem is directly personal to you—maybe it takes the form of some physical ailment that causes you to worry and to ask yourself whether it can be resolved or will it only get worse and worse, until it is too late. Or it could be some financial difficulty that causes you to pause and ask yourself whether you should open the mail box for fear that it might contain another bill? Or, the problem could be one that eventually comes to everyone who lives long enough to consider it. It is the problem that comes for those who worry about their eternal destinations. They know that the years have piled up and wonder how much time may be left in their lives.¹ These issues, and others that are equally serious, pose some of the major difficulties that life seems to bring to all of us.

We are confronted with problems and then we look around to see who will address them? But there is no one there—just you . . . just you **and Jesus that is.** And you think to yourself: “Jesus can handle this problem. I know that He can do it.” And that is a good thought. That is the realization that all people need to come to—There is nothing too big (or too little) for Jesus to handle. And so, having turned to Jesus to deal with the problem, you begin to wonder: How is Jesus going to make this

happen? Who is He going to use to address this need (whatever it happens to be)? But again, you look around and see nobody in sight, and your heart begins to sink. And so you turn again to Jesus and ask, “Who are you going to use to address this **big** problem?” And then Jesus turns and looks you in the eye, raises His hand and points directly **to you!** But you complain, “Wait a minute Jesus, I can’t do this—I am not some great miracle worker;” or “I don’t have the status or reputation of someone who could address this **big** problem.” In a nutshell, what you are telling Jesus is this: “I am just **too little** to do anything about a problem **as big as this!**”

Well, don’t feel like the lone-ranger, because it appears that Jesus’ own disciples may have felt like that as well when they looked out on that crowd and saw all of those hungry faces. This same story as described by Mark, also appears in Matthew, Luke and John. In fact, it is the only miracle that is described in all four Gospels, which indicates that it is something we need give particular attention to.² So what is one of the lessons that can be gleaned from this passage of Scripture? The answer to this question begins to emerge by considering what the disciples thought would be the best resolution in dealing with this hungry crowd, and it was this: Just send them away! The disciples were ready to announce: “Alright guys, we have completed the teaching for the day—now get out of here! You are hungry. We are hungry. Let’s call it a day, and all go our separate ways and find some food.” The disciples were looking at this problem from a worldly perspective—one driven by the financial aspects of the problem. And so, they commented that it “would take eight months of a man’s wages” to give each person a mere bit to eat. Mark 6:37 (NIV) If we used today’s average income in the U.S. to give a little context to that, the disciples were estimating that it would have cost over \$34,000 just to put a few crumbs in each person’s mouth.³ So, what they were saying is that it was **impossible** to feed all of these people.

But, Jesus wasn’t looking for a financial assessment of the situation. Money wasn’t the answer to this problem—**faith was**. And so, Jesus tells them quite clearly: **“You** give them something to eat.” And with that, they must have wondered: **“We are supposed to feed them?—Jesus, how are we going to do that?”** To a limited degree, they were right. The disciples, acting alone, were quite incapable of addressing the problem. Alone, they were as helpless as sheep, without a Shepherd. But the point that Jesus is making here is that they were not alone and they had **the** Shepherd right there with them to help. All they had to do was to simply turn to Him, **in faith**, and allow **themselves** to be His instruments of grace. In John 15:7 (NIV), Jesus said: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” So, they looked around and came up with five loaves of bread and two fish to eat. That’s like two McDonald’s fish sandwiches to divide up among about 15 to 20 thousand

people, if you count the women and children who were present along with the 5,000 men. Yet, if you take just a little and put it in Jesus' hands—trust it with Him—the results can be enormous. And that's one of central lessons that Jesus' miracle teaches us. With Jesus, it does not matter how little He may have to work with—just so He has a **little of your faith** to work with. Because if we will just show a little faith, Jesus can use it to achieve some very big results **through you**. That is precisely what Paul was trying to tell the Church in Ephesus when he wrote them a letter saying: ***“Now to Him [referring to Jesus] who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.”*** Ephesians 3:20 (NIV)

Jesus can do **big things** with so **little to work with** if we will put ourselves in His hands—**AND JUST DO SOMETHING**. When we actually get moving and start doing something, God will use His power to work through us. God shows this to be true throughout the Bible. When God sent Moses to go before Pharaoh and demanded that he let the Hebrew people go, all Moses had in his hand was a wooden staff. Now Moses could have shown that staff to Pharaoh, maybe even shake it in Pharaoh's face, but I doubt if that would have impressed him very much. Whatever Moses did with the staff, acting alone, would have been useless. But, when Moses gave it over to God and allowed God to work through him, that wooden staff became the most powerful instrument on the face of the earth. So, powerful that it could even part the Red Sea.⁴ The similarity between Moses and these same disciples is striking when we read Exodus 14. As the Egyptian chariots were bearing down upon the Israelites, Moses told the people that, ***“The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”*** Exodus 14:14 (NIV) But, God would have none of that. God replied that He didn't want people who could do nothing more than just ***“be still”***. In Exodus 14:15, it tells us: ***“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on.”*** (NIV) In other words, God was saying, ***“You do something!—don't just stand there and expect me to do all of the work!”*** That is what Jesus was telling the disciples. That is what He is saying to you and me—***move on according to His ways***, and not our own.

Goliath was the undisputed heavy weight champion of the world—or so it seemed to the Israelite soldiers who shook in their sandals whenever he paraded before them. Who could defeat this mighty Philistine warrior?—surely not a little boy, with just a slingshot and a small, smooth stone. Yet, that's all God needed to work with—a little boy named David who had the courage, faith and motivation **to get moving** for the Lord.

Now I don't know this for sure, but I have to believe that it wasn't so much the disciples searching the crowd for food, as it was someone in the crowd actually taking the initiative to come forward to offer those loaves of bread and the fishes. We know from John's Gospel that it was a little

boy.⁵ Unlike the one who slew Goliath, we don't know the name of this little boy. But, I believe that he had listened intently to Jesus' teachings all day long. And this little boy was so inspired by Jesus' words that his faith may well have exceeded that of the disciples themselves. And because of this faith, he was on the move. You can almost hear him crying out with a smile on his face as he came rushing forward and offered what was intended to be his lunch to the disciple Andrew: "Take my lunch and feed the Master's sheep!" Whereas the disciples saw the problem as impossible to solve, faith—as exhibited in this little boy—turned it all around. [Jesus said] "Anything is possible if you have faith." Mark 9:23 (TLB) So, how much faith are we talking about here? Again, Jesus can take a little and do incredible things. He tells us: "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:20 (NIV) So, it doesn't take much faith in the hands of the Savior to do some amazing things.

What can Jesus do **for** you? Oh, He can do a lot—but Jesus can do so much more if you will allow Him to use His power **through** you. That's what God was trying to demonstrate to the disciples as Jesus broke those few loaves and fishes—because He used the disciples to distribute the food to that massive, hungry crowd. One of the problems for the Church in this country today is that we often take an outlook like the disciples—instead of having faith in the One who can solve our problems (and then **acting on** that faith), we tend to focus only on the problem, and do nothing. And when we do that, we doom ourselves to failure. But when we believe in God and are willing to submit ourselves to serve His power, then (as Jesus said) nothing is impossible. Like the little boy and his meager lunch of fish and bread, all we need to do is to bring **just a little** to Jesus.

- Bring a little faith and watch Jesus move your mountains.
- Bring a little testimony—a little witnessing to others—Jesus will use it to save their souls.
- Bring your worship and a little praise each Sunday—the glory of God will be magnified.
- Bring your abilities and talents—even if you think they are but a little—and watch Him use you to open up His Kingdom for others to come in.
- And don't be bashful about this—remember Moses thought that he was ill-equipped to serve God, but God empowered him to deliver His people from the land of Egypt.
- God used a young peasant woman, barely more than a little girl—her name was Mary. And through God's power and protection, and her faith in Him, she did a lot. She brought a little light into this world in the form of a baby.
- And this little baby grew to manhood and hung on a big cross on a hill called Calvary, outside a little city called Jerusalem.

- But, through His death and resurrection, we are afforded something huge, **SOMETHING BIG!**
We are given the promise of **ETERNAL LIFE!**

Don't ever underestimate what Jesus can do with the little "fish and loaves of bread" that you offer up to Him. Who knows, maybe you will feed those who are starving spiritually in the crowd that surrounds you, and give them the Bread of Life in Jesus Christ.⁶

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor ©2017

¹ Alan Carr, *The Sermon Notebook – Mark*, (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2012), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "The Lord of the Little, Mark 6:35-44".

² James Montgomery Boice, *An Expositional Commentary – The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1: The King and His Kingdom (Matthew 1-17)*, Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 264.

³ Todd Campbell, "What's the Average Income in the United States Now?" <https://www.fool.com/investing/>, March 24, 2017. The latest local-pay report finds that the median salary for U.S. employees is \$51,272, up 2.9% from February 2016.

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *An Expositional Commentary – The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1: The King and His Kingdom (Matthew 1-17)*, Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 266-267.

⁵ **John 6:8-9 (NIV)** 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?"

⁶ Adapted from: Alan Carr, *The Sermon Notebook – Mark*, (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2012), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "The Lord of the Little," Mark 6:35-44".