

My Thoughts for Sunday, 18 September 2016

“You Give Them Something to Eat!”

“As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food ‘Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.’” Matthew 14:15-16

Let’s set the scene for what was about to happen. The account we are looking at is the only miracle of Jesus reported by each of the four Gospel writers, this in itself is quite unique. In prior chapters of Matthew’s Gospel, he described the work Jesus gave to His twelve apostles. He had instructed them and given them the gifts and abilities to go out into the villages and surrounding towns driving out demons, healing the sick and lame, and giving sight to the blind. (Matthew, Ch. 10) Then Matthew continued with several chapters relating to Jesus Himself, traveling from town to town and village to village teaching and preaching to all who would listen. Here we find record of many of His parables.

Looking at Mark’s account for this period of time, we are told that as the twelve had returned to Jesus from their mission, Jesus gathered them to Himself to a place of solitude for a much needed rest. *“Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. And He said to them, ‘Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.’”* (Mark 6:30-31) Rest and solitude were not destined to be. The crowds saw where they were going and many arrived ahead of them. They wanted to hear more of this new message that was being shared. The crowd continued to gather throughout the day, reaching a recorded mass of five thousand men. That was 5000 men. No count was given of the women and children. A reasonable estimate could be made that the total mass could have exceeded fifteen thousand. It was getting late in the day. Included in this group might have been some who had the foresight to bring along food for the journey but, by the account, many apparently did not.

The Apostles came to Jesus with a serious concern. There were no Supermarkets near-by, no Circle K’s or any fast food restaurants close by, and the crowd was getting hungry. They suggested sending everyone away to fend for themselves in their search of sustenance, but Jesus had His own plan. He told them, “You give them something to eat!” Talk about an attention grabber! What were they going to do? They computed the cost to be in excess of eight months’ wages to feed this many people, and they certainly did not have those funds available. They took this news to Jesus and also the offer from one lad to share his lunch with them. This lunch consisted of five small barley loaves (or cakes) and two small fish. From a background search of ‘barley loaves’ I found that they were the cheapest and of least flavor of any breads, which was the reason for the fish: to add some flavor. Jesus told the Disciples to bring this lad’s lunch to Him. Many of us have heard the outcome of what Jesus did with this meager supply of food. That outcome is recorded for us at Mark 6:41-44. *“And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all. So they all ate and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish. Now those who had eaten the loaves were about^[c] five thousand men.”*

I believe there are several important lessons being taught here. Aside from the obvious example and lesson of God’s love and providence for our wellbeing, He is also showing us a valuable lesson in

sharing those gifts from God, no matter how meager they might seem to us, with those with even greater need. Yes, even today, Jesus could be multiplying our sometimes meager supplies to un-imaginable quantities...Let's re-phrase that last statement! Even today Jesus is multiplying our seemingly meagre supplies to un-imaginable quantities. Remember that when the feast was over, on that hillside, twelve large baskets of food remained after everyone had fulfilled their needs. This brings to mind a third message from this miracle of Jesus. The issue we face today is not the meager quantity of what we might possess. The problem is more in our reluctance to bring these issues to our Lord and Savior and let Him show us His grace in fulfilling our needs. He is our provider. Ask Him for the provisions we need. It has always been His pleasure in caring for those who live Him. *"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."* (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Let's look at another truth that is adhered to often in this sinful world for personal gain. It is even more beneficial for spiritual gain for those believers in the grace of God. This truth applies to three specific aspects of our lives and is beneficial in fulfilling our God-given commission, in building His church and ultimately expanding His kingdom. That truth is in the act of multiplication.

We have all been given certain days of grace on this earth to live our lives and make a difference in the lives of others, good or bad. The principle works both ways. I am only interested in the way of spiritual growth for fellow believers and lost souls. You may only be able to reach a few lost souls due to time restraints or health issues. Even if you can only reach a couple at a time, they in turn reach out to a few each and those are each able to reach out to several more. The growth potential can, over days, weeks and months, be astronomical. But everyone comes into contact today with people to share the Good News of God's Word in your workplace, shopping sites and many other situations we regularly find ourselves in. Do the math! If you only share with two people in one week and they each share with two people and so on, in one week 254 people have heard the good news of salvation. Don't stop with one week! Soon those five thousand men plus their women and children will have heard that saving knowledge. All you did was start with two new friends that will be grateful to you for your time and come to realize what our Savior has done for them.

Our commission is to go into all the world teaching the Word of God and baptizing people of all nations. Granted, we can't all travel the world, literally, but with the time He has given us and the gifts that we possess and the treasures we have had bestowed on us we are all capable in small or large part to helping those Pastors, Teachers, and Missionaries to continue in that great worldwide mission outreach. Let's apply the concept of multiplication from the example above to our gifts to the church through whom these people are being called and sent as Pastors, Teachers and Missionaries. If you are on limited funds you alone might not be able to do much; but with those 254 (in one week) that were reached by your start, much more can be accomplished. Remember, this multiplication event will go on and on with those true believers in Christ who truly appreciate what He has done in their lives.

As the Apostle Paul explained to the people of Corinth, which should remain as instruction for us today, there is no set amount designated to our gift giving to the church. Rather it is meant to be a gift of our appreciation for the gifts God has given to us showing our gratitude. *"So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."* (2 Corinthians 9:7)