



The Bread of Life... 1) Never Comes Up Short

Five seconds. For every five seconds that fly by about five people in the world have died of starvation. One every second. About 36 million will die this year due to hunger related causes. But what is even more disheartening is that there is not a shortage of food in the world. There's more food produced each day than all the people in the world need. India for example, has a surplus of food produced per person each day. But it has the second highest number of undernourished people in the world. The food is there. God has provided. But getting that food where it is needed is the challenge. Wars, conflict, politics, greed, corruption, waste, and hatred against ethnic groups have all contributed to the hunger problem. So, efforts to end world hunger always come up short.

But hunger isn't the greatest problem this world faces. A far greater problem looms. Statistically even more people suffer from it. It is the lack of what Jesus calls, "Living Bread," spiritual food. Without it people face a spiritual starvation which leads to something worse than death. The number of people without "The Bread of Life" seems overwhelming. But in John 6 we read of a heartening truth. WHEN IT COMES TO PROVIDING THE BREAD OF LIFE JESUS NEVER COMES UP SHORT.

We read of a time in John chapter 6 when Jesus was at the height of his popularity in ancient Israel. Many were aware of his miracles. Everyone in Galilee seemed to want more of Jesus. *We read last Sunday how these crowds caused Jesus to retreat by boat to a solitary place for some rest.* But the crowds swarmed on foot! Even though he was now in an isolated place, by the end of the day the crowd was counted as 5000 men! That's easily over ten thousand if you were to count the women and children!

With this huge crowd around them Jesus poses a question to test his disciples: "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" The disciple's response is understandable. Philip eventually came to the conclusion, "We can't buy enough food for all these people! We don't have that kind of money!" We read in the other gospel accounts that some disciples advised, "Send the crowds home so they can get some food." After a while Andrew brought a small portion of food which a boy had on hand. "Here are five loaves of the cheapest Wonder Bread and two McDonald's fish fillets." But they needed a massive potluck for what was probably now numbering ten thousand. Andrew noted that this small amount of food would be useless, "What good will this do with such a huge crowd of people!" What he had was just a drop in the bucket.

Our response to overwhelming needs is often the same. It is easy to dismiss problems if they are not ours or too big for us to handle. There is no struggling pregnant and single mother if you chose not to see it as a struggle. There is no family suffering under alcohol or drug abuse if you decide they should be able to break that addiction without any help. There is no hungry family if you are always content with only your own family being full. There is no victim of human trafficking if you don't want to call those caught up in it victims. The world's problems abound and overwhelm us. And more likely than not, if you chose not to address a problem it will not seek your help. Are there people in need around us? We don't have to look hard to find it. But we do have to look hard if ever we might find a solution! Any efforts of ours would just be a drop in the bucket, come up short.

But Jesus asked this question in order to test them. And in their jump to either dismiss the problem or despair the disciples failed the lesson terribly! They should have expected more from Jesus by now. This was the man who about two years back had miraculously changed over 120 gallons of water into wine! This was the man who told the fishermen Philip and Andrew to cast their nets into the waters only to have the net over-filled with a catch of fish! Now Andrew can only see the two small fish. Instead of repeating Mary's "Jesus-can-solve-this" attitude they grab their calculators, look at the budget reports, determine they lack the proper resources, and declare that it is hopeless, and they can't really do anything. "Dismiss these people. It's not our problem! It's really more than we can handle." The disciples failed the test.

Some of you might be thinking, "*Is it fair to say the disciples failed Jesus' lesson?*" Weren't they just stating the facts? Don't we too recognize *our* own shortcomings? "We don't have the time, we don't have the money, we don't have the ability, we don't have the resources." In reality our own efforts are often will come up very short of what is needed. The disciples were right! Weren't they?! They couldn't provide for the needs of that crowd. And aren't we right too in concluding we can't meet the overwhelming needs of everyone around us!? Isn't it okay to say nothing can be done?

But when we are content with this attitude we too fail the test. We dismiss and despair, but don't direct our eyes to him who delivers. We see our shortcomings, *but* don't see him who never comes up short. Jesus wanted them to see their shortcomings. But he didn't want them to stop there. He showed the disciples just where to look for the needed help! Jesus said, "Direct the people to sit down." They arranged the crowds into organized groups by number. The large crowd sat in the grassy area, all 5000 men plus the women and children. He took the five loaves and two fish which Andrew found and gave thanks. Jesus miraculously handed out the food as the disciples gave it to the crowds. They all ate bread. They all ate fish. Everyone in the crowd ate as much as he or she wanted *and was satisfied*. Jesus did everything! He addressed the need, he provided the rescue. The need is met by him.

And the disciples did have something to contribute. Those who would become the great apostles were now taking entirely different roles. They were *serving* Jesus as ushers. They were serving Jesus as waiters. They would continue to serve as clean-up crew. Jesus provided an opportunity for the disciples to serve him as he met the need of the crowd. This was his plan! Even

before he asked Philip, "where can we buy food?" Jesus *already* had in mind what he was going to do and how the disciples *could* serve him. "He asked this to test them, for he already had in mind what he was going to do." And it involved them serving.

What opportunities does Jesus give us as he rescues the needy? He doesn't ask you to serve as waiter while he miraculously multiplies Subway sandwiches. But he 1) does provide for those in need. And he 2) does provide ways for you to serve him while he helps the needy.

And when you do serve him in this way you are given a chance to marvel at Jesus' abundant provision and rescue! Jesus solution for the crowd was far more than was needed. The disciples were filled with thoughts of failure and hopelessness. They saw what they lacked and what little they had to offer. Soon, however they were staring at 12 baskets full of success and abundance -what Jesus had to offer the needy crowd. THAT'S HOW JESUS WORKS. HE NEVER COMES UP SHORT WHEN HE PROVIDES!

But his provision for the crowd went beyond bread. If he had stopped there he would certainly have come up short. Even if he had given them bread for the rest of their lives he still would have come up short. Jesus would not let anything deter him from giving the world what it needed: The Bread of Life. When the crowd saw the miraculous sign which Jesus had performed they exclaimed, "This must be the prophet who is to come into this world!" In a grand excitement they wanted to carry Jesus off to Jerusalem and compel him to be their new king! They thought he would free them politically from Rome just as Moses freed the people long ago from Egypt. They wanted him as their bread-winner king.

Jesus was indeed the prophet who was to come into the world, the promised Messiah. He was king. The miracle he performed before the crowd pointed to that truth. It demonstrated Jesus as the promised Messiah. But he withdrew from the crowd.

Why? He didn't want his help to come up short of what they really needed. It's always disheartening when efforts to help come up short. Sometimes rescue efforts fail. Tragically one man died trying to help boys trapped in the cave in Thailand. Imagine how much more that tragedy would have been amplified if his contribution and all the efforts of others came up short of rescuing the boys? What if they brought them only part of the way out? How much more important wasn't it for Jesus to not stop short of giving the crowds what they needed! If he would have just been a giver of bread he would have come up short. They needed more than bread. They needed spiritual life. They needed living bread from heaven. They needed a rescue from God's wrath over sin, from the grave, and from something far worse than hunger: the lasting torments of hell.

Jesus would not let anything get in the way of his real mission. He did not come simply to receive worldly praise and popularity. His rescue is not just from Egypt or Rome, but from the grip of sin which has enslaved all people and doomed us to death and punishment. The payment for sin is one which we would never be able to make! (Not even a drop in the bucket) But from all eternity Jesus already knew what he was going to do! Before he even asked Adam, "Did you eat of the fruit which I told you not to eat?" Even before he said, "You will surely die, dust you are and to dust you will return." *Before all time*, Jesus already knew what he was going to do. He was going to the cross. He was going to die in the place of all sinners to rescue them.

Through the cross he defeated the pains of hunger forever and the pain and death that went with it! This is the king we follow and serve! And on the third day, just as he already knew, he rose to life victorious. By his life he guaranteed that he has met our need of a perfect payment for sin! The single mother finds more than a helping hand from him, she finds peace and spiritual rest. The struggling alcoholic will find more than a recovery plan and encouragement, but release from the power of sin. The victim of a broken home, abuse, or human trafficking will find more than someone wanting to get them out of their plight, but someone who will get them out of hell forever! Jesus, the Bread of life never comes up short!

We did not even ask Jesus to do this! He saw the need of fallen mankind, he provided the solution, and met our need. And he willingly and lovingly gave all of himself despite the fact that we not only didn't ask, but don't deserve it! This is called grace! God's underserved love. And all we can do is stand back and marvel at the rich provision he has made for our need. When he rescues, it never comes up short. His death, his blood, pays for every sin! Even those times that we failed to look to him and serve him to help the needy. Even for those times we have been content to let the needy be. There is no sin which is too great for his great sacrifice! Forgiveness is free and overflowing with abundance! The apostle John calls it "grace upon grace."

This is why we now serve Jesus as he rescues people with earthly short-term needs. Yet, no earthly assistance to the needy could ever cause us to leave behind the mission of God's church: proclaiming Christ crucified for sinners, proclaiming his great and abundant rescue not from hunger, but from death itself. This rescue is freely given through faith in him. And when we share this Bread of Life those who eat of it will never hunger for more. They are satisfied.

There are many needs in this world. Hunger is just one of them. It can seem overwhelming. We can begin to despair or dismiss the needy saying "I can't do anything. I'll come up short." Should we ever dismiss those needs as "not our problem" or despair of ever having enough to help? We can meet the needs of everyone around us. That's because they need more than bread. We have something far greater to offer than ordinary bread. And God supplies it abundantly so that we can serve him as we share it. When we serve this bread, we can only stand back and marvel at God's abundant provision for the needs of everyone! Jesus, "The Bread of Life," never comes up short.