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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

I've entitled this message, "The ONLY Word Jesus Doesn't Understand." Words can be hard to understand, especially English words. For instance, someone wrote: "English is a crazy language. There is no egg in eggplant, nor ham in hamburger; a pineapple is neither a pine nor an apple. Quicksand works slowly and boxing rings are square. And why is it that writers write but fingers don't fing, grocers don't groce and hammers don't ham? If a vegetarian eats vegetables, what does a humanitarian eat? People recite at plays and play at recitals. We ship cargo not by cars but by trucks and send cargo by ship. We park on driveways and drive on parkways. We have noses that run and feet that smell. How can a fat chance and a slim chance be the same, while a wise guy and a wise man are opposites? Your house can burn up as it burns down; you fill in a form by filling it out; and alarms go off by going on. When the stars are out they are visible, but when the lights are out, they are invisible. How can flammable and inflammable mean the same thing? And when a car slows up, it slows down? English speakers should be committed to an asylum for the verbally insane."

When you translate English into another language, it can be confusing and even humorous. Here are some actual translations in foreign countries:

1. Next to a fire extinguisher in China the sign says, "Hand Grenade."
2. A sign next to a scenic drop-off says, "Beware of missing foot."
3. A sign over a Nokia store meant to say "Connecting people" but it says: "Connocing poopie."
4. A label on a corkscrew and bottle opener says, "Manicure set."
5. A bathroom sign with the symbol of female says: "Feman."
6. A sign in a Chinese restaurant says: "Please keep chair on position & Keep table clean after dying. Thank you for your corporation."
7. Translations on a bottle of milk and a container of tea say: "Non homo milk" and "Straight Tea."
8. A sign at a tourist attraction called "Mud-filled Paradise" reads: This onsen connects directly with a geothermal source the likes of which are not to be found anywhere else. An unforgettable sensation, as if you are entering right into hell."

Words are funny and today I'm going to be talking about the ONLY word Jesus doesn't understand. After studying seven parables about the Kingdom in Matthew 13, we come to the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. It's the only miracle recorded by all four Gospel writers. Sometimes people wonder why we have four gospel accounts. There are four different accounts to lend validity to the words and works of Jesus. For instance, if only one person told me, "An elephant escaped from the Caldwell Zoo and is roaming around town," I'd be a little skeptical about his sanity. However, if four different people came up and warned me about a runaway elephant in town, I'd be on the watch and make sure I didn't have peanuts on my breath!

When you examine all the details of this miracle provided by all four writers, you have a better understanding of what happened. As we read the text, see if you can spot the only word Jesus doesn't understand.

Matthew 14:13-21. "When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. 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.' 'We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,' they answered. 'Bring them here to me,' he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Did you pick out only word Jesus doesn't understand? This past week I asked my Facebook friends to guess what the only word Jesus didn't understand was and I got a couple of hundred responses. Some people guessed words like, "Fear; Apathy; Doubt; Time; Impossible; and Peer-pressure." Phil Burks wrote that the word Jesus didn't understand was "Bazinga." He said he didn't know what it meant either, because he just made it up.

But several people read these verses and correctly guessed the only word Jesus doesn't understand. I wasn't really asking a question, and I gave the answer in the title itself. Because the **ONLY WORD JESUS DOESN'T UNDERSTAND IS: ONLY!** The disciples said, "We have here ONLY five loaves and two fishes." Jesus didn't even consider the word "only," He said, "It's enough!" Denise Eskridge, correctly guessed that the word was "only" and wrote this: "The only word Jesus doesn't understand is 'ONLY' ...the disciples were thinking in human terms of a logical manner to meet the masses' hunger, not thinking in supernatural terms, of a MIRACLE of GOD to meet the needs of the masses!" Let's learn three life-changing lessons from the miracle of feeding the 5,000.

I. THE COMPASSION LESSON: JESUS CARES ABOUT ALL MY NEEDS

The Bible says, "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick." Jesus had just learned John the Baptist had been executed by Herod Antipas, and He wanted to get away to grieve over the loss of his cousin and friend. But when he got to the northeastern shore of the lake, thousands of people were there. He could have launched back out into the water, or told them He wanted to be alone. But instead, He looked at the people and was filled with compassion.

He fed the people spiritual truth by telling seven parables about the Kingdom. You and I have spiritual needs and Jesus wants to meet those needs. We all have physical needs as well. Jesus healed the sick and fed a hungry crowd. He doesn't just care about your spiritual needs, but He is interested in *every* area of your life.

II. THE FAITH LESSON: JESUS ASKS ME TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE TO TEST ME

The disciples came to Jesus and said, "Let's send the people away to the villages so they can buy food. Jesus said, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." Jesus told His disciples to do something impossible. In John, we read that Jesus told the disciples this to TEST their faith. The disciples thought their problem was a lack of food, but Jesus saw that the bigger problem was a lack of faith.

Jesus asks us to sometimes do the impossible also. He's doing it to test our faith. When I was in college, I had a professor who often started class by announcing, "Everyone clear off your desk except for one blank sheet of paper." We all knew he was about to give one of his infamous pop quizzes. Sometimes I was prepared and sometimes I wasn't.

Jesus does the same thing today. When you face the very hardest times of your lives, it's like God is saying, "Take out a blank sheet of paper." The only question on God's test is: Do you trust me? Your answer is not for His information; it is to show you how much faith you really have. Your faith will be tested continually throughout your life, not to shame you, but to strengthen you. In James 1:2-3 we read: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance." Once you realize problems are God's pop quizzes, it makes it easier to say, "Oh boy! Another test!" When you encounter a problem that involves a shortage, there are three different approaches you can take.

Some people are "feelers." They address problems with their emotions: You can recognize them because they use this phrase: "I just feel that..." The disciples looked around and saw the mob and they felt panic because the day was getting late and there was no food. Anytime you approach a problem with feelings you are in danger of making a huge mistake. Their "feelings" said, "Send these folks away." I've had people tell me they made major decisions just because, "I felt it was the right thing to do." That's a pretty scary way to make decisions because your feelings can be misleading.

Other people are "figurers." They address problems with their minds. You can recognize them because they often make remarks like, "I think..." These are the calculators, the analyzers. In the account of this miracle in John's gospel, we are told Phillip made this statement about feeding the crowd: "Lord, a year's wages would not be enough to buy everyone a single bite." I think Phillip was the CPA of the disciples. Can't you see him as he whips out his handheld iAbacus? He says, "Let's see, 15,000 people at \$2 a meal, divided by a month's wages..." He had it all figured out, but God's math is different than ours. When we pass out food we divide it, but when Jesus passes out food He multiplies it! Human math says, "Five loaves and two fish divided by 15,000 = IMPOSSIBLE. God's math says, "Five loaves plus two fish times the power of God = 15,000 full stomachs. To all the figure-ers, God says, "Your calculation is correct, but you fail the test." There's another way to approach a problem and it is illustrated in the next lesson.

III. THE ABUNDANCE LESSON: WHEN I GIVE JESUS "ONLY" ALL THAT I HAVE, HE TURNS MY POVERTY INTO PLENTY!

The disciples said, "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish." Jesus said, "Bring them here to me." They used the "only" word, but Jesus acted like He didn't even understand it. He said, "Your only is enough for me to make plenty."

There are "feelers" and "figurers" but the third way to face a shortage is to be a "faither." A feeler says, "I feel..." A figure-er says, "I think..." But you can recognize a faither a smile away because they say things like: "I believe that God is able..." There was at least one faither in the crowd that day. John tells us Andrew brought a little boy to Jesus who had five loaves and two fish. I like Andrew because he was always bringing people to Jesus. This little unnamed lad "only" had five little buns and two small fish like sardines. You could call it an Israeli Happy Meal. But he had faith in Jesus because he surrendered all he had. He didn't know what would happen; he just decided to trust Jesus with his food. That's what faith is. You don't know exactly what will happen, but you are still willing to trust God. I would have loved to have seen the look in the little boy's eyes as he watched Jesus supersize that happy meal!

Jesus multiplied "only" that tiny meal until everyone was fed. Not only was there enough for five thousand men, plus all the women and children, there were leftovers! It's God's nature to always give more than enough. One of my favorite Bible promises says, "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 ..." (Ephesians 3:20 NKJV) In the original Greek, three powerful adverbs pile up to increase the force of that promise. "Exceedingly abundantly above," literally means "superabundant, beyond measure, more than more than enough!"

Jesus did four simple things when He received the five loaves and two fish. He looked to heaven, He gave thanks, He broke the bread, and then He distributed it. If you want your "only" to be transformed into God's overabundance, you can do the same four things:

A. Look to heaven for help

When Jesus took the food, the first thing He did was look up to heaven. When you face a need, you may be tempted to focus on the problem and on your own meager resources. But don't look at what you *only* have, instead lift up your eyes and look to heaven. Here's great advice from Psalm 121:1-2: "I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." It may be you feel overwhelmed right now with your marriage problem, your financial problem, your family problem or your physical problem because you're looking in the wrong direction. Like the song says, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus; look full in His wonderful face; and the things of earth will grow strangely dim; in the light of His glory and grace."

B. Give thanks for the little I have

The next thing Jesus did was to thank God for the food. It was only a tiny amount, but Jesus said, "Thank you, Father for this food." We spend much of our time asking God for more rather than thanking Him for what we already have. Thanksgiving is more than a holiday, it's the best way to approach God. The Bible says we "enter His gates with thanksgiving." But thanksgiving is also the best way to approach a problem as well.

In the 17th century, Dutch artist, Nicolaes Maes painted a picture entitled "Old Woman at Prayer." It depicts a simple woman sitting alone at her table praying over half a loaf of bread and a small bowl of soup. You can tell from the surroundings she is a poor, humble woman. Her rough hands reveal the evidence of many years of hard, manual labor. Maes was inspired to paint this after visiting this woman. She invited him to join her for the meager meal. After the prayer, she looked up and with a smile said, "All this and Jesus, too!" Her comment inspired that beautiful painting. So, instead of complaining about what you *don't* have, start thanking God for what you *do* have. You have all this and Jesus too!

Old Woman at Prayer
Nicolaes Maes
Oil on Canvas
c. 1656

C. Cherish the value of brokenness

After Jesus looked to heaven and thanked God for the food, He broke it. It was in this act of breaking the bread that He began to multiply it. God truly values broken things. In our materialistic culture, a broken object becomes less valuable, but in God's economy, brokenness only increases the value. The bread had to be broken before it could be multiplied; The alabaster box Mary brought had to be broken before the perfume could be poured out; the roof above Jesus had to be broken up before the friends could lower the paralyzed man to Jesus; and the body of Jesus had to be broken before our sins could be forgiven. David, a broken man, prayed this prayer in Psalm 51:17, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

When I was growing up there was a song we sang every Sunday in my little home church. It was on one of the last pages of the Baptist Hymnal. It went this way, "Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me. Break me; melt me; mold me; fill me." That's still a great prayer. Will you ask God to do that?

D. Serve others before myself

I can just imagine when the little boy presented his meal to Jesus, Peter probably thought, "Well, at least the STAFF will be fed!" But Jesus instructed them to serve all the people first. I'm sure every time Peter returned for more he just knew they would be out by the time he could eat. But when they gathered the leftovers, how many baskets were there? Twelve. Exactly the number of disciples! Instead of getting a crumb of bread or a sliver of fish first, the disciples served everyone else and they each got a basketful for their work.

Here's an important lesson. If you are most concerned about meeting your own needs first, you will suffer a miserable existence. Be willing to help other people first and you'll find your needs and problems don't seem quite as severe after serving others.

When I was about fourteen, I worked at a Gulf Oil gas station in South Alabama. (Now, we think of something different when we hear "Gulf Oil.") Whenever a car drove up, I would go out and ask, "How can I help you?" Gas was about 29 cents a gallon so some folks would say, "Give me a dollar's worth of Ethyl." I pumped the gas, washed their windshield, and checked their tires

and oil. They were called "service stations." Today, almost every gas station is self-service. That sign you see on gas pumps is actually a sad reminder of our society. Most of us are more interested in self-service rather than offering full service to others. A real disciple is committed to full service to others.

CONCLUSION

Will you give God "only" what you have? In Exodus 3 we find the story of Moses standing before a burning bush. He is 80 years old and for the past 40 years he's been living in obscurity tending his father-in-law's sheep. God tells him to go to Pharaoh and say, "God says, 'Let me people go!'" Moses offered all kinds of excuses. He said, "Lord, you've got the wrong guy. Who am I? I'm only an old man. I'm only a shepherd. And besides, I stutter badly, I can't even talk. I don't have anything to offer you." God said, "I know all that about your 'onlys', but you're my guy."

To demonstrate this, God gave Moses a test. He said, "What's that in your hand, Moses?" Moses said, "It's just a shepherd's staff, a stick." God said, "Throw it down on the ground." I can imagine Moses said, "What do you want with my stick? It's only a piece of wood. And besides, it's mine. God said, "Throw it down." Moses complained, "But Lord, it's MINE. I cut it down myself and over the years it has been worn smooth where I hold it. It feels good. Why do you want my staff? It's only a stick." God said, "Throw it down."

Finally Moses threw it down and it became a snake! Now, what do most of us do when we see a snake? We run. I'll bet Moses saw that snake and said, "Lord, that's a snake! See you later!" I can just see his robe and long grey hair and beard flapping in the wind as he scampered away as fast as an 80 year-old guy can run. And God said, "Moses! Go back and pick it up!" I imagine Moses didn't stop as fast as he started. He wasn't too keen on the idea of picking up a live snake. He probably strolled back, taking the scenic route, whistling and kicking stones hoping the snake would be gone. But it was still there coiled on the ground. He finally got enough courage to pick it up. And it became a stick again. But something had happened between the time he surrendered it to God and when he picked it up again. The snake had gone out of it and the power of God had gone into it. God said to Moses in Exodus 4:17, "Take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it." The Bible no longer called it the "rod of Moses." It was called "the rod of God."

A few months later Moses was faced with an impossible situation: The Red Sea was in front and a pursuing army was behind him. He didn't know what to do. He cried out to God for help, and God said, "What's that in your hand, Moses?" This time Moses knew that it was more than *only* a staff—it was a staff with God's power in it. He touched the Red Sea with the staff, and the waters split to either side.

God is asking you the same thing today. What's that in your hand? You say, "It's only my job." God says, "Lay it down before me." "It's only my bank account." God says, "Lay it down before me." "It's only my family." "Lay it down before me." "It's only my meager abilities." "Only? I don't understand that word. Lay it down."

You may be thinking, "I only have this much to give. Jesus says, "It is enough, bring it to me!" God has been performing miracles with "onlys" for centuries. Adam was only a pile of clay. Goliath and the Philistines looked at David and said, "He's only a boy with only a slingshot." They said Mary was "only" an unwed teenage mother. They said that Jesus was "only" a carpenter. Just think about what God can do with your "only" if you'll offer it to Him.

I came across a wonderful poem that expresses the point of my message. It's entitled, "The Little Word 'Only'" It says: I considered my little and God said to me, "Child, what do you mean by saying, 'only?'" It was only a word that created all that you see; It was only some clay that brought you to be. Only a staff that parted the sea; Only one man who set them all free. Only a young shepherd who took down a foe; And there's a lesson to learn that I want you to know: It was only a stable, and only a girl; And only a Carpenter who changed the whole world. So it's not what YOU have, but MY strength, you see; And I can do miracles with your little 'only!'"

So do you understand the *only* word Jesus doesn't understand? **ONLY**. And only He knows what can happen when you give Him your all!

OUTLINE

I. THE COMPASSION LESSON: JESUS CARES ABOUT ALL MY NEEDS

II. THE FAITH LESSON: JESUS ASKS ME TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE TO TEST ME

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance." *James 1:2-3*

III. THE ABUNDANCE LESSON: WHEN I GIVE JESUS "ONLY" ALL THAT I HAVE, HE TURNS MY POVERTY INTO PLENTY!

"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 ..." *Ephesians 3:20 NKJV*

My "only" becomes God's "over-abundance" when I:

- A. Look to heaven for help
- B. Give thanks for the little I have
- C. Cherish the value of brokenness
- D. Serve others before myself