

INTRODUCTION

Let's play Final Jeopardy! The category for Final Jeopardy is the Bible. The Answer is: "Other than Jesus' resurrection, this is the only miracle mentioned in all four gospels." You have thirty seconds. Good luck.

If you said, "What is the feeding of the 5,000?" Then congratulations you're correct.

Jesus performed dozens of miracles, but the feeding of the 5,000 is the only one that appears in all four Gospel Accounts. I believe that's because God wants us to pay particular attention to the lesson of this miracle.

I'm calling it the Miracle of the Minnows and Muffins, because we've always heard about the five loaves and two fish. Don't make the mistake of visualizing five loaves of Wonder Bread and two nice-sized Tilapias. The language used to describe the unknown lad's lunch indicates that the bread were what we'd call mini-muffins. And the fish were tiny, like sardines. They could be spread on the bread to give it a little fishy taste. You might think of it as an Israeli Happy Meal—just enough for one little boy. But we're going to see Jesus supersize it!

Mark 6:30-44. "The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.' So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 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. 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. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.' But he answered, 'You give them something to eat.' They said to him, 'That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?' 'How many loaves do you have?' he asked. 'Go and see.' When they found out, they said, 'Five—and two fish.' Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. 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 his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand."

It had been a tough time for Jesus. His home synagogue had rejected Him and the citizens of Nazareth tried to stone Him. Then after the disciples returned, Jesus got word that his cousin, John the Baptist, had been beheaded by Herod Antipas, the man Jesus would later call, "that fox." As God, Jesus knew all this would happen. As a man, Jesus grieved for His friend and forerunner. He and the disciples were physically tired and hungry.

Jesus tried to get away and get some rest. So they got into a boat and sailed north, but the crowd on the shore tracked their progress and when they landed on the northeastern shore of the lake, thousands of people were waiting for Him. Jesus could have gotten in the boat and sailed away, but instead He had compassion on them; they were like sheep without a shepherd. So in spite of His own fatigue, He started teaching them.

When suppertime came, they were faced with an impossible task. How do you feed 5,000 men and their families in a remote area? James Tissot, a French artist, painted one of my favorite depictions of this miracle. The rocky hills where you see the people look exactly like the area around the Sea of Galilee today. By the way, I love the fact that Jesus was an organizer. He had the people grouped together. That's the only way you can handle a crowd of 5,000 people.

We do the same thing here at Green Acres. There will be about 5,000 gather here today, and the only way we can really function as a congregation is for people to break up into smaller groups. We call them Sunday morning Bible study groups. Some of our groups have fifty, some one hundred, some have two hundred. If you're not part of a Sunday Morning Bible Study group you're missing out on the miraculous feeding of the Word of God that happens each week.

I've said many times that there is a parable in every miracle and a miracle in every parable. In other words, Jesus was teaching a spiritual lesson in this miracle. Later in this chapter, He gives the test, and the disciples failed the test.

Jump ahead to verse 52 and you see that the disciples missed the point. The Bible says, "They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened." (Mark 6:52) Do you understand the lesson of the loaves and fish? In this message I'm going to lift out three life-changing lessons about what to do when you face an impossible challenge.

I. NEVER MEASURE A PROBLEM IN LIGHT OF YOUR OWN RESOURCES

One of my favorite details of this miracle is that there was an unnamed lad who got to enjoy lunch with Jesus. What a story he must have been able to tell his family and friends!

When we face a problem, our immediate reaction is to reach into our pocket and count our change; we want to see how much emotional or physical currency we have on hand to meet this crisis.

Peter Lord was the pastor of a Baptist Church in Titusville, Florida for over 30 years. He's 84 years old and still teaching God's Word. I once heard Peter Lord say there are three kinds of people in every church whenever there is a crisis or a challenge. First, there are the Feelers—they go by what they feel. Second, there are the Figurers. They say, "Here's the problem, and here's the calculated solution." But fortunately every church also has a group of Faithers—they trust God. Let's look at these three attitudes and see into which category you fit.

A. Some people say, "I feel that I should do this."

Jesus turned to the disciples and said, "Here's the problem. We have several thousand hungry people, so what are we going to do?" (Jesus knew exactly what He was going to do. This was part of the test.) Some of the disciples felt that they had an answer. They said, "Lord, it's late. These people are hungry. We can't feed them. We feel that You should send them away in the neighboring towns to buy food." They felt panic and fear that this hungry mob might turn on them, so they wanted to send them away.

Do let your feelings be your guide? Are you someone who goes by your gut feeling? Do you judge a solution or a situation by whether it *feels* right or wrong? Be careful, because your feelings can mislead you. Your emotions are the shallowest part of your soul.

B. Some people say, "I figure that we could do this."

Of all the disciples, I believe Philip was the CPA in the group. Don't get me wrong; I thank God for CPAs. I couldn't live without one. I love Numbers if you're talking about the fourth book of the Bible. But depreciation makes me dizzy.

Jesus asked Philip, "How are we going to feed these people?" Philip whipped out his iAbacus and started his calculation. He said, "5,000 men...add in wives and children...let's make it 15,000 people. Multiply that by \$1.75 per person, the cost of a meal purchased in bulk. Then divide that amount by one denarius, the amount of money a manmade working one full day."

He turned to Jesus and said, "Lord, the numbers don't lie. It would take a man working eight months to feed this crowd." And he probably thought, "And we don't have anywhere near that amount." So, to translate that into today's dollars. Think about what your monthly salary is times eight. That was a lot of money. But Philip had it figured out.

That's the way a lot of people approach any challenge or crisis: "What's it gonna' cost me?"

About 18 years ago we were trying to raise about \$20 million for this Worship Center. At the time, the church had about 10,000 members. Someone wrote me a letter informing me that they had figured out a simple way to raise \$20 million. He wrote that we should ask every member of the church to give \$2,000. 10,000 members times \$2,000 equals \$20,000,000. He had it all figured out.

I responded to him with kindness and thanked him for his suggestion. I started to write that I'd be by to pick up his \$2,000 check. But I didn't. Instead I explained that about half of our members never show up or give anything. And many of our members are youth and children. And I also explained that some of our members are so poor that \$2,000 would be very difficult for them to give. At the same time, many of our members have been blessed financially, and \$2,000 wouldn't be much of a sacrifice for them. I told him our motto was "Equal sacrifice, not equal gifts." He was a figurer.

C. But Praise God there are always some people who say, "I faith that God wants to do the impossible."

That's not a typo. Faith is verb. I have always gravitated people who are faithers. They don't "fake it 'til they make it." They "faith it until God makes it." They say, "Here's a big challenge, and we don't have enough resources, but our God is bigger than any challenge, and He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and all the gold, silver, oil, and gas beneath those hills. If God wants us to do this, it will be done. Where God guides, He provides."

And because of the sacrificial giving of our people 18 years ago, we raised, not \$20 million, but \$28 million to pay for this Worship Center without incurring any debt.

I believe this little boy was a faither. I like Andrew because he is often seen bringing people to Jesus. And in John's Gospel we learn it is Andrew who brings the little boy to Jesus. He says, "Lord, there's a boy here with five small muffins and two small minnows." And if Andrew had stopped talking there he would have passed the test. But like most of us, he got in trouble because he kept talking. He said, "But how far will that go among so many?" Jesus said, "That's plenty." It's at this point I think I hear Simon Peter saying, "Well, at least the staff will be fed."

Are you living by feelings, figuring, or faith? There was a lady living in a retirement center. The newest resident of the retirement home was a nice-looking older gentleman, whose wife had died a few months earlier. The lady saw him at the cafeteria table and asked, "Can I join you?" He said, "Sure." She sat down and they began to talk and had a delightful conversation. Finally she just started staring at him. He said, "Is something wrong?" She said, "No excuse me. I couldn't help staring at you because you remind me so much of my third husband." He said, "Really? How many times have you been married?" She smiled and said, "Twice actually." That's what I call a profession of faith!

II. A LITTLE BECOMES MUCH IN THE HANDS OF JESUS

Here's the little unnamed lad who is brought to Jesus and willingly hands his small lunch over. It was little in quantity. As I mentioned, the Greek words in John indicates these were small rolls and tiny fish: minnows and muffins. The muffins were made from barley, which was the coarsest and cheapest flour. As one country preacher said, "It was barley even bread at all!" But he gave it to Jesus and Jesus used it as the basis of a miracle. This lad took two steps of faith we all need to take if we want to see God's power released in our lives.

STEP 1: Transfer ownership of everything you have to Jesus

This little boy had come prepared. His mother had packed his supper for him. He was the rightful owner of those fish and loaves. He could have snuck off behind a rock and enjoyed his food privately. The text doesn't say whether Jesus asked the boy for the lunch or if the boy just offered it to Jesus. Regardless, the little boy handed ownership of his lunch to Jesus.

God already owns all the wealth in the universe. You and I don't own anything. He has just allowed us to manage a part of His wealth for a short period of time. But God wants us to transfer ownership of ALL we have back into His hands.

That's something my family has always done. In every house we've occupied, we had a prayer of dedication acknowledging that God is the owner of our home, not us, not the mortgage company. God owns our home and we want Him to use it for His glory. Some of you have been kind enough to invite me into your new home and pray a prayer of dedication, giving it to God. It's the same with vehicles. Every new vehicle we've gotten, we've given it to God. And when I had two teenage girls driving, we had a lot of prayers because there were a lot of fender-benders. We had a reserved parking spot at Davis-Green Body Shop. But praise God, nobody was ever hurt.

Consider all your assets and your abilities. Have you come to a place where you say, "God this all belongs to you. I transfer ownership of my treasure, time, and talents." It's almost like declaring a form of spiritual bankruptcy. When the devil comes and says, "I'm going to take away everything you have." You can smile and say, "Go ahead, I don't own anything. God owns it all." Or when the devil says, "Follow me and I'll give you everything you want." You can smile and say, "No thanks, my Father is meeting all my needs according to His riches in glory."

Come on, give it up. The little boy didn't say, "Jesus, I'll give you one fish and two muffins; I need to keep some for myself." He gave it all. Will you say, "All to Jesus I surrender?"

STEP 2: Jesus transforms what you give Him and gives back more

Jesus took the minnows and muffins and turned it into an all-you-can-eat buffet. It fed 5,000 men and their families and the Bible says they were all filled, satisfied. If the little boy had kept his lunch to himself he would have only had two minnows and five muffins. That might not have filled up a growing boy. But because he gave it to Jesus, he got to eat all he wanted.

Here's what Jesus does when you surrender everything you have and are to Him. He takes what you give Him. He blesses what you give him. He multiplies what you give Him, and then He gives it back to you, but now it has His power in it.

There's a principle in the Bible that what you give to God, He gives back to you with His blessing on it. There's a beautiful story in John 12 about how Mary, the sister of Martha came to Jesus during a meal. She took a pint of very expensive perfume and poured it on the feet of Jesus. The cost of the perfume was an entire year of wages. Then Mary wiped His feet with her hair. Judas objected saying that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to feed the poor. But Jesus said Mary understood what none of them did—she was anointing his body for burial. She knew He was going to die in less than a week. Mary gave it all to Jesus, but what do you think Mary carried with her when she left Jesus? She carried with her on her hair and hands that beautiful fragrance—and it lingered for days. She gave it all, and she received a blessing in return.

Have you followed the example of this little boy? Have you transferred ownership of all you have and all you are to Jesus? You say, "I don't have much to give!" He can take minnows and muffins and feed a multitude. Little becomes much in the hands of Jesus.

III. GOD WILL CREATE A NEED IN YOUR LIFE TO DEMONSTRATE THAT HE CAN MEET IT

I used to have a professor in college who would often walk into the class and say, "Put away your books and take out a clean sheet of paper." We knew he was about to give us a pop quiz. If I had studied the assigned material, I was confident. But if I hadn't cracked the book, it was a pretty miserable experience.

There are many times Jesus will test your faith. That's what He was doing here. Jesus created a situation that was humanly impossible to solve. The feeding of the 5,000 was the lesson, and the test was the upcoming storm later that evening and as we saw, they failed the test. In the middle of the storm, they gave in to fear.

When it comes to impossible situations and challenges, I want to ask you to look in three directions with me.

A. Hindsight: Looking back and seeing that God sustained you

It is said hindsight is 20/20. I want you to think back to a time when you went through a terrible crisis or challenge in your life or family. While you were in it, you wondered if you would even survive. But here you are. God sustained you. God was faithful to bring you through.

In the Old Testament there's a parable, actually a riddle about problems. It comes from the life of Samson. Samson was the original superman, Hercules, and the Incredible Hulk; he was one strong dude. A vicious lion attacked him and he tore the lion apart with his hands. Later after the birds and animals of prey had stripped the carcass down to a skeleton, some bees built a hive in the lion's skeleton. Later Samson walked up and reached into the lion's skeleton and grabbed a handful of sweet honey.

Later he gave this riddle to his enemies, "Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet." (Judges 14:14) The lion that had threatened to eat Samson had actually ended up be the source of a meal for him. The strong lion gave him something sweet.

That's a parable about problems. As you pass through life you will be able to look back on the skeletons of your past problems. When you see those skeletal memories you are reminded that God sustained you. You find the sweetness of God's Word and His presence. That's hindsight.

B. Foresight: Looking forward to the perfection of heaven

It may be difficult for us to know what's going to happen tomorrow or next month; but for a Child of God our ultimate destination is secure. One day we're going to be with Jesus for all eternity. The thought of that always brings a smile to my face, even when I'm going through tough times. Paul wrote, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18)

James Black penned this hymn in 1893: "On that bright and cloudless morning when the dead in Christ shall rise, and the glory of His resurrection share; When His chosen ones shall gather to their home beyond the skies, and the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there!"

Hindsight is easy; foresight is glorious.

C. Insight: Looking through your current crisis to see Romans 8:28

It's when we're right in the middle of problem or crisis when we need God's insight—and you need it now! Vance Havner used to say, "When you're up to your neck in alligators, it's not the time to convene a symposium on how to drain the swamp!"

God has given us help and hope in the midst of our challenges. He wants us to walk by faith and believe that He will carry us through this crisis and we will get to the other side and be able to claim the truth of Romans 8:28, like those other problems in the past.

This is one of the most powerful promises of God: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28) God isn't working on some things—He is working in ALL things, the good, the bad, and the ugly, and the result will be good.

Kids, those big storage areas in your kitchen where your mom keeps the potato chips are actually ovens. Back in the ancient days, women used to bake cakes in those ovens. None of us would want to sit down and eat a cup full of sugar, or eat raw eggs, or force down a couple of cups of dry flour. And it would be hard to eat a whole stick of butter. But a good baker can mix all of those things up and pop it in the oven, and in a few minutes, the result is a delicious cake.

God is the ultimate Chef. He can take all the bad, distasteful, ugly, experiences of your life, and mix in a few good things. Then He mixes them up and pops them in the oven of His omnipotence and what pops out is something really sweet.

CONCLUSION

Years ago a famous violinist was scheduled to perform a concert using a priceless Stradivarius violin. The concert hall was packed and when he carefully removed the violin from the case, there were "oohs and ahs" from the audience as they saw the priceless instrument.

For the next fifteen minutes, the musician thrilled the audience. He made the violin sound as beautiful as a mother singing a lullaby to her children. He could make it sound like the laughter of a child and the weeping of a woman.

The people sat on the edge of their seats and drank in every heavenly note. As he finished the first section, the audience jumped to its feet and applauded. To their surprise and horror the violinist took the instrument by the neck and smashed it onto the stage.

The shocked audience was silenced. The musician walked off stage and returned carrying another case. He opened it, removed the violin and said, "This is the real Stradivarius. What I was playing before was a \$50 violin I bought at a pawnshop. I just wanted you to know that it is not the instrument; it is the artist who draws the bow across the strings that makes the music. He resumed the concert, but this time the audience ignored the instrument and focused on the ability of the musician.

That's like us: We are all like the cheap fiddle. We think we're just an insignificant meal of minnows and muffins. But in the hands of the Master, our lives can become something beautiful and lasting.

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes