

How Many Loaves Do You Have?
Sept 4, 2022
Matt 15:29-39

Introduction

[TITLE SLIDE 01] Good morning! Here we are already at Lesson #8, our final one in this Questions Jesus Asked series. I trust you have been encouraged, challenged and changed by our contemplation of Jesus and his teaching.

It was more than 25 years ago, but I still remember the way one preacher began his sermon with a very provocative question that went something like this:

- *How many of you believe that right now you have everything you need to do everything that God is calling you to do?*

He went on to talk about what he called the 'not enough' syndrome.

I wonder if you can relate to any of the following feelings:

- I feel like there is just not enough time to do what needs to be done
 - Not enough days in the week, or hours in a day
- I feel like I don't have enough energy or strength to do anything but the bare minimum
 - My health is poor just now. I just don't have enough physical stamina to think about reaching out to help others
- I don't have enough money. I can barely make it on what I have; there's no way I have enough to share with anyone else
- I don't have enough friends - I'm lonely and disconnected.
- I don't have enough of the right kind of skills to help in any valuable way
- Perhaps as a church we might feel right now - we don't have enough pastors! Why, we don't even have a lead pastor!

Let's take this one step further. What words would you use to describe the feelings associated with this 'not-enough syndrome'?

- Overwhelmed, discouraged, exhausted, worn down from trying so hard to keep up

Let me make 2 observations:

- Perhaps, we feel this way because we have taken on more than what God is actually calling us to do.
 - This can be true at any stage of life, but let me speak to my senior friends for a moment. I have the great privilege to visit many of the seniors on our church community. Many of them have served Jesus tirelessly in this church for many decades. But now, physical limitations associated with advancing years have severely restricted them from serving in the way they wish they could.
 - My dear friends - I want to encourage you by saying that I believe God still has ways for you to serve, but it must look different now.
 - For all of us, let us be careful to be listening attentively for God's voice as we make our choices about what we put our hands to in life and work.

- It's OK to work hard and be busy in a healthy way.
 - In no way do I want to suggest that God is calling us to an easy, comfortable life
 - No, we are called to deny ourselves and follow Jesus with our whole hearts, to engage fully in the life that he is calling us to. Often there are spiritual battles and struggles.
 - However, I believe God is calling us to experience fullness of life and not live under the heaviness of this 'not-enough syndrome'.

It is my hope and prayer that by observing today's question from Jesus in its context, that we may be lifted out of the 'not-enough syndrome' and our hearts might be encouraged to believe that God has provided everything that we need right now to do everything that He is calling us to do!

In our story today, Jesus asks his disciples this question:

[MAIN POINT SLIDE 02] How many loaves do you have?

In the flow of the story, what is the logical answer to the question?

There are 4,000 men, plus women and children who haven't eaten in 3 days.

The answer to this question ought to be: NOT ENOUGH!

7 loaves, plus a few small fish are NOT enough to feed this hungry crowd.

In fact, this minuscule amount of provision is not even a drop in a bucket compared with what is necessary to feed 10,000 people plus have 7 baskets full of leftovers. As such then, we could say this by observing the story:

Jesus + NOTHING is enough!

After all, did Jesus really need this meagre offering of 7 loaves and tiny fish?

NO! Of course not. And yet, he asks his friends, 'how many loaves do you have?'

What do we learn from this story?

[SUB-POINT SLIDE 03] Jesus invites us to bring our meagre resources and join Him in His mission in the world.

- I believe this is a story that is pointing to something much bigger than itself.
- Please just take in the beauty of Jesus as you contemplate this statement
- Jesus has all the resources of the universe in himself. He doesn't need you or me to help him to accomplish his mission in the world.
- Anything we might be able to offer Jesus by definition must be considered meagre compared with his infinite power and glory
- And yet he asks, 'how many loaves do you have'?
- To his disciples he said, 'bring those 7 loaves and small fish, and let's put on a banquet for 10,000 people!'
- He says, 'bring what you have and together let's do something big and beautiful'
- He invites each one of his children to bring their small gifts, skills, and resources and join with him in the most exciting mission in human history!

From this story I wish us to ask 2 questions:

[SUB-POINT SLIDE 04]

- **What is the mission of Jesus in the world?**
- **How can we join him in his mission?**

In pursuit of an answer to question one we turn to the early part of our reading. The writer of our story, Matthew, is being very deliberate in his language here, I believe. Listen carefully to the description of Jesus' ministry:

[SCRIPTURE SLIDE]

And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel. (Matt. 15:30-31)

Why did they 'glorify the God of Israel'? Because they recognized that this very work was the fulfillment of what was written about by many of the prophets in the Jewish Scriptures.

Jesus, in his own teaching ministry used the term 'the kingdom of God'. 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand'.

Just in case there was any doubt about Jesus coming to fulfill what the OT prophets spoke about, Jesus himself stood up in the synagogue at the beginning of his ministry and quoted from the prophet Isaiah - as I read this text, notice how similar the language is to what Matthew is describing here!

Luke 4:17-21

17 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Let me summarize the mission of Jesus in the world using 2 key words:

[SUB-POINT SLIDE 06] The mission of Jesus is the ministry of reconciliation and restoration.

- Why reconciliation? Because when sin and rebellion entered the world way back in Genesis 3, the relationship between humans and their good Creator God was broken. Jesus came to accomplish that reconciliation.
 - Col. 1:19-22
 - 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,*
 - 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

*21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,
22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present
you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,*

- Why restoration? When sin and rebellion entered into God's good creation, all relationships were affected - humans with God, humans with humans, humans with creation, with animals - everything was broken and death, disease, corruption and self-centred greed entered into the world where it never existed before.
 - Jesus mission is to restore everything that is broken!
 - Rev 21
 - 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*
 - 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."*

The description we read earlier of Jesus' healing all those who were sick is like small foretaste of the completion and fulfillment of the mission of Jesus.

You might be saying to yourself at this point, 'the mission of Jesus sounds all quite supernatural, how exactly are we to be invited to participate?'

[NO GRAPHIC - end previous slide]

Let's be clear about the timeline of the latter half of the story of the Bible:

- Jesus came into the world 2000 years ago and fully accomplished the work of reconciliation.
 - In dying on the cross, he took on himself and paid in full for the sin of the whole world
 - In rising from the dead he broke the power of death
 - Based completely on this completed work of Jesus, the Scriptures tell us with confidence that 'whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life'!
 - This is a finished work and it is the best news in the history of the world!
 - This reconciled relationship with God is offered to all mankind as a gift - 'the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord'
- But then, not so many weeks after his resurrection Jesus left the earth and ascended back to be at his Father's right hand.
 - Many times before he left, he promised that he would return and when he did he would fully complete the work of restoration in the language that we read a few minutes ago in Revelation 21.
- We, therefore, live in this period of time between the comings of Jesus.
 - What, specifically does the mission of Jesus look like now?
- Let me take you to what has become one of my favourite all time passages of Scripture

- In 2 Peter 3, Peter is answering a question that many people have today. Jesus promised to come back to earth to make everything new - why is he taking so long??

[SCRIPTURE SLIDE]

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3:8-9)

- Do you feel the heart of Jesus here? Do you sense his compassion for lost people, just as he has compassion for the hungry people in our story??
- The challenging question here is: do our hearts beat for the lost of our world with the compassion of Jesus? That none should perish, but all come to repentance?

We come now to our 2nd question. If this is the heart of the mission of Jesus in the world now...

[SUB-POINT SLIDE 08]

- **How can we join him in his mission?**

Let me suggest the following

- Receive the gift
- Capture the heart of the mission
- Bring our '7 loaves' to Jesus

[SUB-POINT SLIDE 09]

- **Receive the gift.**
 - I wish to speak to you if you're here this morning and still exploring Christian faith. Thank you for being with us. We love having you here. I encourage you to look closely at the gift that is being offered by Jesus - the gift of restored relationship with God. It's not a gift that can be earned or bought. The apostle Paul reminds us: *"it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God"* (Eph 2:8)
 - It really is the best gift in this history of the world and it's yours to receive. *'Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'*.

[SUB-POINT SLIDE 10]

- **Capture the heart of the mission.**
 - In our story in Matthew 15, as Jesus invites his 12 friends to join him in the mission of feeding the 10,000 or so people, he reveals his heart

- *"I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." (v.32)*
- Throughout Scripture God is consistently described as a compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in mercy
 - This is clearly seen in the 2 Peter passage - he longs that none should perish but all come to repentance...
- To be effective mission workers alongside Jesus, I believe we must capture his heart - we must become like Him in this.
- Listen to how Paul describes this in one of his letters

[SCRIPTURE SLIDE 11]

But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. (2 Cor. 2:14-15)

So, to join in the mission of Jesus, we

- Receive the gift
- Capture the heart of the mission
- Then...

[SUB-POINT SLIDE 12]

- **Bring our '7 loaves' to Jesus.**
 - There are many words in the NT to describe how we are to join with Jesus
 - Witnesses, ambassadors, disciple makers
 - But from our story today, I wish to focus on the truth that Jesus invites us to bring what resources we have, no matter how meagre, and join with Him in his mission to let more and more people know about this amazing gift of reconciliation that is available to them!
 - The NT writers use picture language to describe this. They talk about how we, collectively are the Body of Christ. Jesus is the Head, and we all are various members of his body.
 - Each of us are unique. We have a particular set of gifts, skill and abilities.
 - The point here is to bring ALL that we are and offer it to Jesus for his mission
 - It may seem small and insignificant, but he can take it and turn it into something big and beautiful in his mission.

[SCRIPTURE SLIDE 13]

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:6-8)

So, we come back to our question from Jesus in this context:

[MAIN POINT SLIDE 14] How many loaves do you have?

- Will you offer what you have to Jesus so that he may use your gifts and skills and abilities in His mission to reach the whole world with the Good News that reconciliation with God is possible - it is a good gift to be received!

[NO GRAPHIC]

Conclusion and Application

- Next week we will have our Ministry Fair. In fact, during all 3 remaining Sundays in September, our desire is to make you aware of ways that you might be able to plug in and minister alongside others in the body of Christ that is at Central.
 - Please prayerfully consider how you might get connected and serve alongside of us in this exciting mission of Jesus

Introduction to Communion

I will invite the music team to join me now.

This morning, as is our custom on the first Sunday of each month, we have the immense privilege to remember Jesus in the way that He commanded us.

If you didn't get a communion cup & you would like to participate, please raise your hand.

We sometimes call it 'The Lord's Supper', reminding ourselves of the Passover Meal that Jesus had with his friends just before he went to the cross. It was at this meal, where Jesus took these very common elements in every meal and breathed new significance into them with these words...

Matthew 26

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

Matthew 26

27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."

28 This is my blood of the covenant [or Luke 22 - This cup is the new covenant in my blood], which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

