

Beginning of the End

by Alan Redpath

The sermon emphasizes the importance of yielding to God and letting him work through us to meet the needs of the crowd and to fulfill our mission in life.

Duration: 48:31

Scripture: Exodus 20:8-11, Matthew 11:28-30, Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:7-13, Mark 6:30-31, Luke 10:38-42

Topics: "Miracle"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the Feeding of the Five Thousand, where Jesus teaches his disciples a valuable lesson. The preacher emphasizes the importance of giving everything to Jesus and allowing him to take control in order to reach others effectively. He highlights the tendency to rely on our own efforts and strategies to meet the needs of the crowd, but suggests that our behavior and actions should be the main attraction for people to witness. The preacher also emphasizes the need for rest and avoiding overworking in the Christian life, as it can lead to burnout and a loss of power.

Transcript

Would you open your Bibles this afternoon at the sixth chapter of Mark's Gospel, at this familiar parable, miracle rather, of the feeding of the five thousand, the only one, the only miracle of our Lord which is recorded in all four Gospels. Let me say that, let me make a confession before I begin. This is the first time I have ever spoken at a baccalaureate service.

In fact, I wasn't so sure until yesterday what the word meant. But with the help of Mr. and Mrs. Martin and the Webster Dictionary, we found out that it means an occasion when a farewell address is given to a graduating class. That sort of ringed, rung a bell in my heart, and reminded me somewhat of our great war leader Winston Churchill, who I think it is in his memoirs of Second World War, the volume entitled Britain's Finest Hour, records during the Battle of Britain when we had been pushed out of France and lost all our equipment and had endured months of bombing.

And the tide however was beginning to turn, and Winston Churchill in a remarkable speech said in the course of it, that I cannot promise you that this is the beginning of the end. But I do promise you it's the end of the beginning. And I look upon a baccalaureate service, I hope correctly, as the end of the beginning.

And if we define the word end as being a goal or objective, I would regard the graduation service next week as the beginning of the end. And here we are now at the end of the beginning. And we are indeed introduced to a passage of scripture here, which is both the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end.

So here is the introduction to the task in which all of us are engaged, the task of World Evangelism. If you glance back in this chapter of Mark's Gospel, to the seventeenth verse, the seventh verse rather of the chapter, you would find here is the feeding of the five thousand seen in its setting. He called unto him the twelve and began to send them forth.

First they had been trained to be disciples. They had watched him display his power over disease, his power over death, and his power over the devil. And they had been with him to watch him.

Now he sent them out, sent them forth two by two. They were first with him as disciples, they were now to go forth for him as apostles. Disciples and apostles, in with him for order, out with him in obedience, in with him for worship, out for him in witness, in with him in surrender, out for him in service.

And the Christian life, all the way through to the very end, is an in-and-out life. Not an up-and-down life, but an in-and-out life. And now they are sent out two by two and given power over an unseen spirit, power over the devil.

Just the same power that Jesus had, he was going to give to them. They were sent forth two by two. There was to be no isolation, no congestion.

I haven't time to comment on this. I would like to preach a whole sermon on that. Everybody today wants his own independence.

Everybody has his own independent work. Like Vance Havner, that dear saint from North Carolina, once said of Miramaric to Kerik, in his droll accent, which I couldn't possibly rightly imitate, he said, you know, he said, the trouble is, when the tide is out, every little shrimp has its own puddle. That's saying something very profound in a very dramatic way.

Everybody demands their own independence. No, says Jesus, in effect, you are to go out two by two. And there to be no congestion, two by two.

Today, ninety-one percent of Christian work is done among nine percent of the world's population. And having sent them forth, they were to go out with equipment that wasn't to be extravagant, but was to be adequate. I would challenge the reason for the vast sums of money which are spent on the North American continent on building huge, wonderful, beautiful, traditional church buildings at the expense, very often, of missionary enterprise.

The equipment of the early church was never extravagant, but was to be adequate. He sent them out with a message. They were to travel, but not just to gossip, hang around.

And they were to go with a passion, but not a profession. They were to preach the word of repentance. And verse thirteen tells us that they did exactly what they were told to do.

Then the theme is taken up at the thirtieth verse of this chapter, on their return from their first fear, their first term of service without the Lord. And they gathered themselves together to Him, and told Him all

things, both what they had done and what they had taught. To tell Jesus, all you've done and all you've taught, is not to tell Him anything that He doesn't know already.

But it certainly is to get things in the right perspective, and to review every day's ministry with Him, is likely to be the best means of repeating the mistakes of that day. And I can imagine Him sitting, listening patiently to them, all perhaps talking at once, thrilled with their exciting term of service on the mission field, thrilled with the blessing that they've seen, tripping over each other trying to tell the exciting story. And then Jesus said to them, come you yourselves apart into a desert place and rest a while.

He said come, that means He was going to go with them. He said you yourselves apart, alone, privately, somewhere where we can be alone and not interrupted, to rest after the toil and strain and emotion of this missionary tour, a while, not forever, but for a while. Now there are times when this is a sacred duty and obligation to all of us in Christian work, and to fail in it is to sin.

If Jesus needed rest, everyone of His followers do. To neglect the body doesn't promote the health of the soul. A clock runs down by ticking.

Strength is used up by working. The Christian has got no business to overwork. The Lord's work suffers when He does that.

It's a wonderful thing to burn out for Jesus. It's better still to last out. A train will go on for an awful long time on its own momentum when the power is shut off.

And if you're overworking in Christian life, that's exactly what's happening. The power is gone, but you're keeping on the momentum. But then look what's happened.

In verse 33, this time of much needed rest was suddenly interrupted. The desert place was invaded by a crowd, an inconsiderate crowd, who came to listen to Christ. You notice His reaction.

He was moved with compassion. Now you notice the attitude of the disciples. In verse 35, they formed a committee, and they passed a resolution, which they carried unanimously, and it was, send them away.

Quite clearly, they knew that they were facing an impossibility. They simply couldn't meet it themselves. This crowd bewildered them.

So by unanimous agreement, they moved that they be sent away home. But the Lord Jesus proposed an amendment, and it was carried, not by a show of hands, but by a demonstration of power. It makes all the difference whether, in every opportunity, you see a difficulty, and give up.

Or whether, in every difficulty, you see an opportunity, and press on. And these disciples have already achieved quite a degree of success. But this crowd seemed too much for them.

I somehow feel they'd never seen a crowd like Jesus did. He was moved with compassion. There's a medical word that's used here, which almost means an inward pain.

As a sore crowd are sheep without a shepherd. He was moved with compassion. Now these disciples hadn't learned to love.

They were delighted with their success, with their experience, with the thrill of it. But now they faced this multitude, and they're overwhelmed. Then Jesus said to them, give ye then to eat.

Now such a procedure had never occurred to any of them. And their only answer was to reckon up what it would take to feed such a crowd, and to undertake to go and buy some food. To go to somebody other than Christ, and outside themselves.

It was quite beyond them. Now here we're brought face to face with something that is tremendously relevant today. How are we to meet the need of the crowd? I heard of a minister in the Church of England, in the midlands of our country, who at midday, every day, went down from his parsonage to the bottom of the garden, across the railway bridge, and stood at the top of the bridge.

And he saw a train coming, every day at midday. And when it came, he threw his hat in the air, and shouted hallelujah. After he'd been doing this about three or four weeks, his parishioners thought he was a little bit off, so they summoned the bishop, who came to see this extraordinary exhibition.

And when the bishop arrived, he stood and watched. Yes, sure enough, at twelve o'clock every day, that day, this minister went down the path, crossed the railway bridge, waited for the train, and when it came, he threw his hat in the air, and said hallelujah. So the bishop said to him, Sir, you can't work in this diocese and behave like that.

I can't have a madman here. Why do you do this? Well, my lord, he said, it's the only thing that goes through my parish without me having to push it. How can we match the need of the crowd? Our reaction is, push! Program! Streamline! Work! Get something, think up a bigger idea! Get plenty of people with plenty of money to back it, and then put the whole lot together, mix it up, sprinkle it with a little bit of prayer, and wait for the explosion.

Push! Push! Push! Always doing something. What can we do? How can we reach the crowd? We have no business to expect the crowd ever to come inside our church to listen to what we believe. We've every reason, however, to expect the crowd to watch how we behave.

And they'll never see how we behave unless we go out and mingle with them. And if you have a belief which hasn't radically transformed your behavior, it isn't valid in terms of New Testament experience. Douglas Webster, in his book, *The Unchanging Mission*, has a chapter which he calls *The Outward Thrust*.

The church, he says, is always called to be an out-church. The shepherd goes out to find the sheep. The fisherman goes out into the deep to let down his net.

The farmer goes out to field, the field to plant and reap. Paul Rees, Dr. Paul Rees, in January issue of *World Vision*, comments on that statement by saying this, Is that the image of today's church that you will find in the minds of most people in North America? Hardly. We have become an in-church.

Come in and sit in our pew. Come in and listen to our sermons. Come in and sing in our choir.

Come in and sit in our committees. Help us to decide what shade of pink to use in our children's nursery. While the ghettos smoulder with solemnness, and the rats have their tenement, have their carnival in the tenement, and the white establishment lashes back in the fury of its rationalized racism, and the little black children grow up wondering why their jobless father never seems to do so much as mother does to keep the family from completely going to pieces.

Ours should never be an in-church. It should always be an out-church. And that means that everybody who leaves this institute has to be prepared to get involved with people where they are.

Now if you want to do that, you have to have a long enough bridge to reach them where they are. And you have to have a strong enough bridge to carry the message of full salvation. Otherwise the whole thing will collapse.

Non-involvement is never of necessity, a sign of sanctity, a mark of bravery, or a proof of fidelity. And somehow non-involvement is an echo of the voice of the priest and the Levite on the road to Jericho, who on arrival home said, thank heaven I didn't get involved. And we've got to get involved with people right where they are.

How are we going to do it? Well, some of us might buy some radio time. We might organize a committee, or some procedure. Jesus says, give ye them to eat.

This is where his way of reaching a crowd. It was his way then, it's his way now. But Lord, I haven't got anything.

I can't reach the crowd that way. And we buy off our responsibility. Anything else is easier than turning from the crowd and listening to Jesus saying, I want you to come into the realm of miracles.

Because my method is always miracles. And I want to show you how to reach the crowd, how to move into the area of miracles, the area in which the Holy Spirit himself works. And so we watch Jesus teaching this band of disciples a tremendous lesson.

I don't know how many people were there. This parable is called the feeding of the 5,000. Well, there were 5,000 men besides women and children.

I would estimate it at 10,000. And he sat them down in ranks and proceeded to give them a lesson on his way to reach people. And you notice how he began.

He set to work by using what they had. Five loaves and two fishes. First of all he took them.

Now that is of first and supreme importance. He worked with what we have. But it must be all we have.

Have we attempted to evade that basic principle of Christian life and never really given to Jesus all? Perhaps we've never realized that to reach the crowd for him we must first of all let him take over all of us. He's absolutely omnipotent. But he only reaches men through men.

So does the devil. He only reaches men through men. And Jesus only reaches men through men.

I read recently in the magazine Christianity Today the following statistics. This country of course is very fond of statistics. Some of them I would question as to how they get the information.

But nevertheless these made me feel very uncomfortable. In the average church role in America evangelical church role of the total paper membership 5% don't exist. 10% can't be found.

25% never go to church. 50% have no missionary interest. 75% never attend a church prayer meeting.

90% have no family altar. No family worship. 95% never lead anybody to Christ.

Now if those figures are near the truth they trace, track right down to the very root the breakdown of our Christian lives. We are not propagating. God has no grandchildren.

He's only got children. And every generation is only one generation removed from total elimination. Every generation starts afresh.

Somehow we've got to recover the secret of propagation. And God has no hands but our hands. He has no feet but our feet.

No heart but our heart to love with. No mind but our mind to plan through. No eyes but our eyes to see through.

I'm not suggesting that God has put himself in an embarrassing position by loving us so much to die for us and finding himself without power to do what his love wants to do. He needs nobody. But he uses anybody who's prepared to give him everything.

Let me repeat that. God needs none of us. But he deigns to use any of us who are prepared to meet him on his own terms and give him all we've got.

He works with what we have. He took the load. He doesn't expect more than that but he does expect that.

The mathematics of our spiritual breakdown time and time again are our 99% Christianity. And as you leave PBI and as we go on in Christian life and Christian service I tell you my dear friends this is an issue which Satan never, never leaves alone. He'll come back at us.

He'll attack us on it. He'll strive to break down our yieldedness. He knows perfectly well how to cut the Holy Spirit out of business to make him non-operative, non-effective in the Christian life.

Even years after Christian service has begun years maybe on the mission team he can come back at you with an overwhelming counter-attack and put you on the shelf. This is an issue that is not settled once and for all. Jesus claims all we have and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Ever increasing sovereignty over ever increasing areas of my life but the man whom God uses is the man who's given God everything. Who's signed off. Who knows that without dispute without argument, without debate without any committees in his soul he belongs to Jesus.

He's his all together utterly. And there's been a moment in his life when he has vacated the throne in his heart which he has occupied ever since he was born. And even his new birth didn't affect it too much.

He remained on top. And there's come a moment when he's stepped off that throne and he's knelt at the foot of it and he's put Jesus on it and he's said Lord I'm yours always without dispute. He takes and he takes everything.

Then you notice he blessed them. And oh my how he blesses what he takes. He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

Just to think of how much we've missed of the endowment of his power. Because we've never got into the simple strategic plan of Holy Spirit blessing in our lives. When we give all he comes back with all of himself.

When we yield our all he begins to wield in us everything that he is. He blesses what he takes. And so often at that very simple basic point of breakdown we've never proved the sufficiency of the grace of God in every situation.

Simply because we've never accepted the government of God in our lives. I spoke at Canadian Keswick last year. You know that hundreds of miles north of Toronto.

And my colleague on the platform was Dr. Roland Phillips of Baltimore. And I remember him on this occasion telling a story and saying you know the best car in the world is a Rolls Royce. Well that may be open to question but it's certainly the most expensive \$35,000 or so.

And he said not so long ago an official of the South African government ordered a magnificent Rolls Royce Silver Shadow. And after it's arrival in Johannesburg he had it for some months and he was so thrilled with this car. With it's speed, with it's acceleration, with it's silence.

With it's strange sense of smoothness. That he went to his agent and said tell me what exactly is the horsepower of this car? And the agent said sorry I don't know. He said you don't know? No he said Rolls Royce never tell us.

They always refuse to tell us. Well he said find out. Well he was a very important government official so the agent thought he'd better find out.

I'll try. So he sent a telegram to London giving all the details of this magnificent car. It's acceleration, it's rate, it's speed, it's brake horsepower.

It's tuned capacity of the cylinder. And after a lot more detail he finished the wire and said tell me what exactly is the horsepower of this motor? The following day he received a reply by cable. And it only had one word on it.

Adequate. My friend, do you find Jesus adequate? As you go out to face the missionary situation and the world and the crowd I tell you you'll crash unless you have an adequate saviour. And he's always adequate in the life of the man who's given him everything.

His adequacy has replaced my inadequacy and your inadequacy. And Jesus himself is always sufficient. He's guaranteed to be that.

And therefore you'll never be involved in any situation in the will of God for which Jesus himself is not adequate. He took and then he blessed and how he blesses what he takes. But will you notice the next word? He broke the load.

And all of what Jesus takes he breaks. Uncrushed grain is never bread. It's got to be crushed fine.

Unbroken men can never be bread in his hand to feed a crowd. So this is the thing which he does to his people. Simply because he did it to himself.

You remember the last supper? He took bread and broke it and gave to his disciples and said take eat this is my body which is broken for you. As the living father hath sent me and I live by the father so he that eateth me shall live by me. And so in blessing us he then breaks us.

What would you say is the one thing that distinguishes a Christian from anybody else? Not his zeal. Not his charity. Not even his sincerity or his wisdom.

Other people may have all of these things. But there's one thing that marks out the genuine Christian from everybody. It's this a complete absence of self-confidence.

He's come to the end of his rope. He's moved up the level of trusting himself and he's exchanged it for a trust a confidence in a mighty God. And that God has broken him in order that he may lean entirely upon the Lord Jesus.

I believe that God has one purpose for everybody at this meeting today. And I believe that that purpose is to make us like himself. Like Jesus.

Everything is subsidiary to that. And do you know how he does it? Usually he does it by enlargement through pressure. Do you know what I mean by that? You put three men in a burning fiery furnace that pressure most of us would want to get out quick.

But in that furnace they meet one like unto the Son of God. That's enlargement. And my dear friend this, the beginning of the end the beginning of Christ's goal with your life I would say to you that you're just partying as I am I'm only in the kindergarten myself of learning that God wants me to make me like Jesus and he'll put me through anything allow me to go through any experience no matter how devastating if only it can accomplish that.

He'll break you that he might make you. And an unbroken man can never be a witness to the crowd. Tell me as you leave school I think I know enough about college life school life I wonder how many of you would stand up if I asked you do you resent the disciplines of Praetor Bible Institute?

Call them square don't like all the rules it's a lot of nonsense you said it's been hard to live with now you just get out you're making phew glad to be free from these annoying restrictions all these awful rules hmm you're quite sure your rebellion is not against the rules but against the Lord quite sure personally if I may say so I thank God for a an institute that is found these days with standards that are maintained there aren't many but I'm glad that PBI is one that doesn't mean I'm a square or I'm not with it but I'll tell you what it does mean if you don't learn discipline at school you will be a missionary casualty in six months I was in a situation fifteen months ago in the country of Thailand at a missionary conference where a brave little band of missionaries were living in a

country which for hundreds of years had been under the domination of Buddhism no country ruled by the devil for centuries is going to give in quickly to the gospel and these folk have been metaphorically speaking banging their heads against a brick wall for seventeen years and more and it's been really tough with little, little fruit and in that situation oh how easy it is to crack to give in, to give up to return home and I want to say to you publicly today that two of the people there who were the most loyal devoted Christ-like man and woman that I had met for a long time both of them were graduates of Crater Babel Institute and I believe they were standing their ground against this tremendous pressure of the devil in Thailand because they learned to accept discipline before they

started out God had broken them and if there's anybody going out from this school without being really broken the Lord bless you and the Lord break you now from every bit of self-confidence in order that he may give you utter Christ comfort My Saviour is never in the self-improvement business but he's in the

Christ-replacement business and if only I would get out of the way and make room for him he'll come in and flood my life but I must be a broken man that doesn't mean a negative personality it doesn't mean a crushed personality it doesn't mean somebody who's weak and a sissy, but it does mean somebody who's meek and there's all the difference between meekness and weakness you try being meek for a week and then you'll find that out hmm all the difference in the world oh, it isn't being

soft listen you are never to be a stumbling block in the way to other people finding Christ you are to be a stepping stone and stepping stones have to be walked on and we are to be a stepping stone of the bridge that leads to this generation that's tired of traditional Christianity and if you are going to be a stepping stone you've got to be prepared to be walked on and that's how God will break you probably send you to the mission field and find yourself there with somebody you can't stand the sight of somebody who's absolutely opposite and temperamental to you you know I was once speaking at a service at one of the training colleges in London and a girl who was graduating gave a testimony she'd been at the college for three years and for the past two years she'd been she'd had as a

roommate somebody who hated the window open she loved the window open she couldn't stand stuffiness her roommate couldn't stand fresh air and the two of them between them that built up such a kind of tension over the whole situation that they nearly got out of school altogether and couldn't stand it they wrestled with this privately without telling each other then one day one of them had the good sense to go to the principal and weep her heart out about it fancy that just over a closing window but then when they took it to the Lord the matter was settled I think the answer was open the window part time the rest of the time it being shut it's just lonely to live with somebody you don't like but they have to be broken and that means walking in the light and living in the light and day by

day being honest and open with one another and above all with the Lord Jesus he takes and uh he blesses what he takes and then he breaks oh my as I think of all of you going out I don't know what that may mean for you but I just pray that you will come to the place where you have no confidence in anyone or anything but Jesus and you will never glory in the flesh or in yourself but in the Lord and you'll be broken now enough for Christ to use you a man called me in Chicago during my pastor at Moody church he was the chairman of a church board long distance call and he said to me we have a pastoral vacancy in our church do you know anybody who might fill it and I thought for a moment and I gave him the names of one or two men and described their characteristics and their accomplishments a

bit and he asked me questions about them and I went on the conversation lasted about half an hour I didn't mind it was his call at the end of that half hour I shall never forget a sort of shiver went right down my spine when he said to me thanks very much very kind of you to tell me about these men but I'm afraid none of them are big enough for our pulpit I hope he didn't think I was rude but I couldn't resist saying to him sir are you quite sure that you don't mean they're not small enough see God reduces a man to a minimum in order that through him he might do the maximum that's a divine principle that God never makes any exception to some of us God forgive us have got too big for him to use too self important too proud and God has to break us all over again but next and final word you

notice he took them everything he blessed them all blessed them all tremendously and then he broke them and then he gave them he gave them he gave them to the disciples to sit before them and did it all eat and were filled every need was met every appetite was satisfied and every disciple had a basket over to remind him of that day my friend every taken Christian must be broken and if he's broken then he's given out of the hand of God to the people and the generation in which he lives oh what a wonderful thing

to be given from Jesus hand when did this miracle of feeding the 5000 take place was it when Christ had the loaves in his hand to feed them oh no how could those loaves possibly how could it possibly be that they had been multiplied and he held them in his hand he couldn't do that

was it when the disciples held them in their hands all these loaves that had come no it was when every disciple broke what he'd got and then gave everything he had to everybody around him and then the miracle happened and God always deals with men and women in exactly the same way unbroken Christians are ungiven Christians but to be broken by the Lord Jesus really to be in the place of brokenness is to be in the place where God gives you and to attempt to reach the crowd today and to win men for Christ and any other maces is absolutely fatal I want to ask you are you living in the light of that responsibility and in the power of it are you give ye them to eat none of us can escape that we can't send them away listen to those words again he took them he blessed them he broke them he gave

them has he taken you all of you then surely he's blessing you and in the process of blessing you he's breaking you and he's giving you he's giving you out of his hand and what a wonderful thing to be given to the crowd out of the hand of Jesus the task is absolutely impossible except on the basis of a miracle like this I wonder if I when I close my message if I may just bear testimony because this visit to PBI again has brought back some precious memories to me it was about 1957 I think or just before after I had been about 3 or 4 years as pastor at Moody Church in Chicago and I the honeymoon was over it hadn't lasted very long actually but it was over and I was having a pretty tough time with various members of my church board and I remember after one board meeting terrible thing to

have to acknowledge before you all I remember after one board meeting which had been a terrible time nothing had gone right which of course simply means I hadn't got my own way in anything I remember after that board meeting do you know I got into my car and I drove it non stop to Milwaukee and back before I dare go home and speak to my wife and control my emotions and I was a defeated man and I was saying to the Lord Lord why did you send me 4000 miles across the ocean to deal with difficult people like this I want to get on with the job what can I do I can only resign and I had the letter if not on paper certainly ready in my mind and it was a hot one believe me we had about a week later our Mid-America Keswick convention and one of our speakers that year was Dr.

Maxwell I hadn't met him until then and he was addressing a ministers meeting there would be about 200 ministers there and I was chairman and I introduced Dr. Maxwell to speak to these ministers he didn't know me I didn't know him and he began to speak and in the course of his message he said some of you men get into pastorate and into missionary work and then you find yourself facing tough situations difficult people and you threaten in your own mind to resign by this time I was wishing to be out of the chair and in the back row but I knew that Dr.

Maxwell hadn't been speaking to me but God had got me in a corner and if God was interested in the other 199 it seemed to me that he was supremely concerned at that moment with me and Dr. Maxwell went on to say I wonder when you will realize that all these situations and difficult people and things that make you get resentful and things that make you want to resign are the nails that Jesus is using to drive you to the cross and I admit that it was through tears which he didn't see because he was speaking but I said thank you Lord I never saw it like that oh that lesson had to be learned constantly but it's a tremendous moment when you look up into his dear face and say to him oh spirit of the living God fall afresh on me break me melt me mold me, fill me spirit of the living God fall afresh on me will you say that to Jesus right now, let us pray

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