

Serving Others With God's Supply

by Todd Atkinson

This sermon focuses on the story in John's gospel where a little boy demonstrates childlike faith by offering what he has to Jesus without worry or fear. It emphasizes the contrast between the disciples' self-reliance and the little boy's trust in God's provision. Jesus blesses the boy's gift, looks up to heaven, and breaks the loaves, symbolizing the significance of his own impending sacrifice. The broken bread represents Jesus' body given for the life of the world, highlighting the profound impact of his self-offering and surrender to God's will.

Scripture: John 6:9, John 6:11, John 6:27, John 6:35, John 6:51, Romans 6:5, Isaiah 53:5, 1 Corinthians 10:16, Ephesians 5:2, Philippians 4:19

Topics: "Childlike Faith", "Self-Sacrifice of Jesus"

Description

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Transcript

The desire to check out. Every one of us face that temptation. But on the other hand, there's another character in the story in John's version of the gospel, which is a little boy who represents childlike faith.

He's not overwhelmed, he thinks this is a ball. Because he doesn't represent a life of fear, he represents a life of trust. And he comes to Jesus and simply offers him what he has.

The little boy doesn't worry. He's not thinking of how much, how it's so little, we're gonna feed so many. He doesn't even think it's any of his business.

Jesus asks, does anybody have any food here? He says, I've got a wee bit. And he just offers what he has. See the contrast? You don't have to be like the disciples in the story, you can be like the little boy.

And Jesus received his gift gladly. Second thing, Jesus looked up to heaven, he said a blessing. I love that picture, he looked up to heaven.

He's not looking up to heaven because he thinks heaven is up. I'll explain to you in a minute the significance of that phrase. When Jesus asked the disciples to feed the crowds, you feed them, you find some food.

Do you notice that not one of them thought about praying? Why were they overwhelmed? Because they thought that they were limited to their own resources. They've got to figure this out. They've got to come up with a solution.

But not one of them thought, hey, we're kind of godly people. We're kind of meant to be even the representatives of the kingdom of God on earth. We should probably ask God about this.

Maybe he's God's solution. Not one of them thought to pray. They looked inward and they did not find the resources they needed.

But Jesus showed them how to look upward. To look to God, knowing that heaven had more than enough to meet this need. Heaven wasn't in any short supply.

That's why the whole nature of the miracle, you start with a little, you end with 12 basketfuls. Because if you come to God and you give him your little, it will always be enough when heaven adds its blessing. Always enough.

Even the smallest gift, when it is put into God's hand, is beautiful and it is sufficient. If we could grasp this truth, we would stop saying I don't have enough and we would start saying I don't pray enough. Jesus taught them to pray in this moment, to turn to heaven in your time of need.

And heaven did not disappoint. Jesus looked to heaven in his time of need. Where do you look in your time of need? Maybe we're all a little like disciples.

We've got to figure this out. We just start feeling overwhelmed. Overwhelmed with life.

Between school and finances and kids and friends and community and we feel like there's too many needs and there's not enough of me to go around. The truth is there isn't. As long as you think that you have enough resources to meet these needs, you will always be stretched thin.

And feeling the unhappiness of that. But for Christian people, it's an invitation. Remember, the disciples said send them away.

Jesus said feed them. He saw an opportunity here. Thirdly, Jesus broke the loaves.

When we read these words, it becomes clear that there's a lot more going on in this story than bread. In John's gospel, Jesus said I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.

And the bread that I give for the life of the world is my flesh. John's gospel, the miracle of the loaves and the fishes, but right following that is a great discourse or sermon by Jesus called the bread of life. Where he explains the miracle.

That it's all about him. And the reason that in the other gospels, the bread had to be broken is because it represented the imminent breaking of his body, his flesh. When Jesus was born of Mary, a human life was given to him.

He had known from eternity a heavenly life, but now the gift of a human existence is given to him. The word give. I've often wondered about the Magi.

See the star in the east, the birth of a king. And when they arrived, that king is only this big. How's anything that big supposed to save the whole world? How's anything that big supposed to be the great cosmic king of the universe? You could be excused if you looked upon that infant in a manger.

No bigger than a few loaves of bread in the story. And if you thought, how could such a small baby act as savior of the whole world? How could such a small gift remove so much sin and pain? Billions of people. This is what the disciples thought.

How can a couple of loaves and fish feed thousands upon thousands? It can't go that far. Well, the answer to that question is because that small life was blessed. That small life had God standing squarely behind it.

That small life had God's sanction. That small life had God's approval. That small life had the strength and saving might of God behind it.

That life was both God and belonged to God. Like the wee loaves of bread were given to Jesus and he offered them to God in prayer. So this small life was God and was wholly offered to God, given to God, made his own.

He was offered to God again and again and again. He was presented to God as a baby. He was set apart to God again at his baptism.

But the ultimate offering of himself to God was not seen in his life, it was seen in his death where his body, like bread, was broken. When Jesus broke the bread at the Last Supper, he said, this is my body broken for you. When we use the word broken in this sense, we mean more than just become two pieces.

We mean it is subdued, overcome, given over to. It means that Jesus utterly subjected himself to his tormentors because it was God's will. It means that he did not fight them because he knew that his death was for the life of the world.

It means that he allowed them to do their worst. They broke him. Isaiah 53, that famous Old Testament prophet with that famous chapter predicting the coming of the Savior one day, says he was despised and rejected by men.

A man of sorrows, plural, and acquainted with grief. He was pierced for our transgressions and he was crushed for our iniquities. Sometimes we speak of a soldier returning from war as a broken man, a broken woman.

It means that they have endured so much more than physical pain, that something inside of them is crushed, fragmented. They have seen such horrors that they can't resume normal life again. Not only did Jesus anticipate that, but he welcomed it, and even thanked God in advance for it.

In John's record of this story, when it says that Jesus gave thanks, the Greek word here is eucharistio, from which we get the word eucharist. He gave thanks knowing that the breaking of the bread prefigured his own death, and still gave thanks for it. I have a hard time even thanking God for something after the fact, let alone thanking him before the fact, because his destiny was to be broken, that we might be made whole.

His destiny was to be crushed, that we might be put back together again. His destiny was to be pained, that we might be healed, to take our sin upon himself, that we might be forgiven. He looked upon that with joy, knowing that you would be the recipient.

There's only two things that could make pain like that worthwhile. Number one, remember he'd offered himself to God, that he belonged to God, even unto the point of death, even death on a cross. He was surrendered to God.

And the only other thing that could have ever made that worthwhile was knowing what that would make possible for you. Hence, he took bread, he took the human life that would be given to him. That human life was offered to God, blessed by God, belonged to him, so that it could be broken and crushed on a cross with the end that it might be given.

As long as those five small loaves remained intact, they'd never feed anybody. But it was when they were broken, multiplied, they could feed the multitudes. And it's through Christ's brokenness that he is able to give himself to you and to me.

So Lent is a time when we do a few things. We contemplate the suffering of Christ. It's utter significance.

We take time to reflect upon it. Yes, in only a matter of weeks, we'll contemplate something else, which is an open tomb. But there is a divine order there.

Crucifixion always precedes resurrection. Book of Romans, Saint Paul says that if we're crucified with him, we'll be raised with him. So if you ever find yourself thinking, why are you talking about the cross? Why aren't we talking about the resurrection? The cross is the way to the resurrection.

It's very clear in scripture. Undisputable. I think I tried to get to the open tomb for many years, but to find my own way there, that had little to do with the cross.

And I never arrived there. So at this time, we contemplate the suffering of our Lord. But this is also a time when we seek to draw near to him in his suffering.

Even to become like him, as we think about the way that his life was given. Blessed. Broken.

And given out. As you hear those words in the gospel, we find that the Holy Spirit is at work within every believer. The Holy Spirit is at work within you right now.

And he's leading you gently, if you'll follow him. Where is he leading you? The same direction. At your baptism, we promised we would be one with Christ in his death and in his resurrection.

So the Holy Spirit is always helping you. He's our helper. He's helping you to fulfill that baptismal covenant.

Every single day. He's there, just gently. I mean, you could even tune him out if you want.

I wouldn't recommend it. But if you tune in to him, you'll find that he is right there at work within you, leading you in the same direction. To, number one, appreciate the gift of life you've been given.

It's a gift. Number two, to offer that life back to God in love. Even though we don't feel like we're enough, when our lives are offered to God, they are received by him.

They become more than enough. They become blessed. They belong to God.

They become inseparable from God. Which is why when the bread is blessed, it suddenly has qualities it never had before. It can do things that bread has never done.

When our lives become one with God and are blessed by him, suddenly things begin to happen in us that have never happened before. Things that are completely beyond our ability. The disciples felt overwhelmed and their response was self-preservation.

The little boy felt not overwhelmed. He felt invited and his response was self-offering to give what he had. And so also the pressures of the pandemic has caused all of us to make some choices.

Either to offer ourselves freely to God or to self-preservation. Sometimes we have to make choices. There's a mixture of the two.

Either we have chosen to live out of his resources and not our own, or we choose to withdraw from him, which ends up becoming a withdrawal from fellowship and a withdrawal from church, a withdrawal from mission, or a withdrawal from his joy, or a withdrawal from his resources. And we just feel stuck in our own little pool of insufficient resources. And then wonder why life seems unbearable.

Thank God for the gift you've been given and offer it back to them. Holy, without reservations. Be the little boy in the story who didn't even think, well, what am I gonna eat tonight? Everybody got to eat their fill.

Offer yourself to him. You were created to belong to God. That is where you will be most happy.

Not in self-preservation, but in self-offering. And when we do that, we find that our broken places become gifts to him. We don't have to hide our broken places.

We don't have to pretend that they don't exist. Our brokenness actually begins to become an asset when it's put into God's hands. And when our brokenness is put into God's hands, he begins to work through us to give himself for the life of the world.

May God bless the public proclamation of his glorious gospel. Amen.

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