

Feeding the Lost Multitude - Part 1

by Vance Havner

Vance Havner's sermon emphasizes the necessity of faith in Jesus to spiritually nourish the lost, highlighting the collective responsibility of the church to share the bread of life.

Duration: 30:31

Scripture: Psalm 119:54, Matthew 6:33, Mark 6:31, John 6:1-14

Topics: "Lost Souls"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a young preacher who wanted to attract the masses and started preaching on a goods box in the street. Eventually, they were directed to an open auditorium where they could continue their meeting. The speaker emphasizes the importance of sharing the gospel with neighbors and not just focusing on missions abroad. They also highlight the question Jesus asked Philip about how to feed the crowd, which they believe is the biggest problem facing the Church today. The sermon references the feeding of the multitude in all four gospels and encourages the audience to study the variations in the accounts to get the full story.

Transcript

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They also provide stimulating material for group interaction. Permission to broadcast or to copy this tape in any form must be secured in writing from CBC Media Ministries. I want to thank you for, I hear that you can't see my face, what a tragedy that would be.

Let's see, where was I? I had a little sort of a sick spell coming up here Saturday, and you've been praying for me, and I've been helped. I played hooky this morning and missed all the meetings, and walked all over these woods back here, back through Tapwa, and revived memories of 40-odd years ago there. And it did me good, but above all, you're remembering me.

I'm glad the sister who's 89 is here tonight. That is a distinct encouragement to me. I'd been aiming at 79 in October and think I was doing pretty well.

And then Bertha Smith, they tell me she went out to California where they were giving lessons for older people how to freshen them up, and before the thing was over, she was telling them how. So that encouraged my spirits greatly, you may be sure. Now, the account of the feeding of the multitude is found in all four Gospels.

And one needs the harmony of the Gospels in front of him when he's talking about that, because the different accounts do not have any discrepancies, but they have variations, and you have to get them all in focus to get the full story, which is a wonderful story. I'm going to read only from John, the sixth chapter. After these things, Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias.

And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles, which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the Passover, a feast of the Jews was nigh.

When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, When shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes, but what are they among so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down.

Now there was much grass in the place, so the men sat down in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples, to them that were set down, and likewise of the fishes, so much as they would. When they were filled, he saith unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth, that prophet, that should come into the world. You notice here that our Lord first says in Mark, and I didn't read it, but in Mark, or at the outset, before all of this actually happened, Let's go into a quiet place and rest awhile, come apart and rest awhile.

And I've been telling people through these years, If you don't come apart, you will come apart. You'll go to pieces. So we need to get to the quiet place.

But the word got around, and the multitude gathered, like sheep without a shepherd, into a desert place. And soon the hour was late, and long past time to eat, and they had no food. And John tells us that Jesus asked Philip, Where shall we buy bread to feed this crowd? The disciples had said in Matthew's version of this, Send away to the villages to buy bread.

And Jesus said, They need not depart, give ye them to eat. What a missionary text that is. Here is a picture of a hungry world, dying spiritually, for want of the bread of life.

It is never necessary to get away from Jesus. It's never necessary to depart from him. We need not turn to the philosophies and the pleasures and the possessions of this world.

Jesus is all they need, and it's our business as Christians, as churches, to get the bread of life out to them, not just the responsibility of the preacher. It's the duty of everybody, by prayer and by proxy, if you can't go, and by provision, by person if you can go, to help feed the souls of the lost world. They need not

depart.

We're surrounded by this multitude any time. I remember in my own home church, First Baptist of Greensboro, one Sunday morning I was there. It's a rare thing for me to get to the service there.

And they had sung, as the last number, we've a story to tell to the nations. And they sang it with a great deal of enthusiasm, and the pastor spotted me back there among all the backsliders on the back seat, and called on me to lead in the closing prayer. Well, I don't know whether it was a fitting prayer or not, but I said, Lord, we've just sung we've a story to tell to the nations.

Help us to remember we've a story to tell to the neighbors as well. And that means not always going to Africa, but going across the street. Some will send people across the sea who won't cross the street.

And you can't do it just with a special missionary offering once a year. Now, this question that Jesus asked Philip is the biggest problem before the Church of Jesus Christ today. Books have been written, and sermons have been preached, and crusades and campaigns have been staged, and programs have been planned, and study courses have been told, and songs have been written, and dramas have been staged, all trying to answer the question that he asked Philip, how are we going to feed this crowd? And G. Campbell Morgan tells how that when he was a youngster, his father took him to hear George Muller, the great saint of God, who was used so marvelously and miraculously to keep an orphanage going on faith and prayer.

And Campbell Morgan said, for 60 years thereafter, I never forgot the sight of that man standing there, and with his broken German, I still never forgot the text. He himself knew what he would do. And there are times when you don't know what you're going to do, and you wonder what you ought to do.

But remember, God's plan is never mixed up. He knows what he is going to do. So Jesus asked Philip, and he was a pragmatist.

He had a lot of practical common sense, ordinarily. It shows up on certain occasions. When Nathaniel said, Can any good come out of Nazareth? Philip said, Come and see.

That's a good common sense answer. And he said to Jesus, Show us the Father, and we'll be satisfied. That's a good request to make.

And so here, when Jesus said, How are we going to feed this crowd? Philip started figuring. And Spurgeon says he started counting. One, two, three, four, and got up to 200.

Two hundred penny worth of bread. No, that wouldn't do. Doesn't that just remind you of the chairman of the finance committee in your church? I know it does among my crowd.

I tell the Baptists we're the best estimators on the face of the earth, always making an estimate of what it's going to cost to do such and such a thing. Philip was a computer expert ahead of his time. Today, the Great Commission falls all too often in the hands of committees, a group of the unfit appointed by the unwilling to do the unnecessary.

And they're always figuring how to do it, and they've got it worked out. Statisticians, somebody said there are three kinds of lies, black lies, white lies, and statistics. And that's quite true.

Philip started counting, and he got to this point and said, No, that wouldn't do it. Well, at least he did realize that that wouldn't work. We need sanctified committees and dedicated statisticians, and we need some practical logistics in the business.

But today, both in this country and in the church, things are pretty well in the hands of experts, charts and computers, figuring out how many pennies' worth of bread it'll take to balance the budget in the country. And Will Rogers said, We ought to be glad we're not getting all the government we're paying for. Well, that is refreshing.

I wonder what he'd say now. And in the church, we're discussing how big a budget will it take to convert the world to Christ. Philip tried to put the problem into figures, and you can't do it.

You can't measure any church by its statistics, by head count. We had in my own denomination, and this will work just as well for yours, whatever it may be, we had a great man in Texas years ago who was president of that convention. He was a homestrung philosopher, and he said just what he thought.

James B. Gamble, and he said something that is prophetic. Whatever major denomination or any denomination you belong to, take this to heart, not since the beginning of the Christian era has one heard so much of experts in religion. Never before have we heard so much about the business end of religion, nor so much good figure on how long it'll take to convert the world, or long calculations on how many dollars it takes to convert a soul.

We're in a day of planning and figuring. Certain men have gotten themselves before the world as great religious statesmen. We're almost dazed with the magnificence of some of their conceptions, and their methods are so fine that the common man feels he doesn't know where to begin.

And then he said, getting away from the tumult and reading the New Testament quietly and thinking it over, I am writing it down now deliberately, that all this looking into the situation and parceling out the world to be converted in a given time and fitting up a nice harness for everybody to work in makes me tired. While the experts are telling us all about it and organizing everything, some men who don't seem to know much about it are holding good meetings, and nearly all the people that are being converted are being converted by non-experts. I'll repeat it.

I'm tired of all the fine figuring and wonderfully fine statesmanship up in the air. Now, here's the prediction. Before we know it, we're going to be snared by human wisdom and human devices.

We will get away from the simple method of Christ, which is so simple that people can understand it. There is something deeper, he said, in his life and spirit. We're going to wake up and find out one of these days that we've been weaving some fine theories that will enslave us and wear us out.

He needs to come back and preach to us some more. There's a prophet, and it came true, and we're seeing it now. It was Joseph Parker who had a great sermon on the stupidity of the specialist.

The stone which the experts despised has become the headstone of the corner. You'd have thought that the experts ought to know a good cornerstone when they saw one, but they didn't. Jesus came the great cornerstone, and the religious experts helped plan his crucifixion.

They didn't esteem him at all. They fought him. And the stone which the builders, Joseph Parker kept accentuating the builders, folks ought to know, rejected.

When Paul started on the voyage to Rome, the skipper of the boat said, We'll have a good trip. And Paul was the seer on the boat. He said, We'll have trouble.

But they listened to the expert. What would a preacher know about navigation? Listen to the skipper. He ought to know that's his business.

But he didn't, and the seer knew what he was talking about. When Jesus came, the Pharisees knew all about the law. And had it ever occurred to you that you can have all your I's dotted and all your T's crossed and still misspell the word, think that over.

The Pharisees had the theology all right. They had all the I's dotted and all the T's crossed, but they didn't know the cornerstone when he came. Pablo Casals was giving some postgraduate lessons to cello postgraduates, and I watched that over television.

I didn't watch him giving the lessons, but I saw this much of it. That youngster played the number, and I thought, Well, what are you doing taking postgraduate courses when you can play a cello like that? When he finished, the great artist now gone, Pablo Casals said, You're playing the notes, but not the music. That'll do the think over.

You'd think, Well, the notes, isn't that enough? Oh, no, I know a dear lady who's wonderful at the piano, but she admits that somehow it's all so mechanical. She can read anything you put before, and yet she's honest enough to say, I wish sometimes I could play like folks would play by ear. Somehow I don't have that.

Well, the Pharisees had it all, and they didn't have it all. And the psalmist must have had that in mind when he said, Thy statutes have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage. You can have all the statutes and know the theology and not have a song in your heart.

We need some dedicated committees indeed. But if you think that Philip didn't know what he was talking about, you haven't heard anything yet. The next speaker was Andrew.

And he said, Lord, there's a youngster here with a few loaves and fishes, and then he was almost ashamed that he said it. He said, But what are they among so many? And would you believe it, Jesus grabbed that, took him up on it, the very thing that was ridiculous. And folks around there must have said, What is he talking about? Do you mean that a kid with a fish burger can feed all this crowd? But it happened, and it seems to me that that would be the very quintessence of absurdity.

And yet my Lord seized upon it a chance to prove what couldn't be done could be done. He said, Make the folks sit down. I'm sure some of those townspeople said, Well, whatever is he up to now? Why don't they send him down for a truckload of bread anyhow? And Jesus could have done that because he could have caught a few fish and found enough money to buy a load of bread.

He had done something like that before. But my Lord is saying, and remember my subject tonight in your church and your work, Jesus was saying, in effect, We don't need a budget. We need a boy.

We have the budgets today, and we never had so many wonderful budgets as we have, and they have their place. But he said, Bring the loaves to me. Little is much when God's in it.

Jesus often said, Bring this or that to me, the demonized boy. I brought him to the disciples, and he couldn't catch the demon. I said, Bring him to me.

And then Jesus said, There's a donkey I want to send you disciples after. Go get it. And then you have here the task before them that sending after the donkey looked like such an insignificant piece of business, but it was an important donkey.

It was in the Old Testament and in prophecy and the fulfillment of it and part of the divine plan from the foundation of the world. But whether it be the dinner or whether it be the demon or whether it be the donkey, bring what God wants to him, and the miracle happened. My friend, Manuel Scott, that little black preacher who is a saint.

I was at Jack Taylor's church along with Manuel Scott some years ago and had lunch with him every day. That fellow has a keen thinker, and yet he's got a world of wit, and he's got a lovable spirit about him. And he said, When you get low on your Jesusology, you're going to be low on all your ologies.

He said, Ecclesiology, theology, eschatology, sociology, you'll be all mixed up on them if you're not right on your Jesusology. How true that is. Now, you know the rest of this account.

The liberals tell us that there wasn't any miracle, that when the boy brought the bread, the folks that had their meals with him sort of hid them. Everybody pitched in, and they had sort of a good meal after all. Well, that's about as far as liberalism ever gets, it seems to me, and I'm not surprised that they account for it that way.

But God doesn't break his laws. He transcends his laws. That's different.

Contra-natural is one thing, but supernatural is another. He's not the prisoner of them. He's not the slave of his statutes.

They're his laws. And right here is the heart of our problem. The issue in our organized Christianity today is that we're listening too much to Philip instead of to Andrew.

Our Lord stands in all our meetings and our conclaves as we juggle our statistics and marshal our figures and pound our computers and how many penny worth of bread will we need to feed the multitude? And he says, why reason ye among yourselves? Because you have no bread. That ought to be hung in every committee meeting room in every church in America. I'm not disparaging our organization and our promotion.

You have to have a structure. You have to have an establishment. My father used to keep bees, and he sold a lot of honey, and he knew a lot about bees.

And I was intrigued watching those little creatures, so smart, so intelligent. And they had sense enough, of course, to know that unless they built a structure of honeycomb, they'd drown in their own honey. You have to have the structure.

I'm not disparaging organization, but our calculations today do not usually take into consideration seriously the promise and the possibility of divine intervention. We talk about means and methods and money. We're not looking for miracles.

We have a polite little prayer every time we have one of these meetings, and somebody's sure to quote, not by might nor power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts. And that's very nice. And yet, as the meeting goes on, it becomes very evident that we're not expecting much heavenly assistance on a miraculous scale.

Our expectation is not from God. We're not praying like Jehoshaphat. We know not what to do, but our eyes are upon thee.

Now, at the feeding of this multitude, they were skeptical, but Jesus was depending on the miraculous. I remember a meeting many, many years ago among some of my Baptist folks at a regular business meeting of the churches, and one grand old preacher, great old Saint of the Lord, arose in the midst of all of it and said, brethren, are we praying enough? And, of course, they said, well, he's a good old man, but God isn't doing things like that today. This is the age of expertise, the age of the sophisticated and up-to-date technology.

We don't leave the door even cracked open for a divine breakthrough. God's a last resort. I heard of a dear old lady who was very sick, and somebody said, well, dear, we've done all we can for you.

You've got to trust the Lord. She said, my soul, has it come to that? Well, that's what it does come to. So often as a last resort, that ought to be the first resort.

You ought to start out with trusting the Lord. I get in meetings sometimes where somebody stands up and relates that they've been healed, and I know there's a lot of extremism today. But once in a while, God performs a miracle.

And somehow I notice a lot of people drop their heads and look a little embarrassed and a little nervous. And now, what are they dragging into this meeting? And if somebody stands up who didn't have a miracle and wasn't healed from cancer, but says, well, friends, I've never been very sick in my life. I want to thank God for keeping me through all these years.

Praise grace. You can almost hear it over the crowd. So what? Isn't that a miracle, too? That's a marvelous thing.

Not many people can say that. And so we're inclined. At one of our great religious conclaves two years ago, all the people milling around like a county fair, and they were supposed to be having a prayer meeting.

And a leading old minister who still had enough fire about him put in a friendly rebuke, stood up and said, we're trying to talk to God. You'd never known it. We Americans are so accustomed to face every issue in the pride of our know-how.

If somebody even mentions a window open in heaven and a God-sent revival, that was okay in Bible time. We don't do it that way now. We just don't do it anyway now is the trouble.

You stand in any churches I do week after weekend for 40 years on the road and call on the average Sunday morning congregation. About the hardest time on earth to have a revival is on Sunday morning. It ought to be the best time, but everybody's got their church face on, and it'll take some time to crack that up and get them lowered in the presence of God.

Stand and ask them to confess their sins and get right with God, but everything is so organized and programmed and cataloged and regimented and systematized and computed and microfilmed and Xeroxed. And they say, well, that's out, friend. Where have you been? You can't do that today.

My friend, you can't run a church like a department store either. That's not the way God does it. God's ways are not our ways.

His thoughts are not our thoughts. Somebody said the church began as a company of lay witnesses. It has become a professional pulpitism financed by lay spectators.

We pay a church staff to do church work, and then we come out on Sunday to watch them do it. Okay, preacher, what have you got? I remember it went on a leg years ago, Dr. Edmund saying, when I was a young fellow and went to the old Bible conferences. I didn't want to talk to people after the meeting.

I was under conviction and wanted to go to my room and pray. And I said, we come out and everybody says, well, how did you like him? And I said, he's not as good as the one we had last week. You ought to hear Dr. Thunderbolt when he comes next week.

And then we depend so much on natural help and assistance. I heard of a little church some time ago. They discovered oil underneath.

And they put up a sign, we're not taking in any more members. We must make room in our programs and promotions for the unscheduled visit of Almighty God and the divine breakthrough. No wonder that poor fellow read the Order of Service the other day and prayed.

And it was done later in one of our great meetings. God, give us something today that's not on this Order of Service. So tired of looking at doxology, invocation, hymn number, so and so and so, Lord, give us something different for a change.

Make room for a boy with a fish burger. How necessary. Years ago, there was a convention being held in one of our great cities on how to attract the masses.

And during that week, a younger fellow just starting out in the work of the Lord came down the street at the time when the workers were coming home from their work. And he got hold of a goods box somewhere and got up on top of it and had his helper to start off a tune. And these workmen began to gather with their dinner buckets all around until they blocked the traffic.

And the policeman said, You have to move. You can't have a meeting here. And somebody came up to the speaker and said, There's an open auditorium.

They're having a convention. They're not meeting right now. And let's go in there until the crowd meets.

And they're coming to discuss how to gather the masses. Well, he was already gathering the masses. So he went down the street with all these workers and their dinner buckets rattling and went in there and filled up the place.

And he was really preaching. And somebody came in and said, I'm sorry, but our meeting is scheduled to begin on how to attract the masses. So that was D.L. Moody.

So they had to break up Moody's meeting and start a meeting on how to attract the masses. I laugh every time I read that thing, and yet I sigh too. Oh, Moody had a place for divine intervention in his life.

This concludes side one. Please turn the tape over at this point and continue listening on side two.

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