

Christ's Sufficiency For My Insufficiency

Mark 6:30-44

Do you ever feel overwhelmed with all that needs to be done in serving the Lord? We live as needy people serving Christ in a needy world. I often feel overwhelmed with the immensity of the task and with my own feelings of inadequacy. How can I possibly meet the needs of the flock I shepherd, let alone the massive needs of a hurting world?

That's why I'm glad our lesson today is on the feeding of the 5000. It could be argued that the feeding of the 5,000 is the most significant miracle Jesus performed, since it's the only one besides Jesus' resurrection that God saw fit to record in all four gospels. I find myself coming back to the lessons of this miracle again and again. Each time I come away refreshed as I recall how the Lord wants to give me His sufficiency for my insufficiency to meet the needs of this lost world. Listen as I read Mark's account:

35 When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, "This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late.

36 Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat."

37 But He answered and said to them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to Him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?"

38 But He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they found out they said, "Five, and two fish."

39 Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass.

40 So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties.

41 And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all.

42 So they all ate and were filled.

43 And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish.

44 Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men.

The Lord used this incident for the training of the twelve. The miracle itself is almost passed over. We are never told exactly how Jesus did it. The focus is not just on the spectacular nature of the miracle, but on what it teaches us who serve Jesus about how He meets our needs and the needs of others through us.

Christ will give us His sufficiency to meet the needs of people if we yield our insufficiency to Him.

1. People Are Needy.

Remember from last time that the apostles have returned from their first preaching tour and reported to Jesus all that they had done and taught (6:30). Jesus perceived their need for rest, so He said in verse 31, **"Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."** Mark adds that there were so many people coming and going that they didn't even have time to eat. So they got in the boat and started off for the far shore, a distance of four to five miles across the water.

But it turned out that the trip across the lake was the only vacation they got, since the people saw them going and ran there from all the cities and arrived ahead of them. When the disciples saw that crowd of needy people standing on the shore, they must have felt like a newly-wed couple whose friends beat them to the hotel where they planned to spend their first night! “Oh, no! Look at all those people on the shore! Lord, can we turn the boat around?”

The fact that this many people would go to this effort to be with Jesus shows how needy they were. They had great physical needs, as many brought their loved ones for Jesus to heal (Matt. 14:14). By the end of the day, they were hungry, with no place to get food. But their greatest need was spiritual, as seen by Jesus’ response. He saw this great multitude and **“He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things”** (6:34). The Lord, whose gaze penetrated to the very depths of every soul, could see that the greatest need of these people was to know how to be rightly related to God.

How do you look upon lost people? It’s easy to see people as the disciples did here: “They’re a bother! Send them away! These people are intruding on my time off.” It’s also easy to view needy people with contempt: “Why don’t they behave like they should? What’s the matter with people, anyway?”

But Jesus viewed people with compassion, because He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. They are confused and frightened by life. They don’t know which way to go. Sheep without a shepherd think they know what’s best for them when really they do not. They’re a mixed up bunch! But instead of thinking, “Stupid sheep!” Jesus felt compassion for them. So should we.

2. We Are Insufficient to Meet the Overwhelming Needs of People.

The manner in which Jesus performed this miracle is significant. He could have called down manna from heaven. Commentators emphasize the fact that this miracle took place in the wilderness and that the 5,000, seated in companies of hundreds and fifties recalls Israel camped by tribes in the wilderness under Moses. Calling down manna would have been consistent with the fact that Jesus was the new Moses.

Or, the Lord could have spoken the word and a loaf of bread would have miraculously appeared in each person’s hand. Perhaps everyone would have been more awed at Jesus’ power than they were with the quiet way this miracle was done. It would have been much more efficient and impressive than having the disciples distribute the bread and fish to all of the people (there were 5,000 men, plus women and children).

Or Jesus could have called down angels who could have taken the bread from His hand and flown directly to each group and given them the food. People would have been amazed. They would have talked about it for the rest of their lives: “Angels fed us the bread which Jesus multiplied!” Stupendous!

But how did Jesus do it? He used the disciples to distribute the bread and fish to the people. I’m convinced that the Lord did the miracle that way to teach the disciples that His method for meeting the needs of a lost world is through people. Christ meets the needs of people through people. But note carefully the sort of people He uses:

Insufficient people!

A. Jesus uses tired people.

The disciples had just returned from their first preaching tour. Jesus knew they were tired and needed a rest. But their only rest had been the short trip across the lake. True,

Jesus let them rest all day as He taught and healed the multitude. Can't you just hear the tiredness in their voice as they say, "**Send them away**"?

B. Jesus uses busy people.

The disciples didn't even have time to eat because of all the people coming and going. Whenever you help people, as Jesus did, word spreads. One person who was helped tells another who tells another. Soon you find yourself swamped with the needs of hurting people. But Jesus uses tired, busy people.

C. Jesus uses emotionally drained people.

Remember from earlier in the chapter that the disciples and Jesus were feeling the loss of John the Baptist. His death was an ominous warning of what lay ahead for Jesus, and for them. Listen to the exasperation in their voice as the disciples say: "**Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat.**" They were spent! Yet Jesus very pointedly tells them, "**You give them something to eat!**" That reveals a fourth insufficiency:

D. Jesus uses people who lack resources.

The disciples respond to Jesus' command to feed this crowd of 15-20,000 people with mild sarcasm: "**Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?**" A denarius was a day's wage for a working man (Matt. 20:2). Two hundred denarii was seven to eight months' wages. Obviously, the disciples didn't have anywhere near that much cash, and even if they did it would have provided only a minimal serving for each person. Besides, they were in a desolate place. Even if they went to a town to buy it, there wouldn't be that much bread available.

Jesus accents their inadequacy when He asks them, "**How many loaves do you have? Go and see!**" They come up with five small barley loaves and two little fish. They were ridiculously lacking in the resources to meet this demand of Jesus to feed the multitude.

Are you tired? Busy? Emotionally drained? Short of funds? Congratulations! You qualify to be used of God in meeting the overwhelming needs of people. He doesn't work through sufficient people. He works through insufficient people who give Him the inadequate resources they have and let Him use them as He pleases."

People are needy.

We're insufficient.

3. Christ Will Give Us His Sufficiency when we yield our insufficiency to Him to use as He pleases.

There's an important distinction between choosing to serve and being a servant. You can choose to serve when you are well rested, have the time to serve, are emotionally full, and have adequate resources to meet the needs. Jesus came as a servant, and He calls us to be servants. Servants don't volunteer to serve; it's not an option. Servants serve when they're tired, busy, emotionally drained, and lacking in adequate resources. Servants serve because they're under obligation to their master.

How do we do it? By yielding our insufficiency to Him to use as He pleases. Five small loaves and two fish, a boy's lunch. Not much to feed such a crowd. Matthew records Jesus as saying, "Bring them here to Me!" That's the key! Give your inadequate resources and abilities to Jesus. The insufficient becomes more than sufficient when surrendered to Christ! Jesus wanted the disciples to face their own inability to meet the

need. And He wanted them to offer up their weaknesses to Him. He took their five loaves and two fish, and He made something out of them -- He took their insufficiency, and He still takes our insufficiencies and weaknesses that He might manifest His strength.

Two thoughts:

A. We must yield what we have, not what we don't have.

That sounds obvious, doesn't it? But so often we make up excuses about what we don't have and we fail to offer to Jesus what we do have. "If I just had more money, I'd give regularly to the church!" "If I just had the gift of evangelism, I'd witness more!" "If I just had the spiritual gifts that others have" "If our mission just had" "If I just ..."! But God never asks you to give Him what you don't have. He asks you to give Him what you do have. "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" And then bring them to Jesus.

The point is that our ridiculously insufficient resources become sufficient when we put them in the Lord's hands. The Lord doesn't use what you don't have; He uses the insufficient things you do have when you yield them to Him.

B. We must yield our insufficiency to Him to use as He pleases.

What Jesus did with this boy's lunch is what He does with us when we give Him our insufficient abilities and resources:

***Jesus blesses it.** Without His blessing, we're wasting our time. "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Ps. 127:1). To have God's blessing is not to expect results in proportion to my talents and labor, but in proportion to God's abundance.

Without the Lord's blessing, five loaves and two fish were woefully inadequate. With His blessing, it was more than enough.

***Jesus breaks it.** Blessing and brokenness go together. You won't find God's blessing apart from God's breaking. The Lord always breaks what He uses.

Maybe you're thinking, "But what about me? How will my needs be met? Here are all these desperately needy people. We're insufficient to meet their needs. You're saying that Christ will give us His sufficiency to meet their needs when we yield our insufficiency to Him to use as He pleases. But what about our needs?"

4. Christ's Sufficiency Always Satisfies.

I love verse 42: "**So they all ate and were filled.**" Everyone had enough. All the tummies were full. They even had leftovers! Jesus always provides a full measure, nothing lacking!

And don't miss verse 43: "**And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish.**" How many disciples? Twelve! How many baskets full? Twelve! A basket full for each disciple!

The bread in this miracle is symbolic of Christ. He said, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). The Lord is teaching us that if we will surrender ourselves to Him to use as He pleases in meeting the needs of others, then He will satisfy us with a full measure of Himself.

Here is a multitude of sheep without a shepherd--now we are seeing the Lord as the Shepherd among the sheep - what a depiction of Psalm 23 verse 2! 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. I will lack nothing, I will have no need. He maketh me to lie

down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters'. Isaiah 40 is being fulfilled: 'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young'.

The lowly Servant before them was the Christ of the impossible. And the lesson He's teaching is: 'You don't need to go away from Me, you need to look to Me'. When we look to Jesus in faith, we trust His word and He supplies. Didn't the children of Israel say in the desert: **'Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?'** - can God? The God of Moses fed them in the wilderness. The God of Elijah lives today, the God who multiplied the oil and the meal for the widow of Zarephath. The God of Elisha, who increased the pot of oil and fed 100 men with 20 loaves of barley - that God is alive! Psalm 132:15 was being fulfilled: **'I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread'**. The Lord was in their midst.

We look around us and see overwhelming needs. Then we hear the Lord say, "You give them something to eat!" He wants us to give the Bread of Life to those who are hungry. It doesn't take much calculation to realize that we can't scrape together enough even to barely meet the needs. We're insufficient! Then we hear Jesus say, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" "Not many, Lord!" "Give them to Me."

Do you see that your Savior is the Christ of the impossible? Do you see that He gives you sufficient confidence to serve others, because He gives you His power? When we give our insufficient resources and abilities to the Lord to use as He pleases, He exchanges His sufficiency for our insufficiency. And He even gives each of us a basket full of leftovers for ourselves besides!