

Focus on the Solution

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, just for a short time this evening, if we can turn back to Mark and chapter 6. Mark chapter 6.

And I'd like us to consider the section that we have in verses 30 through to 44, where we read of Jesus feeding the 5,000.

It's great to have some young folk here with us tonight. I've not forgotten you. I've got three questions. But be careful, because one of them could be a trick question.

Okay? So are you ready for the three questions? The first one is this. How many people are being fed? How many people are being fed?

You might think that's a really easy one. But hold on. Listen carefully. And you might see there's a different answer. Question number two.

[1 : 04] Instead of being focused on the problem, what should the disciples have been focused on?

An extra brownie point for that is... Well, if I say the brownie point, I think I'll give away the answer. So I won't do that. And then the last question is, what was left over?

What was left over? So how many people were fed? Instead of being focused on the problem, the disciples should have been focused on. And then what was left over?

So we're going to consider these words. Verses 30 to 44. We all have different, I suppose, opinions as to who God is and what God can do.

Whether we're Christians or non-Christians, at varying times in our Christian experience, we can see God differently. Sometimes we're closer to God than at other times.

[2 : 11] Sometimes we rely upon God more than we do at other times. But who is God and what can he do?

I think this is a question that if we're being honest with ourselves, you and me included, it's a question that we can, when we're so busy in the ordinary every day of life, we can lose sight of the real, meaningful answer to that question.

Who is God and what can he do? And, you know, there's always a temptation when we look at ourselves spiritually and we look at our inadequacies and how we fall so short in our service towards the Lord.

We can think that's just us. That the day we live in is a day of small things. That the generations that went before us were far more godly than us.

And so that the problems that we experience, they never did. But we only need to come to the narrative before us here to see that that is so far from the truth.

[3 : 15] Each generation has their own problems to deal with. Each person, each one of the Lord's people have their own problems to deal with.

Because what we see before us here is a case study. We see a case study of those who on this earth walk the closest with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who were with him when he carried out so many miraculous things. When he healed the sick. When he raised the dead.

When he turned water into wine. When he did all kinds of wonderful things. They were there by his side. They witnessed it. Just like the person is sitting beside you, young folk here.

So was Jesus with the disciples. Imagine Jesus being so close to you. Well that's how it was for these men. But still.

[4 : 15] Even although they were so close to Jesus. Time and time again they were unable to fully grasp. To take to heart exactly who this Jesus was.

And exactly what he was capable of doing. So what I'd like us to do is to see that unfolding before our eyes here in this account.

That's traditionally known as the feeding of the 5,000. We're going to think about two simple headings. First of all, the problem. Or perhaps more than one problem. The problem and then the provision. The problem and the provision. Let's look at verse 30 together. Verse 30. And the apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. Now before we come to the problem, it's helpful for us to have a little bit of context here. Where have the apostles been? Where have they come back from? What is it they're telling Jesus about? [5 : 19] Well, at this point we see that the disciples had been sent out. They'd been sent out in twos. They'd been sent out essentially on their very first missionary journey.

This was, if you like, a time of training. It was almost like a placement for these disciples. Up until this point they had been side by side with Jesus. They'd heard Jesus teach. They'd listened to his words. They'd always had him there every step of the way, but not now. They'd been called to go out in twos and to go out alone, as it were. To go into the villages and the towns and to go and share the good news of the gospel. And once they'd done that, they were then called to come back, to reflect, to talk about what went well and what went not so well, to talk about their experiences, and to share them with Jesus. And that's what we see here. Essentially, this is a debrief. And of course, this had been a new experience for the disciples. This was the first time, as I said, they'd gone out on their own, and so they would have been out with their comfort zone.

[6 : 32] And I know myself, when I became a minister, the first year of ministry, I was like a rabbit in the headlights. Up until that point, I'd had people to rely upon, to lean upon, in terms of being in congregations on placements.

But then when I went out on my own, it was altogether different. And so it was for the disciples. They had come across all kinds of different things, all kinds of different responses, opposition, those who were willing to listen, and everything in between.

And so, needless to say, as they come back to Jesus at this point, they're tired, they're fatigued. Mentally and physically, they're done. And then we see Jesus' response to them.

This is just so refreshing. Verse 31, Notice the response of Jesus here to the disciples.

This is certainly not the response that we have in a busy world nowadays. A world where there is no mercy. No matter how tired or fatigued we are, we're expected to go on and on and on and on.

[8 : 10] Jesus says no. He says, come away. Rest. Take time away. Because some of you haven't even had time to eat. What is he doing here?

What? Well, he's doing, and I think I maybe mentioned this a previous time I've been with you, he's doing what he's done so much in the past. He's showing compassion. Compassion.

If anything's to, apart from the fact that God is love, but if anything is to characterize Jesus himself, is the fact that time and time again, he shows compassion.

Come on, he says, let's go into the boat. Let's get away from here. Let's cross the Sea of Galilee.

And as we cross the Sea of Galilee on that boat, this will be a chance for you to catch your breath, to get some rest before we move on to the next stage.

Isn't that our example? A desire to help rather than hinder. A desire to build up rather than pull down.

[9 : 16] He's not setting these disciples up to fail. Such pity has a father unto his children dear. He knows we are weak. He knows we are dust.

He knows our infirmities. He knows our weaknesses. And he meets us time and time again. We see that here.

Come and get some rest. Certainly not that distant, detached God that some would like to portray. A God who doesn't care.

A God who's angry and who seeks to trip his people up at every given opportunity. That is not the God of the Bible. God is moved to wrath and anger.

Absolutely. That is true. But that is not his default position. He's a God of mercy and compassion.

So we see here the disciples, they catch their breath.

[10 : 16] They rest as they cross the Sea of Galilee. And we read in Luke's account that they're going to an area near the town of Bethsaida.

However, there's a problem. The problem is this, that their peace wasn't going to last.

And their peace wasn't going to last because the problem was people. What do we read? We read that as the disciples are enjoying rest across the Sea of Galilee, as they're catching their breath,

meanwhile, the crowds of people on the shore, they're running ahead of the boat so that they get to Bethsaida before Jesus so that they're there to meet him.

Why are they there? Why are they so desperate to be where Jesus is? Is it so that they can worship him and praise him? Is it so that they can give their lives to him?

Sadly not. These crowds were drawn, but drawn for the wrong reasons. Many of these crowds, all they wanted to see was a show.

[11 : 30] They wanted to see Jesus in action. They wanted to see him perform. They wanted even Jesus to meet their own physical needs, whatever they were. Perhaps they had ailments. Perhaps they had family members who were on the brink of death.

They wanted Jesus to tend to them. That's, of course, a common response to Jesus, is it not, for those who don't profess faith in him. They come to him in times of need, in times of difficulty, in times of emergency.

But yet more often than not, the heart will not be bowed in worship. So you can just imagine the hearts of the disciples sinking as they see this crowd coming towards the shore, as they make their way into the shore.

And what do they do? How do they respond? How does Jesus respond? Does he change course? Does he change direction? Does he go to a quieter place? Does he say, not these people again, let's move on to a different direction?

Is that what he does? Verse 34, when he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

[12 : 51] Yes, there was the problem of the mass of the people, but Jesus could see a bigger problem. Not the fact that they had ruined his peace and quiet, but rather that these were a people who were like sheep without a shepherd.

These were a people who were wandering aimlessly, a people who were lacking direction, a people who were lacking purpose, a people who were lacking leadership. Priests and the religious leaders, they should have been giving them direction, yet the reality was that all they cared about was fulfilling their own righteousness.

They had no thought for the people. They had no love for the people. They had no compassion for the people. But not Jesus.

Not the Jesus that you and I sit here worshipping, I hope, tonight. Because he is moved with compassion. He could see that what they needed more than anything was to come and to get to know the good shepherd himself.

Not because they deserved him. Far from it. But because he is a God who delights in mercy. So what do we read?

[14 : 16] We read that he begins to teach them many things. No doubt he opens up to them the way of salvation. He reveals to them that he is the way, the truth, and the life.

He shows them their need of something greater than the things of this world. He reminds them of the fact that this world is but passing. It's temporary.

And that they are to come and to put their trust in something with far more substance. Yet the more he teaches, it would seem at least that the more agitated the disciples are getting.

Remember at this point, they haven't had that much rest. And we don't read that they've had anything to eat. They're human. They've got sinful, selfish hearts like us all.

And so it gets to the point where enough's enough. We read in verse 35, And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late.

[15 : 20] Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages, and buy themselves something to eat. Yes, it's true they'd got waylaid with these people who had desired to meet with Jesus.

But now it was time for them to go and fend for themselves. It's time for us, they're saying, Jesus, it's time for us to go and get food for ourselves. Leave them to go and get their own food.

To go to the countryside and the villages to buy themselves something to eat. Otherwise, what will happen is we'll have to deal with them. So like us.

So like us. We get to that point where we're accommodating, but then when we're pushed and pushed and pushed, we find our backs getting up.

If it's this accommodating of others, it means that our own toes are being trod upon. And Jesus sees this. And so he answers them in verse 37.

[16 : 29] You give them something to eat. Not perhaps the response they were expecting. Not that compassionate, loving, considerate, helpful response that they were so used to hearing from their Savior.

You give them something to eat. And not only that, but it's a response that almost appears to be sarcastic. Because look at the crowds of people here.

Jesus isn't asking his disciples to feed half a dozen people, to get some food together and give them a meal. We could all do that. That's not what he's asking of them.

The fact is that there is at least 5,000 people. Our young friends might want to listen at this point. I say at least because in the other accounts, we read that there are 5,000 men plus women plus children.

And so if you total all that up, there could have been, although the text doesn't say that here, there could have been around 20,000 people. And so what is Jesus asking these disciples to do?

[17 : 49] He's asking them what appears to be the impossible. They're having none of it. Straight away, the answer back, shall we go and buy 200 denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?

Now, 200 denarii was about eight months' wage, and of course this was money that they simply didn't have access to. They couldn't do it. And even if they could, this wouldn't even come close to feeding the colossal crowd that needed to be fed in front of their very eyes.

It simply couldn't be done. Or could it? The Bible is wonderful in that it, I suppose it depends how we look at it, but the Bible is wonderful in that it exposes us.

It shows us for what we are. And I suppose it's good when that happens because we can learn from it and we can build upon it. But what we see here is a character trait that we're also guilty of, perhaps some more so than others, depending on our personality.

But we're guilty of this, even in the church, perhaps even at times, especially in the church. And what is that character trait? Well, it's this. Always being focused on the problem and not the solution.

[19 : 22] Have we ever done that? I know I have. Always being focused on the problem and not the solution. Expending our energy and dissecting and being drowned by every detail of a problem, talking about it and talking about it again and talking about it some more and sharing it with this person, that person and the next person and allowing this problem to snowball and get bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger, yet all the while doing nothing to offer a solution.

When I was a teacher, I was always struck by the approach of one of the headteachers I worked for. Whenever this headteacher would be confronted by a...

I know this because I was a principal teacher myself and I worked with this headteacher. Whenever this headteacher would be confronted, perhaps, with a grumpy member of staff or a parent or somebody else, the way that this headteacher dealt with it was interesting.

Because if someone would come with a problem, the headteacher would always invite that person to offer a solution.

Okay, I've listened to your problem. What are we going to do about it? How can we solve this? What's the answer to fix this? And of course, this instantly disarms the person because the person has never thought of a solution.

[20 : 58] Problem-driven. Problem-driven. It's so unhelpful. And as Christians especially, we should never adopt that mindset. It's not a good witness.

We should always look for a solution. Whether that's in our church family, when we see a problem. Instead of seeking to expose it for all to see, we try and fix it.

Whether that's in our community, we see a problem. Instead of passing the problem on to someone else and abdicating responsibility, we seek to help and to fix it. That's a good witness.

Whatever we are and whatever we do, we seek to do as unto the Lord and not to men. And that's what people notice when we go that extra mile, when we focus on the solution.

That's not what the disciples do. And you say, well, of course they didn't. Look at the facts. They had all these thousands of people to feed and nothing to feed them with.

[21 : 59] They don't have the resources. We see that in verse 39. And he said to them, how many loaves do you have? Go and see. And when they had found out, they said five and two fish.

And John 6 fleshes this out a little bit more. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, there is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish.

But what are they among so many? And so you say, oh, well, I understand what you're saying about being solution-driven in small areas of life.

Absolutely. But when it comes to this, we need perhaps to cut the disciples some slack. Just look at what's before them. They've got five loaves and two fish, tens of thousands of people possibly. How can they do it? They could do it. They could do it because the five loaves and the two fish, they weren't the resource that they should have been looking to.

[23 : 12] Just remember what these disciples have seen up until this point. Just remember the knowledge that they have of this Jesus. Just remember the experiences that they have enjoyed with this Jesus.

They've seen the work of his hand, the power of his might. They know what he can do. And so instead of focusing on the five loaves and two fishes, what they should have done is focused on the greatest resource of all, the provider of the five loaves and the two fishes, the Lord Jesus Christ. So in reality, the solution was there all along. How often can we say that? It's no different.

Not that we treat the Lord like a genie in a bottle who meets out every need. But there are times when we need him, that we really need him, and that we need to come to him, perhaps when we don't come to him.

How many times have you and I, we've had problems in our lives, and perhaps what we've done is we've gone down this avenue and that avenue and the next avenue. We've sought to solve that problem in this way and that way and this way.

[24 : 34] And when this doesn't work, I'll try the next thing. And yet in all of that, as God's people, we fail to do one important thing, to take it to the Lord in prayer.

So simple, yet so difficult for us. Why do we struggle with that? Is it a lack of faith? Is it that we think God isn't interested with our trivialities?

He is. You come to him. Whatever you have in your life just now, and you think is too difficult for you to overcome, and maybe it is, it's not too difficult for him to help you overcome.

You come to him. You come to him as your creator. You come to him as your sustainer, as the one who's taken you from death to life, from darkness to light, the one who's transformed your life in a way that you could never hope to do.

You come to him with full confidence that he hears and he answers prayer. He might answer it a different way to the way that you would like, but yet he will answer it in a way that is best for you and for his glory.

[25 : 47] That is a promise. That is a promise. And so they have the solution there all along. And Jesus is about to remind them of this in verse 39, where he starts to organize the people.

Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups by hundreds and by fifties. We see that this is a God of order.

He's not chaotic. He's ordering the people. He's going to use means as to feed these people and he's going to use the resources of the people in order to make this happen.

Verse 41, And taking the loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people.

And he divided the two fish among them all. Among them all. How on earth was this possible?

[26 : 58] Well, the answer to that is we don't know. We don't know how this looked, what happened before the eyes of the people who witnessed this, but we know it did happen through the supernatural power of God.

We don't limit the supernatural power of God. It's the supernatural power of God that has saved you and me if we are His tonight. The power of His Holy Spirit.

This Holy Spirit is in the original called the pneuma. The pneuma. And that shows something of the power. That's where we get the word pneumatic drill.

The pneuma, the power of the Spirit. The Spirit that can do all things. So that these loaves and these fishes, they were multiplied over and over and over and over again.

Jesus is here using His creative power to show compassionate provision. Isn't that wonderful?

[27 : 58] We see in verse 42 just how wonderful it is that they all ate and were satisfied.

This, dear friends, is the common grace of God. Many, if not most of these, were unbelievers and yet He's here providing for their every need.

I don't know if you're a Christian here tonight or not. I know most of you. I don't know all of you. I don't know the hearts of all of you here and gathering online.

But I wonder, is that a picture of you? That we eat and we are satisfied with the fruit of the land. We eat and we're satisfied with all that God gives us in terms of earthly goods.

that we eat and we're satisfied and we expect to be further satisfied tomorrow and the next day and the next day and the next day. That is the way we are by nature.

[29 : 08] But is that all we use Jesus for? Is that as far as our relationship with God goes that we take, take, take, and response, we give nothing and certainly not our lives or our hearts.

Can you see the problem there? What about the disciples though?

Has he forgotten them? Has he failed to honor his word in providing compassionately for them?

Remember he was going to take them to that place of rest.

They got the journey. That's true but not more than that and we don't know that they got fed. But you know what we see here is this friends that God's ways are not our ways.

Because at times and maybe you're going through this just now in your own heart. At times you might think that the Lord is not showing you compassion that he's forgotten you and forsaken you and you wonder where he is and what he's doing.

[30 : 13] But yet all the while behind the scenes and perhaps it's still to be revealed to you in the months that lie ahead how this is all going to work.

Providence is often best read backwards. And so you wonder what he's doing and you see he's not compassionate. If only you knew what was happening in my life just now you would not call God compassionate.

Certainly not to me. Ah yes friend but there's a bigger picture. A bigger picture that extends so far and beyond your immediate circumstance.

And so it was with these disciples. Because what he does with these disciples is he shows them far more compassion than they'd even asked for.

Because what we see in this detour if you like in this interruption to the rest we see that the compassion of the Lord extends to the souls of the disciples.

[31 : 20] If this interruption hadn't taken place the disciples would never have been brought to that place whereby they had to learn to lean on Christ all the more. That's why we grow in the valleys.

Not in the mountains in the valleys in the depths. It's not a nice place to be. It's a hard place to be. It's a confusing place at times to be. A place full of questions just like the disciples had.

But yet a place where we are forced to abdicate our own resources and lean on the Lord Jesus Christ. And when we do that we grow and we bear fruit and more fruit and we're of far more use to him because then we can sympathize with others who are in the same place.

He wants them to be more robust for what lies ahead. He wants them to be strengthened. He wants to remind them of exactly who he is.

And so that's why he reveals all of this before their very eyes in showing this common grace to sinners that he is God and that with him all things are possible.

[32 : 32] But you know he hasn't forgotten their physical needs either. Maybe the young ones might want to listen again. I'm sure they've been listening all the way through.

Verse 43 And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and off the fish.

They took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and off the fish. After everyone else is fed I don't think it's any coincidence that there are twelve baskets left.

A basket for each disciple. He provides exceedingly abundantly above what we can ask or ever think.

The disciples had lost sight of who Jesus was. They'd lost sight of his power, his might, his strength, his authority, but still he provides for them. He provides for them because that is the nature of our God.

[33 : 43] But yet as we and we're nearly finished with this, as we reflect upon this narrative, as we find it elsewhere in the Gospels, we're reminded of a greater problem and a greater need.

And that is a need that as far as we can see many didn't want to be met. The need of their never dying soul.

The need of receiving the bread of life. The Lord Jesus Christ himself. Just see what happens. They take this meal. They enjoy this meal.

They've come and Jesus has given them his time and his food. And what do they do in response? Just like I was saying a minute ago, what do they do in response?

Well, John 6, 66 tells us that from that time, this is the very next day, from that time, many of his disciples went back and walked with him no more.

[34 : 58] Isn't that sad? Once he had met their temporal needs, they were away, nowhere to be seen. The disciples, of course, are speaking just of followers.

The apostles were the twelve disciples, but these are just followers of Jesus. They go and they follow him no more. You see, they wanted him for something that he had never come to be, a king or a political leader.

But yet he had so much more to offer than that. He has so much more to offer than that today. As one commentator puts it, Jesus refused to be a permanent source of free meals.

That's what he is here. But he was willing to be an eternal source of spiritual sustenance. I'll read that again. Jesus refused to be a permanent source of free meals, but he was willing to be an eternal source of spiritual sustenance.

Friend, please, please, please, don't treat Jesus like this, a permanent source of free meals. In other words, asking him to meet your earthly needs, yet failing to come and ask him to meet your greatest need, for him to be your source of spiritual sustenance.

[36 : 29] That's what you need. That's what you need today, tonight, every day of your life. That's supposing you have no food to eat to feed your body, you have food for your soul in Christ.

That's supposing this earthly body of yours, it deteriorates and it passes away as it will. You have so much more to live for than that.

Provide for your soul, friend. Provide for your soul. Come to the greatest resource of all. What do you live for in this world?

What's motivating you in the wake that lies ahead in your life? Only you can answer that question. Is it a deeper knowledge of Christ? Or is it to do all that he's called you to do?

Or the many gifts that he's given you in this world? Is it to use these gifts? Absolutely. But to his glory? So that you can reflect something of the wonder of the one who is the giver of every good and perfect gift.

[37 : 40] Do you want your deepest need met? Well if you do you focus on the solution because tonight friends there is a solution.

The solution is found in none other than Christ. Don't think that somehow your need is so great that he cannot meet it. Don't be like the disciples and think that it's just too big.

Your sins are too big. They're too bad. I'm not as good as this person.

I'm not as good as the next person. I can't be saved. Don't think that friend. He is a God of mercy and a God of grace.

He is the good shepherd. Lord, he is the one who is willing to feed the sheep. If only they'll come to him. And wouldn't it be wonderful if it could be said of you in the days that lie ahead that you ate and that you were satisfied, not with the things of this world, but that you were satisfied with his abundant grace.

[39 : 02] May it be so for your good and for his glory. Let us pray. Lord, we come and we acknowledge that we are challenged by your word, but yet we give thanks that it is a word that does not leave us to ourselves, but rather reveals to us the very nature of who we are.

So we pray especially for any here today who are struggling, who are perhaps even haltering between two opinions, whose minds are upon Christ, but also the things of this world, that your Holy Spirit would work mightily and show them even this night the abundance and the fullness that is to be found in calling you Father.

We praise your name, O Lord, then, that when all is said and done and when this passing world is done, that if we are in Christ, we have that hope that spans for so much longer than a few short decades, but a hope that looks to that long tomorrow, even to that eternity, that will be spent with you.

Let us all then seek to have this as our personal testimony and not rest until we have that prayer answered, Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner.

Forgive us then, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, before we come to our final singing, we can answer our questions. I think they were quite simple questions tonight.

[40 : 51] Question number one, how many people were fed? 20,000. It could have been 5,000, but we read elsewhere that they were women and children, so that's excellent, well done.

Up to 20,000 could have been fed. Superb. Now, instead of being focused on the problem, what should the disciples and all of us here, what should we always be focused on?

I think this is a life lesson that we can take into the world next week. What should we be focused on? Anyone here?

Any idea at the back? The solution, absolutely. Focus on the solution.

So when there's a problem in the playground and someone's having difficulties, instead of going and telling on them, try and find a solution to the problem, okay?

[42 : 01] Unless it's something really bad that you can't maybe cope with yourself. Try and find a solution to the problem, to help out with the problem. And then lastly, what was left over?

After all these people were fed, how much was left over? Twelve baskets. Yes, well done. Twelve baskets. It's a God who provides more than we even need.

Well done. You listened so, so well this evening. So we're going to close and we're going to sing to God's praise. Psalm 100. A psalm that speaks about this good shepherd who feeds us if we are his flock.

All people that on earth do dwell. This is on page 362. All people that on earth do dwell sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. Him serve with mirth his praise foretell.

Come ye before him and rejoice. Let's stand to sing to the praise of our God. All people that on earth do dwell.

[43 : 21] Sing through the heart with cheerful voice. Him serve with worthless praise foretell.

Come ye before will and rejoice. You love the Lord is all in fear.

With earth the rain he did us name. we are his hope he does see and for his sheep he does stay.

more enter than his gates with grace approach with joy his Lord stand to praise his God and blesses day always for it is he resolved to do for why the Lord our God is good his mercy is forever true his truth that all times firmly stood and shall promise to it endure and may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit rest on and abide with you now and always Amen