

“GIVING LIKE JESUS”

Mark 6:30-44

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Mark 6:30-44 *Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. 31 And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. 32 So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves. 33 But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him. 34 And Jesus, when 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. 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.*

It can be a daunting and often painful thing to step back and really see the human need in our world today. Extremes can be the tendency: where we either are overcome with emotion and try fruitlessly to help everyone in the world, or we are so overwhelmed that we wash our hands of all of it. I once had a friend in India tell me a story about a young man who went over on a short term mission and nearly lost his mind trying to compassionately help everyone he came across on the streets of Delhi. He eventually was returned home in a nearly catatonic state! We are either swept away or we close our eyes. Yet it is so hard to do the latter, when the plight of man screams so very loud. Even this story begs to be read and compels us to pay attention, as it is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels!

I do believe that to read this story only in the context of physical need and material supply would be a mistake. The condition of humanity runs much deeper and is far intense. Even throughout the world, missions organizations are questioning their own methods, where instead of blessing those they are attempting to help, they are coming to the acknowledgment that in fact they are inadvertently building dependence and instilling a reliance despite the best of intentions. That does not mean we don't feed the hungry but it means we do not want to condition them in such a way that we become their grocery store!

But just as damning is an attitude of avoidance: a life that ignores the condition of mankind and all the needs that abound in our culture and society...one who lives a self-absorbed and self-entitled lifestyle that has turned a blind eye to the hurt and needs so evident around us. That too cannot be seen as even moral or sensitive, let alone Christ-like for those of us that count ourselves a part of the family of God. When we live our lives just focused upon 'old number one' we fail to live up to the Jesus example. In fact, it wholly misses the point of Jesus altogether!

We tend to have the heart of the apostles in this matter, whether we knowingly intend to be rude or whether we are just inadvertently aloof. Because of our ‘maxed out’ lifestyles and all consuming ‘grab-all-you-can-get’ gusto thinking, we are more often than not saying...*either with our words or even our day to day living*, that we want them to go away. We try hard to ‘send them away’ ...to suck it up and make due! Maybe you need to have been in their shoes at some point to really understand, or maybe to have been *backed up against the wall* to grasp the nuances of the process of desperation? Or *maybe*, we just need to grasp the magnitude of the cross and the meaning of the gospel! How can we hold back on anything when Jesus gave us *everything*?

So often we tend to say “we *can*’t” when what we really mean...if we were honest, is that we *won*’t! Rarely is this process and heart state a matter of the lack of resources on the part of the disciple, but rather a positional stance which shouts out our worldly priorities and lack of faith maturity. One thing that I have come to understand both practically speaking as well as reputation in the greater church community is that generally speaking the more wealthy a person is, the less they give. This fellowship is balanced firmly on the backs of the blue-collar working class!

Now please do not mis-understand my message here. I am not promoting a “social gospel” where our focus is upon gender equality, economic disparities, and “fair-trade.” It’s not that I am immediately against any of that, but while these things may benefit humanity on some level, they do not fill a person’s greater need or give society purpose. You cannot effectively and profoundly change the world through social intervention, but you can affect social intervention by changing the world. Certainly no one proved that more dramatically than Christ Himself! Change a person through salvation and rebirth, and you can change all the peripheral that that life possesses.

I’m not trying to oversimplify this picture or paint a “just-add-water” redemptive process that will fix everything wrong in a person’s life. No...life is never that simple! But salvation opens our eyes to a reality and a world understanding that takes much of the obstacles to peace and fulfillment out of the way. Such is within reach for the born again child of God who will make Jesus Lord of their lives! Change a person’s heart and you change a person’s life! And scripture rings out with words like “they will know we are Christians by our love.” (John 13:35)

But even in this truth, there is a danger. And that is the danger of fatalism and the shifting of responsibility onto the back of Jesus totally, when even a quick read of the New Testament will clearly tell us that while the plan and the power to change a person’s life and fill their need is ultimately in the hands of our Creator, the fact remains that He most often chooses to use us to be His hands. We can easily default to the position of praying for an act of the supernatural when the power to fix a situation is within our reach already.

Again, does this mean I should jump up to intervene in every need? No...careful and constant ‘seeking’ prayer must be exercised to act in a way that is best for the person involved and the situation before us. Did Jesus feed every person that passed by Him that might have been hungry? No...we have no such record. Did He heal every person who had an ailment? No. Did He raise every person who was dead back to life? No...*but He did raise a few, didn’t He?* Such accurate investment requires careful spiritual discernment, or we may end up hurting the individual instead of blessing, or accidentally getting in the way of God trying to teach someone and maybe grow them up.

Now all of this may be apt to feel overwhelming and difficult, and I am the first to admit that ‘helping’ is not always as clean and simple as we would like it to be. But we cannot miss the fact that when the need was presented, Jesus told his boys “**you** give them something to eat!” It wasn’t a call to “pray” about the need or point the individual toward the nearest food shelf or mental health counselor. He told them to ‘step up’ and do something about it themselves. “Yes...but if I don’t, surely someone else will help out...you know...someone who has more money than me, or more time than me, or is better at talking than me,” etc etc. “I mean, I don’t need to serve...there are other people to do that!” (as if serving was all about the product rather than the action upon the soul of the servant!) And “I don’t need to tithe...other people have more money than I do so I will let them do it!” Yet the fact is not lost that invariably we continue to *use* the church resources and adopt a ‘consumer’ and ‘customer’ attitude of heart. We then slowly become materialists and socially dependant...institutionalized in a consumer world where we never have enough and we are never satisfied with what we have. **We** can’t go out and serve God! We have bills to pay and responsibilities to be responsible for! I’d like to give to God and love people in action, but I...simply...*can’t*.

“You give them something...” The task can seem overwhelming...impossible even. The apostle’s reaction would have been nothing less than incredulous. “*Seriously?*” With 5000 *men* there, that would have been 15 to 20 thousand with women and children! John’s version says that in the crowd there was a boy. A boy who had 5 loaves and 2 fish, and was willing to give them to the cause. But what could that do? It’s an inconsequential amount in light of the need! And that is what we are apt to think when we look at the mountain of need before us. How can what I have make any difference to such a massive demand? How can what I do make any dent in the plight of man and the desperate state of the world? But they were thinking that the answer must lay in *their* hands, when the answer and the power lay in the hands of Christ! What **was** in their hands was the *resources*. The ‘raw materials.’ God gave to them, so they could give to Him!

We are familiar with the story of the ‘widows mite.’ The account is this: “*Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on.”* (Mark 12:41-44) You see it is not the amount, but the heart and the act. A California man recently found an old penny in his deceased father’s desk that had been there for 33 years before he took it to a coin shop. That’s when he discovered that it was a rare aluminum penny from the Denver mint, and was worth over 200,000 dollars! The apostles were asked to give but they were to bring it to Jesus for the multiplication. They were to ‘*bring it to Jesus*’ for the power to make it more than it was in itself.

One is sure to ask the obvious question: “Well, if Jesus can do such miraculous, then why would He want what little I have? Why doesn’t He just whip it all up from scratch?” After all, Psalms 50:10 tells us He “*owns the cattle on a thousand hills.*” In verse 12 of that chapter, He goes on to say “*If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness.*” Acts 17:25 makes it clear that He doesn’t need any of our stuff. So why do I need to give? That question gives away a heart that does not grasp the relationship God wants to have with us!

We don’t give because He *needs* it, we give because *we need to give it* for our own sake as well as the need before us. It is a matter of worship, and honor, and compassion. It is an issue of being a steward and acknowledging that everything we have is given to us by Him, and while we are blessed to enjoy such resources

in this life, we have it all for more than just our own earthly enjoyment. It is the acknowledgement that we cannot love both God and money. It is a matter of seeking a life that gives like Jesus gives! 1 Peter 2:9 gives a clear picture of our relationship with Him: *“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”*

Luke 12:15-20 tells us *“Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.”* Then he (Jesus) told them a story: *“A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, ‘What should I do? I don’t have room for all my crops.’ Then he said, ‘I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I’ll sit back and say to myself, ‘My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!’”* *“But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?’* *“Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”*

Now you may think this is a tithing message, but it is not. Because what God wants us to give goes far beyond the money in our possession, and well beyond your support of this fellowship. Should we give to support the corporate church that we belong to? Oh yes! Malachi 3:10 clearly calls us to *“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this,”* Says the LORD of hosts, *“If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it.”*

Perhaps you have the attitude that you will give but you will handle it yourself alone. And while I indeed believe and personally practice unilateral giving, I also believe in unity and organization and orderly distribution. I believe, *as the Bible teaches*, that there is “wisdom in much council.” Jesus apparently did too, as He immediately handled the need in a very corporate way with a very organized methodology.

While the issue of giving financially rankles some folks, others are quite willing to write a check! But don’t ask for their time, or their service, or God forbid that they need to rub shoulders with the poor or needy! Don’t ask me to ‘break a sweat’ because I got enough stuff going in my own life! We need to search our heart on this matter. Why are we here? Why are we that are God’s kids still here on this earth? Is it not because God has a mission for us... *each of us*, to complete before we go home? Scripture calls us to *love*. Not just in word, but in deed...in action!

Now, I do not believe Jesus is a communist! I do not believe that He is propagating that position or that political/social agenda. People need to work and support themselves and their families. This too is a biblical principle. But rarely is life that neat and clean. Jesus did feed the poor and heal the sick and serve others. We desire to “teach a man to fish, not just give him a fish for dinner.” And there are times that ‘helping’ someone is actually hurting them in the long run. Again, many missions organizations are rethinking their methods, and that includes us! Thus we must be careful and discerning, but that doesn’t mean judgmental. Let us remember, that the honest truth is we give not to just help another, but to help ourselves and our hearts toward this world and God Himself.

The bottom line is this Christian: *who owns all your stuff?*