

DO WHAT YOU CAN'T
Mark 6:30-44

A couple of years ago I was watching a Husker game, apparently not realizing what a great privilege it was at the time, and I saw a commercial that reminded me of what it's like to live the Christian life. Maybe you've seen it. In the commercial, this ostrich walks up to this house where people left in a hurry without cleaning up the dishes on their patio table. There is still a bunch of plates leftover on their patio table with scraps on them, but there's also a set of virtual reality goggles. And when the ostrich goes to eat some of the scraps – and you know how ostriches eat with a quick lunge of the head to nip at something – the ostrich accidentally ends up with a pair of virtual reality goggles on his head that were on the table. And what's replaying over and over in the virtual reality video is this 1st person image of flying through the clouds. And the ostrich loves it because he has wings but can't fly. But now he can see beyond his limitations so he's running around in the desert like a mad-man acting trying to fly and all the other ostriches think he's crazy. But before long the ostrich actually starts to fly and all other ostriches are left on the ground in his dust. And at the end of the commercial it says, **“Do what you can't.”**

That commercial has always stuck in my mind because in some ways it's a really magnificent picture of what it's like to live the Christian life. The moment we receive Christ as our Savior is the moment we are born again by the Holy Spirit and are therefore, Christians. And it's an important moment. However, becoming a Christian is really only the beginning because once we become a Christian, there is an entire Christian life to live after that. It's like learning how to live all over again!ⁱ Now that we have been made new by the Spirit of God, we have to learn to walk that **newness of life** (Rom. 6:4), with all of its **new relationships, possibilities and capabilities**ⁱⁱ **that require us to do what we can't on our own but can do by His Spirit. We learn to do what we can't, by His power.** It's His power that works in us doing more than we could ask or imagine (Eph. 3:20). Spiritual gifts are a great example of this. We can't take credit for them. They can't be explained by natural talent or character or energy or personality. It's God at work in us and through us as we actively yield our life to Him. We end up doing what we can't.

But it's pretty clear this is not something we grasp immediately. You don't become a giant of the faith overnight. It doesn't work that way. It's a lifelong process of learning to trust God as we yield our lives to Him moment-by-moment, in the big *and* small moments of life.ⁱⁱⁱ That's something the disciples are learning today in Mark 6 through **a teachable moment and a massive power display from Jesus that proves He is God.** Other than the resurrection, this is the only other miracle that all four gospels record. And from this incredible miracle we are going to learn a few lessons today.

“The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. And He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.” (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves. The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together and foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.

When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, “This place is desolate and it is already quite late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy

themselves something to eat.” But He answered them, “You give them something to eat!” And they said to Him, “Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?” And He said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go look!” And when they found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” And He commanded them all to sit down by groups in the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. There were five thousands men who ate the loaves.”

I. **THE DISCIPLES RETURN FROM THEIR COMMISSION TO ISRAEL. (V. 30)**

So as we come back to the gospel of Mark this morning we find that the disciples have returned from their first missionary journeys throughout Israel. Two weeks ago, if you were here, in the beginning of chapter 6 we studied how Jesus commissioned them to share the good news of Christ and the kingdom of God with the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But we never really heard about them returning until now and that’s because Mark is a lot like Paul Harvey. He’ll share the beginning a story, has you wait in suspense for a bit, and then later he’ll give you the rest of the story. Like with Jairus’ daughter needing healing, then the account of the hemorrhagic woman, then he raised Jairus’ daughter back from the dead.

Even though the disciples did much teaching on their journeys, **Jesus really wanted them to learn much along the way.** In fact, I think their going out to minister was as much a lesson for them as it was for the people they were ministering too because that’s one of the big agendas of Jesus right now. When he was rejected by the religious elite, it was the turning point to start heavily investing in them. We’re about one year out from the cross and His focus is to train and prepare these men for ministry, because He’s ascending back to heaven and they’re taking the gospel to the world.

And one of the things they learned on their missionary journeys throughout Israel is that **God would provide for them.** They didn’t have to pack their bags on the journey or have a mule to carry their stuff. They virtually *took nothing* – not even two tunics (shirt-coats) – because they were to expect God to provide them a place to wash their clothes. They took no bread. No money. Nothing. And Jesus questioned them later on in Luke 22:35 about the results of their travels. He said, “When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?” And they’re response was, “No, nothing.” They didn’t lack anything. They have seen God provide for them in incredible ways.

Lesson #1 – God personally provides for our needs moment-by-moment.

Not all at once, but with each moment. Each day. In time, as the clock ticks is when He does it. Think about that: with each passing moment God never forgets you or doesn’t know what you need. He knows what we need before we even ask Him (Mt. 6:8). With each town the disciples came to, they witnessed God do this. Missionaries like Jon & Deb or Hannah & Luke who are here with us, they understand that. And this is the amazing thing about God. So many people today think even if there is a God, He is far out and distant from it and has nothing to do with it – as if He spun the world and set things in motion but then left it to its own. But nothing could be further from the truth. He is a personal God and active in it – so personal and active He became a man and entered into and so personal that He indwells those who believe in Him and works in them and through them. That’s a personal God!

With news about John the Baptist's death and the disciples being tired from their journeys, we come to the next portion where they attempt to get some rest and solitude.

II. **THE ATTEMPT TO GET SOME REST AND SOLITUDE. (VV. 31-34)**

These guys are so busy that they don't even have time to eat. So they try to go out to this secluded place and get some rest which would've been just east of Bethsaida on the north east shore of Galilee. And it's springtime and Passover time (John 6). The grass is green (v.39). And it is important to get some rest, and particularly in ministry. Jesus knows that. Jesus did that. However, that desire for rest and solitude should *never* become such a goal in our life that when the rest doesn't come, it throws us into a tizzy and we forget the real goal. Jesus that day just went right on ministering that day.

This whole part of the account is intensely practical. Put yourself in the shoes of the disciples. You tired, you're worn out, you're hungry. You try to get away for a bit and refresh, but now it's clear that's not going to happen. What do you feel? A little bit of silent anger huh? What about me? When is my time? You just want Jesus to "send them away." But when *a servant like the Savior* (that's our theme for Mark) is thinking like that Savior, they'll **expect** not to get that perfect rest & solitude they dream of and praise the Lord if they do.

You see, one of the things we do that sets us up for frustrations and selfishness, is we come up with all kinds of subtle expectations in our conscience. And when they go unmet, it's not pretty. We say foolish things like "send them away" when we should really be ministering to them. This is important to teach on in marriage counseling. You've got to learn to leave your family and cleave to your new one you're creating. Don't bring into your new family, the expectations of your old one because your wife is not your mom or your husband is not your dad. **Unmet expectations can cause all sorts of friction in our lives** and if we're going to serve Christ well in this life, I think **we've just got to learn to ditch them when we recognize them.**

The challenge from Jesus was never to make it your expectation to find perfect rest. It's to have His peace in the unrest. The challenge is actually to **die daily**. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross **daily** and follow Me" (Lk. 9:23).

❖ **Lesson #2 – Die daily to your unmet expectations.**

If you want to be a servant hearted disciple, it requires a constant death and **one of those deaths is to your constant expectations for how you think your life should be or how you think your day should go.** If you do that, you'll be blessed. This is part of the adventure of the Christian life. Expect the unexpected and watch God come through in it. When we come to the end of our ropes like these disciples, when we feel like we have nothing to offer anymore, and God comes through, we experience great joy for seeing Him work. Because **when we feel like we have nothing to offer anymore, we're often exactly where He wants us.**

But now let get to the miracle & the big lesson.

III. **JESUS & THE DISCIPLES FEED AND SATISFY THE MULTITUDE. (VV. 35-44)**

I bet you've never read that before. Usually it's Jesus feeds the multitude, but as we'll see, I think that's missing the point. And calling it the feeding of the 5,000 is misleading because in that culture they typically only counted the men. Mark, Luke & John record 5,000 and so does Matthew but Matthew adds the phrase, "beside women and children." So with women and children this crowd is like at least twice that big. There could be 10,000-20,000 people here. But it's getting late and people are hungry. So the disciples tell Jesus send the people away so that they can go into the

surrounding towns and buy themselves something to eat. But Jesus replies, “You give them something to eat!” That’s my favorite saying in this passage. “You give them something to eat!” **The “You” is emphasized and the verb “give” is a command, an imperative^v.** Jesus is saying, **“Do what you can’t!”** He wants them to recognize their limitations from a human perspective but not to stop there.

And they get all side-tracked on logistics and finances. Instead of looking up they look around. In John’s gospel Philip cried that even 200 denarii wasn’t enough and that was like 8 months wages. But again, He wants them to put on the “Do what you can’t goggles.” And they’re not virtual reality, they’re reality goggles. **The reality is they couldn’t do it but with Jesus they could.** It’s a very teachable moment. To make them realize their limitations more and clarify for us that no one had brought food, Jesus then says, paraphrased, “Go look and see what you can find for food”. And they only find this young lad who had five barley loaves and two fish. And these aren’t giant French bread loaves or 30 inch walleye. These are some small barley cakes and two small fish, maybe pickled. It’s doesn’t seem like much but Jesus doesn’t need much. In fact, as the Creator of the world He didn’t need anything. But He wants to show them that **He can make much out of little.**

Lesson #3 – Jesus can make much out little or nothing.

There’s a great lesson there for us. You may not think you have much to offer and it’s true. You don’t. But with Jesus, you’ve tapped into the unlimited One and He can do great things! And I want to challenge you this morning to put yourself in this passage. Whatever’s causing you to lose sleep or make your stomach turn or whatever’s eating up all of your time mentally, just look up. Take it to the unlimited One who can make much out of nothing.

And that’s exactly what Jesus does. He takes the five loaves and the two fish, probably in a small wicker-like basket, and **instead of looking around for a solution like the disciples, He looks up!** Like the ostrich, he looks up beyond earthly limitations! Toward heaven and blesses the food. And after He blessed it, it says He just kept giving the disciples loaves and fish to divide among the people. The tense of the words is that He blessed it once but then kept continually giving the food to the disciples who in turn gave it to the people. And they just kept coming back for more and more. It wasn’t like Jesus just gave them enough to get by, He’s literally creating this bread and fish out of no-where and He doesn’t stop until everyone’s gorged themselves on it. And by the end of it, everyone ate and was satisfied – even the teenagers!^v It reminds me of two classic verses. One from Psalm 23, “He makes me lie down in green pastures.” And Philippians 4:19, “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

But let’s boil this whole thing account down. Obviously, Mark is proving Jesus is God and Jesus is proving Himself God. That’s a big deal. Mark is making much of Jesus and so should we. But the text doesn’t let our application stop there. It makes us focus on the disciples. You miss the point if you don’t understand it as a lesson for the disciples. There a huge spotlight on them in this chapter because Jesus is training them (and He’s training us!).

With every other miracle, Jesus just instantly did it on His own. Water to wine? Boom! Making a paralytic walk again? Done! Raising a dead girl? Done! *But this is different.*^{vi} It’s hands-on for the disciples. They’re involved. Imagine being one of them, having to take bread and fish from Jesus and then to the crowd, and then back to Jesus, and then back to the crowd, and then back to Jesus, and then back to the crowd.... They’re involved in it every step of the way.

Big Lesson #4 – If you want the power to live and serve as a disciple it’s a moment-by-moment, continually coming back to Jesus knowing that He will do through you, what He calls you to do, even though you can’t do it.

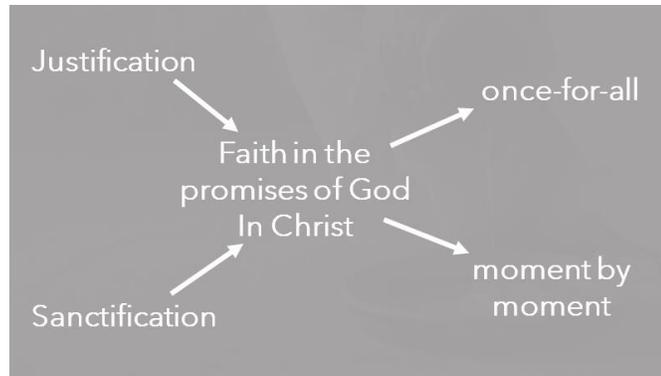
“You give them something to eat” isn’t unreasonable when You’ve got Jesus with you. Because He’s infinite in power, **everyone’s satisfied** and there’s leftovers. Twelve baskets full of leftovers. ***Twelve baskets*, I think, is sending a clear message to the *twelve disciples* that He is God who is able to provide everything they need.** They needed to learn He could **keep providing through every single moment of their lives. He is able to provide spiritually & physically for them and through them – especially when they feel like they have nothing to offer.**

This is such a key to learning to live the Christian life. So much of think we could never do something because we aren’t prepared or we aren’t smart enough, or whatever. That’s the whole point. Jesus comes through when you have nothing to offer. We see this in **salvation**: we come to God empty-handed, with nothing to offer for our salvation. We simply come to Him and trust in His provisions for our sins through the cross. We’re forced to look up and not at ourselves or look around. At that moment, **we are justified (declared righteous) by faith in the promises of God that are in Christ, once and for all.** That is a big moment. He comes through when we can’t.

But after that, for some weird reason, maybe in our zeal to serve the Lord, we start looking around again as if we’re going to live and serve in the Christian life in our own strength. We start living independently of Him. But it’s interesting that in our own self-efforts to please God to work hard at God’s work, we can end up doing the exact opposite if we’re not careful, and it’s because we’ve left the principle of ***faith in Christ*** in the dust of salvation.

This is a little difficult to explain, but **the gospel is just as necessary for salvation as it is for sanctification.** We’re *justified* (saved/declared righteous) through faith in the gospel of Christ – His death, burial and resurrection – but we’re also *sanctified* through faith in the gospel as well – including specifically, *our* death, burial and resurrection with Him. Romans 6 is kind of key for this teaching if you want to reread it later but Romans 6:4 says, “Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.” So we are so connected with Christ through our baptism by the Spirit that we can say, “When He died, I died. When He was buried, we were buried. And when He was raised, we were raised from our spiritual deadness to the glory of the Father.” If you want to live a powerful and fruit-bearing life you’ve got to learn to see beyond what’s visible and see your death with Christ, your life with Christ.

This is something that should be on our minds frequently. Everything that we are in Christ, all of the realities about who we are in Him and what blessed heavenly possessions we have in Him must be remembered daily in some kind of extent. That’s where the walk of the Spirit and the newness of life is found – by constantly meditating on the gospel. Faith in the promises of God in Christ saves us and sanctifies us. The means of justification and sanctification are very much parallel.



Sadly, there are many Christians today who are powerless and frustrated and about to give up because they've either forgotten this reality or have been ignorant of this fact to begin with so they're serving in their own strength. Some have read books that teach you need to have some sort of new "2nd blessing" experience before they can really have the power to live and serve Christ, and so they waiting on it. But you were equipped with everything you need to live the Christian life the moment you were saved so it's not a need for something new – **it's a return to the same old door we walked through at salvation – the door of faith in the finished work of Christ. His death, burial and resurrection doesn't only have meaning for us in the past but in the present as well.** It's faith then and faith now. It's a continual coming back to Jesus in faith. Think of it as **a revolving door**. You just keep coming back through the door of faith.

If we are to be *truly spiritual* people who are filled with the fruit of the Spirit and bearing fruit for God for God, we have got to understand this. If we want to fulfill our vision of bearing fruit, we must understand these things – that **we are the branches and Jesus is the Vine – and apart from Him we cannot bear fruit...** we can do nothing. Zilch. Zero. And there's another type of fruit bearing picture in the Scripture and it's the picture of **Christ as our husband while we, the Church, are the wife.** And we as the wife cannot bear fruit for God, as in the "**fruit of the womb**" without remaining faithful to our Husband, Christ. And if we try to go back to living by the self-effort mentality of the Law, Paul said in Romans 7 that we're committing adultery against Christ and bear fruit for death. "Therefore my brethren you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God." So that picture is a powerful picture as well. You only bear fruit through Christ as branch or a wife. Aren't you glad we chose the branch & Vine vision rather than the husband & wife one for our logo?

But it's these gospel truths, guys, that we have to keep possessing in our hearts and minds. Keep coming back to Jesus by faith and by faith in Him we walk in the newness of the Spirit, the newness of life. One of the reasons why new believers have so much joy is because they still have the truth of the gospel at the forefront of their minds. They're just so excited about what God has done for them, how He has forgiven them for their sins, made them new creations, given them the Holy Spirit, and eternal life, and blessed them with all the blessings of heaven – all promises in Christ – all of those truths on the back of your outline sheet. **By appropriating gospel truths, taking hold of them in your heart and your mind, we're looking up and beyond and really possessing them... and they change us.**

Do you really possess your possessions? It's an important question because the basis of so much sinful reliance of self is that we don't understand how awesome being in Christ is. Francis Schaeffer

said, “The real sin of the Christian is not to possess his possessions by faith.” He can say that because “Whatever is not of faith is sin” (Rom.14:23). You never leave behind the principle of faith in Christ in the dust of salvation. We keep living by faith. **When we possess our possession in Christ, we do what we can’t.**

Possessions in Christ

- I have been **justified** (declared righteous by God) by His grace based on Christ's substitutionary death on the cross for me. (Romans 3:21-24)
- I now have the **righteousness** of God in Christ. (II Corinthians 5:21; Phil. 3:9)
- I have been **forgiven** of all my sins and transgressions because my debt was completely paid by Jesus Christ on the cross. My sin debt has been canceled. (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; 2:13,14)
- I have been made **complete** in Christ. (Colossians 2:9,10)
- I have the **assurance** of never being separated from His love. (Romans 8:31-39)
- I have been given **eternal life** as a free in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:23)
- I died with Christ and **died to the power of sin's rule** over my life. (Romans 6:1-7)
- I am **free forever from condemnation**. (Romans 8:1)
- I have been **placed into Christ** by God's doing and Christ has become to me wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. (I Corinthians 1:30)
- I have been **redeemed by His blood** and am a recipient of His lavish grace. (Eph. 1:7,8; Col. 1:14)
- I have been **sanctified (set apart to God)** in Christ Jesus. (I Corinthians 1:2)
- I have been **united with other believers** in Christ in one body. (Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:13-22)
- I have been **established, anointed, and sealed** by God. (II Cor. 1:21)
- I have been **given the Holy Spirit** as a pledge guaranteeing my inheritance to come. (Ephesians 1:13,14)
- I have been **blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies**. (Ephesians 1:3)
- I was **chosen in Christ** before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blame before Him in love. (Ephesians 1:4)
- I was **predestined** to be adopted as God's son. (Ephesians 1:5)
- **I died with Christ and I have been raised up with Christ**. My life is now hidden with Christ in God. Christ is now my life. (Colossians 3:1-4)
- I have been **made alive** together with Christ. (Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:12,13)
- I have been **raised up and seated with Christ** in the heavenlies. (Ephesians 2:6)
- I have **direct access to God** through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:18)
- I may **approach God with boldness**, freedom and confidence. (Ephesians 3:12)
- I have been **rescued** from the domain of Satan's rule and **transferred** to the kingdom of Christ. (Colossians 1:13)
- **Christ Himself is in me, the hope of glory**. (Colossians 1:27)
- I am **firmly rooted** in Christ and am now being built in Him. (Colossians 2:7)
- I have been **saved and called** according to God's eternal purpose. (II Timothy 1:9)
- I am **God's workmanship** having been created in Christ Jesus for **good works** which God prepared beforehand for me to walk in. (Ephesians 2:10)
- I am **assured of a future resurrection**. (I Corinthians 15:22)
- I have had the **veil removed from my eyes** so I can know the glory of God in Christ. (II Cor. 3:15-4:6)
- I have an **infinite resource** for all my needs to be supplied. (Philippians 4:19)
- I have been **given grace** in Christ and **made exceedingly rich** in Christ. (I Cor. 1:4,5)

ⁱ Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971, 2001, 2011), 4.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bryan Clark, *It is I; Do Not Be Afraid sermon*, www.lincolnberean.org, accessed 5 September 2020.

^{iv} Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insight: Vol. 2* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016), 168.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Bryan Clark.