

GOD'S ENOUGH IN OUR INADEQUACY

John 6:1-15 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson
(Returning to our series in John's Gospel)

Fifty-six and a half years ago, I entered the ministry, in my first three years serving as a college pastor, and the last 53 and a half years, pastoring both alone and with other pastors by my side. Do I ever feel inadequate as a pastor? Every day in one way or another, I do, especially in every time of counseling, when I pray for but especially on Saturday nights and on Sundays. I always kneel to pray before I rehearse at home what I preach on Sunday. I do this both Saturday night and early Sunday morning. I preach my message out loud to an audience of one, before God. Often those rehearsals are my best message renditions. In those rehearsals, I always cry at the right places, and I stop to underline certain parts of my message that I especially want to emphasize. My call to pastor began in earnest when I was sixteen, but God's call became stronger in college, and even stronger as I finished seminary. God's call is why I am standing here today, your pastor since 1976.

Yet my call as a pastor is a call that always is followed in humble obedience because, I know who I am, and I know without the Lord, I am totally inadequate. The way I feel so often in my spirit sounds a lot like what Andrew, Simon Peter's brother said to Jesus about trying to feed thousands with only one little boy's lunch packed perhaps by his mom. How do you fill the hunger of a crowd of 5,000 men plus women and children—most commentators say it was at 20-30 thousand people. To give you an idea, there are currently 29 NBA arenas and only four of them hold barely 20,000. — the average NBA arena is 18,966. That's a bunch of people and Jesus asked Philip, "Where are we going to get enough bread to feed them all, and this He said to test Philip. Andrew said, "There is one boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" That's me! I am always aware of my human inadequacy until I get on my knees and pray before I rehearse my messages at home. I never ever want to be alone in the pulpit without God's Holy Spirit anointing.

This miracle of Jesus is the only miracle reported in all four Gospels, which shows how significant this miracle is. Charles Spurgeon says that "all four of the Gospel writers record it so none of us will forget how much the Lord can do with little things, that are yielded to Him. This miraculous sign was given to bring lost sinners to Jesus, for John 20:30-31 tells us, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you might have life in His name."

The setting for this miracle is found in John 6:1 in two words, "after this." The last noting of time by John is in John 5:1 which says, "After this, there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem." It could have been the Feast of Tabernacles, 5-6 months previously. The other synoptic Gospels tell us by now Jesus had sent out the twelve disciples on a ministry tour. They came back reporting the joy of all God did. Meanwhile, Herod had beheaded John the Baptist,

Jesus' forerunner. These disciples had been so busy ministering beside Jesus and on their ministry tour that they didn't even have time to eat. Mark 6:30 reports, "The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while. For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat." So, the disciples took a boat across the northern end of the Sea of Galilee to a spot in the country north of Bethsaida, the home of Philip, Andrew, and Peter. The problem was that the crowds saw them go and they took off on foot. The trip by boat was about four miles from the west side of the Jordan to the east side. The trip by land which the multitude took was a nine-mile trek. The multitude had to cross the Jordan River at the north end of the Sea of Galilee two miles upstream at the fords of the Jordan at the town of Bethsaida. On the other side of this ford in the Jordan is a large plain at the base of the foothills leading up to the top of Mt. Hermon. This same plain yet today is covered with green, green grass. What do we read in our text. When Jesus saw the boy's lunch, John 6:10 reads, "Jesus said, "Have the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So, the men sat down, about five thousand in number. The disciples must have thought, "So much for getting away to rest." But Jesus felt compassion for them for He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. First, He taught them, (Mark 6:34) and then, He healed their sick ones. After the teaching and healing, then He desired to feed them. The disciples wanted Jesus to dismiss the crowd and let them go find their own lunch. (Mark 6:37) But Jesus said, "You give them something to eat." That is the setting of this sign, this miracle of the feeding of the five thousand.

What does this sign, this miracle teach us. In the main, it teaches us that God uses inadequate people, like you and me, people who surrender to him who they are and what they have, and that God wants to use who we are and what we have to meet the overwhelming needs of the people around us. There are some basic lessons in this sign or miracle that we need to examine a little closer today. I am deeply indebted to the Lord for helping me in this message from a number of men of God including David McLemore, Russell B. Smith, Steven Cole, and Douglas Douma.

JESUS KNOWS ALL PEOPLE EVERYWHERE HAVE CRUSHING NEEDS. (I.)

Notice in John 6:10 that Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Here on this grassy plain were 5,000 men and probably 20-30,000 people who were unlearned on the things of God as Jesus taught them, some He healed, and by now, all were physically hungry. There was no place nearby to buy food. Adding to their desperation was the fact that it was getting later in the day, and the chance to return to their homes or to go find food was nearing an end. Matthew 14:15 tells us it was toward evening and Luke 9:12 says the day was wearing away. Would they all have to sleep on the grass and go to sleep hungry with nothing available? We've all been in those kinds of situations when we are desperate to find a restaurant, a motel, a gas station, or a place to meet our physical needs, but caught in a desolate place.

These people were after physical healing, miracles, and material things, but most of them probably had little time for spiritual food to meet their eternal needs. They were following Jesus to see His signs, wonders, and miracles, and to be fed

material food. They were living for material things that would soon perish, as is true of most people today. Our ultimate goal should be to introduce such needy people to Jesus who can rescue them from sin and the final judgment to come. Most people have no idea how needy they are, and many would deny they even have spiritual needs, or, that they are in need of Jesus to be their Savior.

Evangelist Ray Comfort helps people see their need for Jesus by walking them through God's commandments that they don't even realize they have broken. Most of you have heard his questions, but they bear repeating. He asks people, "Have you ever lied or stolen anything?" "Yes." What do you call someone who lies and steals? "A liar and a thief. "Have you ever taken God's name in vain?" "Yes." The Bible calls that blasphemy. So, you are saying that you're a liar, a thief, and a blasphemer!" "Have you ever been angry with anyone?" "Yes, many times." Jesus said that God views such anger as murder." "Have you ever looked upon someone with lust?" "Yes, of course." Jesus said that to do so is to commit adultery in His sight. So, you are saying you're a liar, a thief, a blasphemer, a murderer, and a multiple adulterer! How do you think it will go when you stand before the holy God at the judgment? It's only when people see how spiritually needy that they are, that they will ever cry out to the Lord Jesus to save them.

If you want to see how needy everyone was on this day, notice that the people were ready to take Jesus by force to make Him king to destroy the Romans and free them from oppression by the Romans. Today, we spend countless billions of dollars as a nation to try to stop cancer and other diseases, and to try to keep our nation at peace and not at war. Most of us only calculate what we can do with our own personal, or national resources. Jesus was testing Philip and the disciples by asking them to feed the multitude. Would they consider He was there? Here, they had the Son of God with them and yet they were blind to the need to trust Jesus for the answer. When a need arises in our homes or at church, how many of us look first in our wallet, to our budget, and we find ourselves no less human than Philip who said, "Two hundred denari or 200 days wages of one man could never feed this multitude. Oh, how bankrupt we all are in our searching only in our human calculations and in our perceived adequacy. How often do we first pray to the Lord Jesus and ask Him what we should do? Oh, how needy we all are! Secondly,

JESUS PURPOSES FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE INADEQUATE LIKE YOU AND ME, TO MEET OTHER PEOPLE'S CRUSHING NEEDS. (II.) In Mark 6:37, Jesus responded to the disciples' suggestion to send the people away because the hour was now late. (Mark 6:36) –Jesus responded, "You give them something to eat." Jesus could turn water into wine, heal a royal official's son from a distance and heal the invalid at the pool of Bethesda who was unable to walk for 38 years. The disciples were beginning to believe that since Jesus was the Son of God, He could have sent manna from heaven as He did during the Exodus. But Jesus this time as often turned to the disciples and asked them, (Mark 6:38) "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five (loaves) and two fish. Then Jesus commanded them all (Mark 6:39-40) to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties.

But Jesus purpose is not just to use who we are and what we have, small as it is. Just this week from Monday to Friday, I have talked at length with six men who know the Lord. Two of them are pastors. Three of them are sensing God calling them in to the pastoral ministry, and one man is a layman. Five of them are out of state. Unsolicited, each of these men who know and love Jesus, told me of how inadequate they feel when it comes to the things of God, whether pastoring, preaching, counseling, or simply living a holy life. One of the men spends three hours a day in the Word of God and has done this for 3 years. One of the men is struggling on whether to stay in his church or to resign. One of the men is retired and says he is so sorry he retired, because he longs to pastor again. One of the men told me his goal in life is to be holy before God. One man said, “You have spoken to me for years about considering the pastorate, but I have resisted because I am not gifted pastorally. Now that man wants to meet with me, soon in another state, because now he knows God is calling him to be a pastor. God is using each of these men who want to be used of God, but each of them told me how inadequate they are. Will God use them? Yes, because God purposes to use us if we are willing to put our inadequate lives, gifts, and talents, and who we are in His hands. Thirdly,

JESUS IS ALL-SUFFICIENT TO MEET PEOPLE’S CRUSHING NEEDS. (III.)

Each of these 12 disciples were being taught to consider the adequacy of their inadequacy in the hands of Jesus. So, what did Jesus do? Did He call on His Father to multiply the loaves and fish? Not at all. Jesus wants us to learn to be thankful for who we are and what God has given us, and then look out. See what God will do. What did Jesus do? Let me read the answer to you from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew 14:19 says, “Taking the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven and said a blessing”—meaning He gave thanks. Mark 6:41 states, “And taking the five 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. Luke 9:16, we read, “And taking the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them.” And what does John 6:11 say? We read, “Jesus then took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted.”

Hear the lesson of Jesus all-sufficiency. It is off-loaded into our lives, into our laps, and onto our lips when we do as Jesus did and ask God to bless the little boy’s lunch, the inadequate weakness that is us. Be certain that this lesson of Jesus giving thanks is not a small thing at all. Why? Read ahead to our text, hopefully for two weeks from today, found in John 6:23. This is after Jesus walked on the sea. We read, “Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks.” Those are strange words. We don’t read “where the Lord miraculously fed 5,000,” or near the place where the Lord worked a great sign and wonder.” Rather, John wrote that they came near the place where they all were fed after the Lord had given thanks.”

Notice as Jesus gave thanks, “be thankful for what you have to put in Jesus’ hands. Jesus gave thanks for the five loaves and the two fish. The miracle had not yet

occurred. Jesus offered thanks for the blessing about to happen. Jesus knew full well what he was about to do, but neither the disciples nor the multitude had a clue what would come next. All the people could see was Jesus offering thanks for a most meager meal. Discontent is our middle name along with a critical spirit when we have a meager fare. We live in a culture of discontent. Jesus never told the people to give thanks or feel thankful. He just gave thanks for God's provision given to him by a boy who gave his lunch to Andrew who gave it to Jesus. None of the Gospel writers give us any idea how this miracle happened. Did the food re-constitute as it was passed around? Did it stretch as each person tore off a piece of bread or fish? We aren't told how it happened but that it happened. The miracle happening will never be explained unless Jesus does it in Glory. Let me simply tell you all—Stop calculating how God is going to make things happen and how He will supply or by whom or by what means or by what method. When Jesus provides from His all-sufficiency so abundantly, He often does it through totally unexpected means. Our challenge is to keep our hearts and minds open enough to receive the abundant blessings He distributes when He thanks the Father for what we have given Him to use. Are we learning to thank God for what we have? Legendary Alabama Coach Bear Bryant, on the first day his recruited freshmen arrived in Alabama, called them together and asked them, "Have you called your folks yet to thank them? The recruits stared at him. Then he said, "No one ever got to this level without the help of others. Call your folks, Thank them. Fourthly,

JESUS MEETS PEOPLE'S CRUSHING NEEDS THROUGH INADEQUATE PEOPLE WHO SURRENDER THEIR INADEQUACY TO HIM. (IV.) Notice who passed out the food to the multitude. We read in Luke 9:16, "Then Jesus broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces." Lessons abound here. Notice Jesus is in control of every situation. Jesus is more concerned for needy people than we are. Jesus is not limited by our inadequate resources. Jesus doesn't just barely meet needs. He abundantly supplies all we need and even more than we want. Jesus is sufficient not only for physical needs, but especially for spiritual needs. Notice in John 6:14. "When the people saw the sign that He had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world." Now Jesus was usually the meeting of physical needs to open the eyes of the blind and needy multitude to their spiritual need for Messiah, for that is who Jesus was, is, and ever will be.

How does Jesus use inadequate people? The lesson is Jesus uses people to meet people's needs. He uses inadequate people to meet people's needs. Jesus uses inadequate people who yield their inadequate resources to Him. Amazingly, when Jesus uses each of us inadequate vessels to meet the needs of people, He always provides a basketful of leftovers for our own needs. And as with the woman at the well in John 4:32, Jesus provides not only physical supplies for us, but spiritual meat for us to eat that we know nothing about. God's abundance must never be wasted. Never waste what you have. Steven Cole once said, "Give out the Bread of Life to others. Don't live for yourself. Live to be used of God and you'll be satisfied with a basketful of the Living Bread for yourself." Amen.