

Jesus' generosity test.

Text: John 6:1-15 for 7/29/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Feast was near. ⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" ⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹ "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. ¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

Of all of Jesus' miracles the one we are taking some time to study today is perhaps the most well-known: Jesus feeding of the five thousand. It is one of the few miracles of Jesus that is recorded by all four of the gospel writers. But for as well-known as this miracle may be it is also one of the most often misunderstood of Jesus' miracles.

We might think it is easy enough to figure out what Jesus is doing there. There is a crowd of hungry people who are hungry, and Jesus feeds them. But is that it, or is there something more going on here? I don't want you to miss what is really happening here. Jesus is not just feeding people, he is teaching, and he is using a specific tool to do that teaching. Jesus is giving a test, and that test is not just for his disciples, it is also for us. What is happening in this portion of God's word is ...

Theme: Jesus' generosity test.

- I. He tests our trust in his generosity
- II. He tests our generosity

The first person Jesus gives his test to is Philip. We are told, **When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him** (vs. 5,6). Jesus was not testing Philip's knowledge of the best place to buy bread. He is testing Philip's generosity. What is Philip willing to give trusting that Jesus would provide for Philip? What is Philip's answer to this test? **"Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite"** (v. 7)!

Why eight month's wages? That may have been how much money the disciples had in the group's money bag. Philip may have done a quick calculation and realizes that money would not be enough. Even if they give everyone only one bite of bread it still wouldn't be enough money. So, Philip stops the test right there. He doesn't offer to buy some bread. He doesn't offer a portion of the money to Jesus and say, "I trust that you can do something with this." Philip simply says, "Jesus, this won't work."

So, what's causing Philip to stop? Perhaps fear. If they used all the money to feed the

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crowd what would be left for the disciples to buy food? Maybe he thought what Jesus was asking was impossible, so why even bother. Perhaps it was greed. Philip may have thought, "Why should we use OUR money to serve these people." Philip appears to be trusting in the almighty dollar more than he was trusting in Jesus. Philip's grade on the test? He failed.

But Philip was not the only one being tested. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was also taking the same test. At first it looks like he might pass. Andrew is willing to entrust something to Jesus. In response to Jesus' question of where to get bread Andrew says, "**Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish**" (v. 9a). Andrew finds some food that is available from a young boy, and then Andrew entrusts that food to Jesus to help feed the people. So far, so good.

But then Andrew stumbles. He says, "**But how far will they go among so many**" (v. 9b)? Really Andrew? Andrew was at the wedding in Cana when Jesus turned the water into wine. And Jesus didn't create just a little bit of wine, but gallons upon gallons of wine! But this wasn't a wedding with just a few hundred people. Andrew saw the huge crowd: five thousand men plus women and children. Then Andrew looked at that little bit of food, and he just couldn't see how this was going to work. Andrew was trusting in his senses and his human reason instead of fully trusting Jesus. Andrew's grade? He failed too.

How well would you and I do on Jesus' generosity test? Jesus wants us to continue to feed people. He wants us to care for the physical and spiritual needs of fellow believers. He wants us to take the life-giving food of the gospel out into our neighborhood and into the world to feed others as well.

Do we entrust what we have to Jesus, trusting that he is going to provide more than enough for everyone. Or like Philip do we throw up our hands and say, "Eight months of my wages wouldn't be enough to do even a little good, so why bother"? What might stop us from continuing the test? Is it the fear of not having enough? Is it the thought that something is impossible, so why bother (even though nothing is impossible with God)? Or is it simply greed. We think, "It's my money, so I will do what I want with it." Do we find ourselves trusting our money more than Jesus?

Maybe, sometimes like Andrew, do we find our senses getting in the way? We may be willing to give something to Jesus, but we just don't see how it is going to help. For example: Right now, our larger church body, the Wisconsin Synod, is trying to raise money to start some new programs to help smaller churches like ours, churches that are struggling to grow. We might think, "Sure, I could give a little something to that, but what good will the little bit I give do to help the many small churches in our synod? Like trying to feed a crowd of thousands of people with a few loaves of bread we may wonder, "How can these few dollars that I give to Jesus make any difference?" Sometimes we trust our senses, or our human reason, more than we trust our Lord.

That is why Jesus gives us this test. He is using it to show us where we fall short. That's what sin is, it's falling short of the perfection God demands to gain entrance into his heaven. Jesus is trying to open our eyes to the reality that we fall short every single day. With this test he helps us to see why we need him. He uses the test to show us our sin, and then he goes on to show us that he is our Savior.

First, Jesus displays his power to generously provide. John tells us that Jesus **took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by**

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those who had eaten (vs. 11-13).

Jesus took something very inadequate and turned it into extreme abundance. But Jesus' generosity is more than just an example for us. It was done in place of our often-lacking generosity. Christ's perfect giving was offered up in place of our stubborn stinginess. Our Lord lived what we could not, and then he died so that we would not die eternally. When Jesus gave his life on the cross he displayed his greatest generosity: full and free forgiveness of our sins, forgiveness found only through faith in Christ. God the Father also shows his generosity by raising Jesus from the dead, opening the gates of heaven, and freely offering his Son's forgiveness to the entire world. God offers you a forgiveness that will always be more than enough to cover all of your sins. Through this test, Jesus tests and strengthens our trust in his generosity.

Yet, for us, the test doesn't end there. After strengthening our trust in his ability to generously provide for us, Jesus goes on to test our generosity. Jesus continues his test by blessing us with an abundance. Jesus didn't provide "just enough" food for that crowd. He provided an abundance of food. We are told that there were twelve baskets full of bread left over even after thousands of people had eaten from those five loaves.

Our Lord treats us no differently. Think of all of the things that God has provided for your daily life: Food, drink, clothing, shelter. Those are the things you need to live; to survive. Now look again at your life. How much more has God provided for you than just the basics? Think of all of the material possessions he gives us: Places to live and all we need to live there, dishes, furniture, decorations in our rooms, more than enough clothes to wear, and cars in the driveway or garage (sometimes more than one). God graciously opens his hand and provides all these things for us.

But God's abundance doesn't stop there. He provides each of us with mental abilities: the ability to speak and read and write. The ability to use our minds to figure things out. Some of us he has blessed with physical abilities: the ability to play sports, or music, or to work with our hands to plant and build. And as if all of this were somehow not enough God also pours out on us Spiritual blessings. Through his saving word God pours out on us his Holy Spirit, who fills us with knowledge and understanding that goes beyond human thoughts and words. The Spirit blesses us with faith: A faith that trusts in Jesus for forgiveness even when our human reason may tell us not to trust.

God is generous to us so that we can be generous to others. Having blessed us with his abundance, God then blesses us with opportunities: Opportunities to give. God puts us where we can serve him by serving others. Do you remember how the disciples came to be on that hillside with Jesus? We heard in our Gospel reading from last week that Jesus told his disciples to come with him so that they could get some rest. It was Jesus who brought them there. It was Jesus who put them there. Christ was giving them an opportunity to share his generosity to them with others.

Where does Jesus put you on a daily basis? Who does Jesus put you in contact with as you go about your day to day life? Is your daily contact with your spouse and children? Maybe you daily come in contact with coworkers, fellow students, or people in your neighborhood and community. And how has Jesus abundantly provided for you? As you think about the answer to those questions ask yourself one more: How can I be generous to others with that which my Lord has been so generous to me?

Being generous isn't always easy. Because of our sinful nature being generous is something we are going to wrestle with often. But when we struggle we can turn to our Lord for help. When our generosity is lacking, we can turn to Jesus for forgiveness. We can pray to

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our Lord for the strength to give as he gives. We know he will answer that prayer, and when he does he will provide for us abundantly.

As we take one last look at this miracle of Jesus just keep in mind, this has been a test. This has been Jesus' generosity test. May this test open our eyes to our need for forgiveness which only our Savior can provide. May this test open our hearts to share with others all the goodness our Lord pours out into our lives. May our faith be moved to give as God has given to us. For God has blessed us with his heavenly kingdom, and with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Amen.