

When I hold a basketball in my hands, it's merely a basketball, but when you place that same basketball in the hands of LeBron James or Stephen Curry, it turns into NBA championships. Put a golf club in any of our hands, and it's merely a golf club, but when you place that same golf club in the hands of Dustin Johnson or Jordan Spieth, it turns him into the best golfer in the world. A paintbrush in my hands might result in a pretty good picture if it's paint by numbers, but when a paintbrush was placed in the hands of Renoir, it turned into incredible works of art. A gun placed in the hands of a member of our Open Bible Defender small group is a tool used for sport or obtaining food, but when placed in the hands of a terrorist, that same gun becomes a weapon of destruction. How is it that the same instruments and the same tools can bring about such differing degrees of results? Quite simply, it depends upon who is holding them and how they're being used. Today we are going to see that when something is in the hands of Jesus, all of our needs are met, both physical and spiritual. Consider Leave It All In His Hands.":

Our story this morning is an excellent example of what can happen and how things can be used when we place them in the hands of God. The scene is a grassy meadow near Bethsaida Julias across the Sea of Galilee from Capernaum. Jesus has been preaching and healing the sick much of the day. He has retreated in order to get some rest and recharge his batteries, but when he looks up, the crowd has followed him. He turns to Philip, because this is Philip's old stomping grounds, "Where can we buy bread for these people?" Somewhat quizzically, Philip replies, *"It would take eight months of a man's wages and that would not buy enough bread for each to have one bite!"* Philip did a little cost analysis. His anxiety went into overdrive. More thoughts probably plagued his mind. How are we going to transport the food out here? How are we going to keep it warm? Who's going to clean up the mess? Who's going to pay for the liability insurance?"

What Philip had forgotten was who was there with them -- Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is the guy who can turn stones to bread. He's standing right there and they're looking for a Colonel Sanders. All of a sudden, Andrew shows up. He says, "Hey guys, there's a little boy here who has 5 barley loaves and two fish."

I've often wondered what it must've been like to be that little boy? When he got up that morning, he was probably planning to spend the day fishing or playing with his friends. As he's on his way out the door, his mother hollers to him, "Did you pack a lunch?" "Aaawww, Mom." "Get back in here right now, young man. You know you can't be out all day and not have anything with you to eat. You just sit right there while I make you some lunch." She pulls out the little lunch basket, and prepares him a lunch of five loaves and two fish. Now, these loaves of bread were not your top of the line sour dough loaves of bread. They were barley loaves, which was the cheapest of all breads; and his fish wasn't salmon or tuna, it was pickled sardines.

On his way to meet his buddies, he sees this large crowd gathering, and he asks, "What's going on?" "See that guy up there? That's Jesus of Nazareth. He is an incredible teacher, and he can heal people. We all want to hear him preach and see him heal people."

Intrigued, the young boy forgets about meeting up with his friends, and he begins to listen to Jesus preach. It is late in the day, and as he stands in a large group in front of Jesus, the disciples start walking through the crowd. Andrew sees the boy and says to Jesus, "Jesus, this young boy has 5 barley loaves and two fish." The boy watches in amazement as Jesus takes his lunch- his stinky, old, unappreciated barley loaves and sardines- and turns it into lunch for 5,000 men plus women and children, perhaps 15,000 people. He can hardly wait to get home and tell his mother what happened.

What do we learn from this story? First, we need to trust that Jesus can help us handle any problem. But what did the disciples do in this text? They went first to themselves as they tried to squeeze an answer out of logic and reason and ingenuity. And they came up empty. They had a battleship of a problem which they were trying to sink with spitballs. We do the same. We always tend to look to a doctor, a counselor, a pill, or some form of recreation to deal with our problems. In other words, I'll figure out a way to handle the problem with the resources available to me.

Jesus tries to show his disciples that their resources to handle problems just won't work. In verse 5 He says to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for He already had in mind what he was going to do."

Why did Jesus do this? He's God. He could have just rained manna out of heaven. He'd done that before. Why did He ask that question? He did it to test them, to have them refocus on who alone can help them. The disciples basically responded, "Lord, this is impossible! It's humanly impossible. It's financially impossible. It's practically impossible! We can't do this!"

Has God ever asked you to do anything impossible? If you've been a believer for any length of time I guarantee you, He probably has. Why? God loves to ask His children to do the impossible. Why? He wants to stretch your faith. He wants to test you. He wants you to see that He can be trustworthy, that He can help you deal with every jam you get yourself into in this life. Jesus doesn't sweat any problem we face. He has a plan ready to go. He obviously knew they were going to get hungry and He knew what He was going to do. But He was just testing the disciples.

This next month, you're going to have some problems come up in your life that you don't have the slightest idea are going to come up. A crisis is a crisis partially because it takes you by surprise. Some of you are going to get that phone call in the middle of the night that gets your heart racing and your adrenalin pumping and you hear that there's been an accident. Or you hear that a loved one has been taken to the hospital or has passed away. Or you're going to hear that your child or grandchild has done something despicable. You don't know what those problems are.

You don't know what those problems are. That's part of what makes them problems. They're going to come up. But, God knows the answer before you even know the problem. He's not going to be surprised by it. He's not going to be blown away by it. You come to Him and say, "God, You knew this was coming and so obviously You knew the answer even before I knew the problem."

I come to Him and admit I have a need and I trust that Jesus will come through and help me deal with it. And he will give me more than I need to face those problems. Our text says that Jesus had them gather the pieces of bread that were left over, and that they gathered 12 baskets full of leftovers. Isn't it true, that our Lord Jesus Christ has richly blessed us in the United States, with a lot more than we actually need. That is His nature. We hold him to the promise in Scripture that says, "I have been old, and I have been young, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their seed begging bread!" God takes care of Christians who love and serve Him. As Jesus tells us too, if I take care of the birds of the field, who don't know where their next meal is coming from, I will surely take care of you, O you of little faith.

But one thing, we need to remember, is that Jesus doesn't want us to make the focus of our lives, filling our stomachs with food and possessions. That is not the reason He came into the world. Note in our text when the people wanted to make him their Bread King, what Jesus did. Our text says, "Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force,

withdrew again to a mountain by himself. Jesus wanted them to recognize He was the Son of God, and that his real mission was to save mankind from their sins. Jesus wants us to focus in on the real reason He came.

George Orwell once described the human nature in this way. He wrote of a wasp that was sucking a spot of jam on his plate, when he took a butter knife and cut the insect in half. The wasp paid no attention, though. He merely went on with his meal, while a tiny stream of jam trickled out of his severed esophagus. Only when he tried to fly away did he realize what had happened to him.

Many people have a lot in common with that wasp. It seems the majority of people in life could care less about spiritual things. They refuse to take such things seriously. It is not a popular notion to believe in the Bible. Too many people are too focused on greed and are unaware of it, so they selfishly continue to consume life's sweetness. Only when it's time to fly away will they grasp their condition.

Jesus wanted to be known not as a bread king, who provided just good wholesome food to eat, but rather wanted to be known as the bread of life. In fact, we can see his real mission in how a normal loaf of bread comes into being. Consider how bread is made. Wheat grows in the field, then it is cut down, winnowed, and ground into flour. It passes through the fire of the oven and is then distributed around the world. Only by this process does bread become bread. Each step is essential. Eliminate the plant, and you have no wheat. Eliminate the winnowing, and you have no flour. Eliminate the fire, and you have no product. Eliminate the distribution and you have no satisfaction.

Now consider Jesus. He grew up as a small plant before the Lord. But like wheat, he was cut down. Like chaff he was pounded and beaten. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. And like bread he passed through the fire. On the cross he passed through the fire of God's anger, not because of his sin, but because of ours. Jesus experienced every part in the process of making bread: the growing, the pounding, the firing. The final process, the distribution, he leaves to us. WE are the distributors. We can't force people to eat the bread, but we can make sure they have it.

Jesus is the Bread – the nourishment – from God. He is the one who offers forgiveness. He offers peace and freedom from guilt and shame. And this is nourishment we need to partake of daily. Sadly, our sinful hearts are tempted to leave this living bread on the table as a leftover. Have you ever gone to a restaurant and gotten an order of bread with dinner? When the breadbasket arrives everyone is excited at first. People will munch down one or two pieces in a matter of minutes. That's until the main course comes, though. And the rest of the bread remains untouched. At the end of the meal, people don't even want to look at the bread, nor do they ask to take it home in a doggy bag.

We are tempted to treat Christ – the Living Bread – in the same way. At times, we welcome him until something better comes along. We need to take Jesus home with us. We need to continue to feed upon his Word.

No one expected anything from those five barley loaves and two sardines, especially that little boy who begrudgingly left the house that morning with his lunch, but it just goes to show the incredible places of growth, healing, and nourishment that becomes ours when our trust is in the hands of Jesus. Truly, my time is in your hands, Oh Lord. Amen.

Dear Jesus,

It seems that when we face problems in life, we are quick to look to our own human resources to handle these problems. We seem to think if we can just take the right pill, or follow a set of directives from a counselor or doctor, all our problems will be solved. It is so easy to leave you out of the equation. Forgive us for the many times we look to ourselves, to our own resources to handle life issues. Remind us again today, how you are ready and willing to help us overcome whatever trouble or problem we face. Give us more resolve to get on our knees and bring our requests regularly to you in prayer. Keep us aware of the fact that you know the answer to our problems before we even know what the problem may be. Thanks so much for being there for us. You give us the strength we need to overcome any problems we face in this life, plus you even give us more than we actually need to face those problems.

Let us as a congregation, never lose focus on what our primary mission here is at Open Bible. We are not here to simply have a food pantry for the poor, help people better manage their finances, or just be a nice meeting place where great friendships can develop. We are here to focus in on your real reason for coming into this world, to save us from our sins. You are the Bread of Life who gives us an abundant life, a forgiven life, even eternal life in heaven. May that message always be at the forefront of Open Bible. In addition, may we not hoard this message to ourselves, but be distributors to others, so that their deep spiritual hunger may be truly satisfied and they may also share in eternal life with us in heaven oneday.