

95-06-25Mark

We have of assembling ourselves together in freedom. We thank you that you have preserved for us the inspired words of Scripture. You have gifted us with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

You have sanctified us positionally and you have given us the means by which we can be sanctified in this life. And we pray now that as we study the truth of your Word, that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts, that we will be edified and built up by these things, and that we will be rebuked and corrected and instructed in righteousness so that we may be mature and thoroughly furnished for every good work. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. We are in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 6. We are halfway through. I was teasing my brother who visited last week that we only got 2,500 out of the 5,000 fed thus far.

We are halfway through the feeding of the 5,000. And we saw last week, we reviewed the context in which this is placed. One of the beauties of the narrative portions of Scripture, which includes our Gospels, is the way that God the Holy Spirit has woven together the fabric of these accounts.

They are not a hodgepodge. They are not just an isolated collection of stories and anecdotes and snippets of teaching from Jesus' ministry. Each of the narrative sections of Scripture, whether it is the Old Testament or the New, has been carefully, exquisitely crafted by God.

It is the greatest literature that has ever existed. It uses the tools that good literature uses. It develops some characters and not others.

It develops some episodes and not others. It builds up the tension and the climax in a story, and then there is a release and what they call a denouement, a resolution of the various things that have come up. God has used every channel that is available in this literature to communicate with us.

So we have the straightforward statements of Scripture, and we have things going on at many different levels that tie together and weave together the Word of God into an integrated whole. We know that the Bible is 66 books written over a period of some 2,000 years, and at least the record that it covers covers over 2,000 years, and yet every part is self-consistent and reflects the same God with the same plan and the same purpose throughout human history. And so it is a great, exciting thing to take a look at individual parts of the Word of God and see the way that God weaves these things together, trying to communicate.

Last week I pointed out sort of a dry academic morsel of information from a textbook on teaching, *The Essence of Good Teaching*, and the author spoke of the fact that if you want to teach in a way that people will retain and remember what they learn, and this goes for anything. I was thinking about this, you know, as we get, as we get I say, as you all have gotten older faster than I have, but in the latter part of our lives all of us begin to see the diminishing of our capacities,

physical and mental. And one of the things that's very frustrating is to not have the memory that you once had, to not have the short-term recall and to suddenly have to go back and count pills to see did I take my medicine this morning or not, and that sort of thing.

We are frustrated by the lack of memory. One of the things that happens is the sheer accumulation of experience. One of the ways that we remember things is by their uniqueness.

An episode happens that isn't like what happened yesterday or the day before, and it sticks in our mind because it's different. And we compare it to our previous experience, and of course the longer you live and the more days you have, the more likely it is that today is going to be like yesterday and the day before. And so things are so similar they don't stand out in our mind, and this is part of what contributes to loss of short-term memory in old age.

In addition to the physiological changes, there is a sameness because as our capacities diminish and as our horizons shrink in, day after day after day seems very much the same. And that sameness, we've opened that bottle and we've taken those pills out for hundreds and hundreds of days, and so did we do it today? Well, what background can we set that against to remember it? There's not a hook to say, well, today it was different because when I took the pill out it was green instead of red. If you had opened up your pills and they were a different color today than they were yesterday, you'd remember that.

You'd say, I took my pill because I remember it was green today. So the point there is learning and memory are related to uniqueness, seeing what is new and different about a particular thing, and it sticks in our mind. You may have driven hundreds of miles on the highway, but you remember when you see a wreck happen before your eyes.

You remember the spot and you remember the circumstances. Why? Because it's different, it's unique, it's exceptional, and it sticks in our mind. And so God is going to use these things.

This is a natural part of the way God made us. And so Jesus is going to use sign ministries, miracles and healings and exceptional, extraordinary events to try to drive home the teachings and drive home the principles that he is weaving into his ministry. And so he will teach a principle and then it will be illustrated.

The disciples will hear him emphasize the importance of faith and then they're going to get a test in it. And this is something that happens in our own life. I have watched with some amusement once I was made aware of this principle that God will teach us something and then sort of test us over it.

And I challenge you to try this if you haven't already. The things that we study, the things that you learn, when you see a principle from the Word of God and you're reminded of it and refreshed on it, watch in the next several days and see if God doesn't construct a circumstance where you have the chance to put that into practice. God knows how we learn.

He knows how we remember and it is his goal for us to remember and apply the things he teaches us. So when we see a principle from the Word of God that the way to meet a challenge is with faith and not with fear, you can count on having a challenge that will provoke you, tempt you to be afraid sometime very soon after that. And it's a chance to say, okay, now it's time to apply what we learned.

Now, I hope you don't go out this afternoon and have all kinds of scary circumstances, scary events happen to you that challenge you for fear versus faith. But this is what Jesus does and we see it illustrated in the lives of the disciples. We saw the seed parables, those three stories that revolved around soil and seeds and the crop that is the result.

And Jesus took that principle and turned it sideways and turned it upside down and looked at it from different perspectives, teaching us that the power in God's plan resides with God. It's God's power that energizes us. It's God's power that brings God's plan to fruition.

We can see the goals of God's plan in many cases. We know that God wants the world to be evangelized. We know that God wants the naked to be clothed, the thirsty to be given a drink, the sick and imprisoned to be visited.

We know that these are part of the objectives in God's plan. But there are several different ways to pursue those objectives and there's only one right way and that's in the power of God. A believer that has not been transformed in his thinking and hasn't had the peace of God and the love of God and the joy of God created inside his soul may go out with the best of intentions and try to accomplish that goal.

But it isn't God's way. It's not God's power that is energizing and bringing to fruition that particular goal. And this is why we have in the seed parables the 30-fold, the 60-fold and the 100-fold field.

To what extent do we let God's seed sink in and do its work? That is the extent to which we produce fruit in God's plan. Our Sunday school class this morning looked at the episode where David has become king and has moved his capital to Jerusalem. And his objective is to bring the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence and God's power in Israel.

He wants to bring that Ark into Jerusalem. That's a good thing. It is the will of God that the Ark and the center of worship be in Jerusalem.

But when David goes to carry out that purpose, he gets a little bit sloppy. He doesn't go back and check the details of the proper movement of the Ark. He constructs a new cart and yokes some nice, strong oxen to it.

And we have seen in going through 1 Samuel that not long before in that book, we saw the Philistines construct an Ark and hook oxen to it to move the Ark. This was the Philistine way of moving the Ark. This wasn't God's way of moving it.

God has specific instructions. I have had you construct the Ark with rings on the side and there are long wooden poles. Only the Levites can approach.

Only the Levites can insert the rods and lift and carry the Ark to its destination. David had a good objective. He had a good purpose.

He had the best of intentions. But in carrying out his purpose, he didn't conform himself to the Word of God. And as a result, this great outburst of the wrath of God came down and Uzzah was left dead in the roadside.

A shocking and powerful reminder of the importance of not only seeking God's purposes, but fulfilling those purposes God's way. That's what Jesus is trying to get across to the disciples here. He has said, the purpose is for you to go and preach.

You shall be my witnesses. I'm sending you out in disciple teams and I want you to go out. Don't take a staff.

Don't take bread. Don't take money in your money belt. You will do this in the power of God.

This is going to be a sign ministry. You will serve as witnesses that Israel must change their minds. They've got to make God and His Word the object of their faith.

They've got to remember that they are God's people and that's the message. Change your mind. The kingdom of God is at hand.

That's the message that they were sent out with. So here is Jesus now reinforcing that. And we see them going across the sea and the storm comes up.

And Jesus is sleeping in the rear of the boat. Here's an opportunity. We don't immediately connect it with the seed parables.

But here is an opportunity to decide. Am I going to bail the boat? Am I going to depend on my seamanship? And what can I throw out of the boat to get across the lake? Am I going to stop and think God has a purpose? Jesus said we're going to the other side. Or am I going to think in human terms and think humanly speaking, I'm in a crisis.

I've never seen a storm like this. We are about to perish. What can we do? And panic and fear take over.

And there's no thought of God's plan and God's purpose and what provision God has made. Jesus sends the disciples out and through their ministry, people are healed and demons are cast out. The disciples at this point, at the feeding of the 5,000, they have been out on their first missionary trip.

These six teams have gone out. The power of God has flowed through them just like it flows through the Lord Jesus Christ. They have healed.

They have cast out demons. The power of God has been channeled and directed through their ministry. They have experience with this.

So now, they've returned and they give their report and they rest up. And Jesus comes out from the mountain retreat and here are the scattered flock of Israel on the hillside. We saw that wonderful passage in Ezekiel chapter 34 that talks about the failure of the shepherds in Israel and how the flock was scattered.

And God says, I Myself will gather My sheep. I will cause them to lie down in the pastures and I will feed them. And what a reminder it is as we see Jesus collecting this flock and having them recline on the hillside and He will feed them.

He literally fulfills the picture that is given in the Old Testament. This idea of sheep without a shepherd occurs throughout the Old Testament and it reminds us of what is going on with the feeding of the 5,000. I have seen and heard more misapplications of this story.

As you know, we have made an emphasis of the fact that it isn't our numerical size that is important, it is our individual faithfulness. There is this old saying, it isn't the size of the dog in the fight, it is the size of the fight in the dog. You have heard that, right? That is provenance here in Oklahoma and Arkansas and this part of the country.

You hear that a lot. In the spiritual realm, it isn't the size of the congregation that has the faith. It is the size of the faith in the congregation.

We have emphasized that and we have stressed that because God has put us in a challenging circumstance. We are not as large as we once were. We are not as large as we someday will be.

Right now, we are in a testing phase and we are somewhat small and so we have been trying to focus on that. Well, I got a communication from someone who knew that we had this emphasis and so forth and they said, well, I have heard too often people say that numbers aren't important. I am sure glad that Jesus was thinking about numbers when He fed the 5,000.

Now, is this a valid conclusion to draw from the feeding of the 5,000? Jesus doesn't stress the number. Jesus stresses the power of God. It isn't the multitude and their size that is the issue.

It is the lack of provision that God causes to fill the need. That's the issue and that's the point. My reason to bring that up is we want to be careful to catch what Jesus is trying to teach us here and not miss it and not have it get lost in a superficial reading.

Jesus has made an issue of faith. In the presence of faith, the power of God is activated. Remember when Jesus went to Nazareth and they didn't believe in Him? This is the son of the

carpenter.

Aren't his brothers and sisters with us? And what was the result? He could do no great work there except that He laid His hands on a few ailing people and healed them. Why is it that Jesus could do no great work in Nazareth? Had He somehow lost His divine power? Had He lost His connection with the Holy Spirit? Had God suddenly withdrawn Himself from Jesus' ministry in Nazareth? What was the limiting factor? It wasn't that the power of God had failed. It was the lack of faith.

The power of God is activated in the presence of faith. We saw this just this past Wednesday when we looked at the woman with the issue of blood. She reaches out in faith and touches the hem of His garment.

There was nothing magical about Jesus' clothes. Hundreds of people in that crowd bumped up against Jesus. Jesus says, Who touched Me? I perceive that power has gone out from Me.

Someone touched Me. And the disciples say, Lord, how can you ask that question? Who in this crowd has not touched You? You've been bumping up against people all day. Everyone has touched You.

But the touch that activated the power of God was the touch of faith. The woman had touched the presence of Jesus and she said in her heart, If I touch even His garment, I will be made well. She recognized who Jesus was and she believed it.

And that touch was unique in the crowd. That faith activated the power of God in her case. And her faith made her whole.

And Jesus told her so. That's the issue. That's what Jesus is presenting in different contexts and in different ways to the disciples.

He did it in the episode with the boat. He did it in the episode with the demon-possessed man. He did it with the woman with the issue of blood.

He did it with Jairus' daughter. And now this group of people have come to Him in the mountainside and they have followed Him a great distance. They have traveled a long ways.

They overshot the destination. They went beyond and then they came back and backtracked and found Him there on the mountainside. And Jesus sees them and He says, They are like sheep without a shepherd.

The first place that this occurs in the Bible is back in the words of Moses. Moses says this in Numbers 27. Moses looks at Israel and you know all the trouble that he had in his leadership role in Israel early on his father-in-law Jethro saw that Moses was having difficulty keeping control over this huge group of people and he said, You need to delegate a little bit.

You need to set up a system of judges in Israel who will carry out a lot of these administrative functions. So Moses is well aware of the challenges of leadership in Israel. And in Numbers 27, verse 17, Moses goes to the Lord and he realizes that he is not going to be around always.

And Moses speaks to the Lord saying, Let the Lord the God of the spirits of all flesh set a man over the congregation who may go out before them and go in before them who may lead them out and bring them in in order that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd. Moses knew that without strong leadership in Israel the flock would scatter. And he goes to the Lord and he prays.

And this is a legitimate prayer for us to pray. What a day and age we live in. We look at the ranks of Christianity.

We look at believers scattered all over the globe. And we see so many who are scattered, spiritually don't have direction, who are not being fed by the shepherds commissioned to feed them. What a need there is today for good shepherds.

What a need there is for spiritual leadership in Christian circles. And this is a legitimate prayer. Moses goes and says, Lord, raise up someone to lead.

Raise up someone to provide that shepherding function so that they are not like sheep without a shepherd. In Jeremiah chapter 50, verses 6 and 7, this same figure is used as a picture of discipline. When Israel fails to obey and fails to heed the voice of the Lord, they become like sheep that are scattered.

They are scattered throughout the nations even. And the prophecy is that one day God will gather them again. And that, of course, is what's going on in Ezekiel chapter 34.

We recall Psalm 23. What is the function of the good shepherd? The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not lack.

The shepherd ensures that the sheep are nourished, that they are provided for, that they are given the nourishment they need. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. We've said and quoted and heard the 23rd Psalm so often that we sometimes don't let the impact of the words sink in.

Back here in Mark chapter 6, here are the hungry multitudes. And in verse 39 of chapter 6, He commanded to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. He makes me to lie down in green pastures.

He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul. When Jesus saw these people scattered, He sat them down and He taught them many things.

The need was spiritual. The answer is the power of God. That's what's needed in Israel.

What is the kingdom of God? John the Baptist and Jesus, the disciples have been preaching, change your mind. The kingdom of God is at hand. What is the kingdom of God? Well, break it down.

What is a kingdom? A kingdom is a place of influence for a king. This is where the king rules, where the king's will is accomplished, where he leads the church, where he provides the authority and the leadership. He ensures that judicial functions are carried out.

He executes criminals. He protects against enemies from the outside. It's where his will and his word have full sway.

The kingdom of God is at hand. If we want the power of God to be active, it's going to be active in the presence of faith. Jesus knows that.

And to present the kingdom of God to Israel, Jesus teaches the Word of God, because the Word of God, made the object of faith, brings in the power of God. So when Jesus sees this problem in Israel, He teaches them many things. Constant emphasis throughout His ministry.

So here we are now in Mark chapter 6. This is where we left off last time. Jesus commanded to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. In Greek, when it says in groups, this is two words side by side.

It's the same word repeated. It's the word from which we get our English word symposium. You've heard of a symposium where people get together and they're going to discuss something.

They're going to have a round table talk about some issue. This is the Greek word symposia. And it says literally, they sat down symposia, symposia.

Group by group. And in verse 40 it says they sat down in ranks. And once again, we have a Greek word repeated two times.

This time it's the Greek word prosiai. Prosiai, prosiai. Group by group.

Rank by rank. And isn't it interesting that here is this scattered flock that Jesus has gathered like sheep that He is going to shepherd and that He is going to feed in the green pastures. And yet within that flock there are subdivisions.

Group by group. Division by division. Each of them is gathered together.

Why does He do this? Why can't they just be scattered by families or by individuals and just find a rock or an outcropping or a rise in the grass there and sit down? Why does Jesus organize them into groups this way and why is it emphasized so? We have two verses that tell us that they were organized into small groups. Groups of 50 and groups of 100. I think both experience and statistics tell us that some of the most effective churches that we have in America are about this

size, from 50 to 100.

Smaller groups, as we know, can have trouble gathering enough resources to be effective as a group. Larger groups suffer and often splinter or divide up. They don't necessarily splinter, but many times you'll find in a large church of several hundred that it is basically a collection of smaller groups.

Many of these churches will assign elders and they will have flock leaders under the pastor or whatever because it seems that groups of 50 and groups of 100 are a good size. They can enjoy fellowship, they can know each other intimately, and yet they're large enough to pool their resources and be used to do things that individuals cannot do. What is one application of this? There's nothing wrong with being a group of 50.

Gideon defeated an entire army of the enemy with only 300, which he divided into groups on each side of the enemy. groups of 75 to 100 each. God can use a small group very effectively.

Jesus organizes this crowd of well over 5,000 people into groups of 50 and groups of 100. There is a purpose. There is a fellowship within each of those groups.

And we know that this story is about the breaking of bread, don't we? What is breaking bread a picture of? Let us break bread together. What does that suggest? Fellowship? Community? Unity? What was Paul's great unhappiness with the church at Corinth when they came together to celebrate the Lord's Table? What did he say? There are strifes and divisions among you. This should not be so.

The Lord's Table, this communal meal, should be a symbol and an expression of your unity. It is a fellowship. It is a uniting effort.

This was recognized even in Greek culture. There is a collection of various manuscripts from Greek literature, both before and after the time of Christ. And I had to write this down because my short-term memory doesn't work for Greek names.

They all start sounding alike, Diogenes and so forth. But Pythagoras, you know the philosopher about the 6th century before Jesus that came up with the Pythagorean theorem with right triangles? I don't think I'll give you the theorem, but it helps us figure out the sides of triangles. Pythagoras was a very famous philosopher in Greek thought.

Pythagoras said one bread serves as the symbol of the bond between brothers, philoi. There was another Greek named Theopompous who said banquets are held where our diners gather about one table on which food for all has been set, and they all drink from the same jar. This was three centuries away from the time of Christ.

But the Greeks understood that this was a symbol of unity. This was a symbol of fellowship, of like-mindedness, sharing a meal together, breaking bread together. And Jesus emphasizes that

by dividing this crowd of over 5,000 into groups.

Each group is eating together. Each group is served together. Each group fellowships together around this bread and this fish that Jesus distributes.

And there's a message there for us. We are a fellowship. We gather and we feed on the Word of God.

And we should be united. We should have a fellowship that is centered in and sustained by the bread of life, Jesus Christ Himself, and the things that we learn about Him from His Word. There should not be divisions.

There should not be strife among us. It should be something that unites and builds us up together. So they sat down in ranks in hundreds and in fifties.

And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, now notice we have those numbers repeated twice, don't we? When Jesus says, What do you have? Go and see. They come back and say, There is this boy that they find and he has these five barley loaves and two fish. And then once again it says that He took the five loaves and the two fish.

Those numbers are significant. They don't contain the whole meaning of this passage, but they remind us of something. What does the number 12 remind us of? We've seen it in our recent studies.

Twelve is the number of Israel. Remember the woman with the issue of blood for twelve years? Jairus' daughter was twelve years of age. Twelve is the number of Israel.

Now that doesn't exhaust the meaning of the passage, but it jogs our memory. When a Jewish person, an Israelite, would read the Word of God and would come across the number 12, he would think, That's the number of tribes. That's the number of Israel.

There will be twelve pillars in the temple of God. Twelve disciples. Twelve apostles.

Reminds us of Israel. Numbers in the Bible have significance. Five is another significant number.

What's the first thing that any Jewish person would think of when they hear the number five? How many books are there in the Torah? How many books of Moses are there? Five. The five were Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. A Jewish person, when they see the number five, that's the first thing they think of.

That was their main Bible. They assigned a higher priority to the books of Moses than they did to the whole rest of the Old Testament writings, which were classified in two groups. In addition to the five books of Moses, there were two collections called the Prophets and the Writings.

They had Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim in Hebrew. Nevi'im are the Prophets. Ketuvim are the Writings.

Ketav means to cut, literally. Of course, in the old days, they had to chisel this stuff or cut it into clay or chisel it into stone. The Law, the Prophets, and the Writing.

The Law is a collection of five books of Moses. The Prophets and the Writings are the other two groups of Scripture that they had at their hands. And it is suggestive, as I say, this does not exhaust the meaning of the passage, but it is suggestive to us that here we have five loaves and two fish.

They are nourishment, and they are enough. They don't look like they're enough. The disciples say, Lord, we don't have the money to go out and buy food for a crowd of this size, and all we've got with us is five loaves and two fish.

But Jesus said, Go and see what you have. And what's the implication there? Whatever you have is sufficient. What you have, however it may look, however small it may be, it's enough.

It's enough. Jesus says, Go and see. They go and see, they say, Lord, we've got five loaves, we've got two fish.

They're sure that that's not enough. And Jesus says, It is enough. Have them sit down in groups on the green grass.

When He had taken the five loaves and the two fish in verse 41, He looked up to heaven. Not an idle detail. You've got five thousand people scattered in groups on the hillside, five thousand men plus their families, a huge number.

Hopefully all of them can hear the Lord speak because they're on the mountainside. But anyone looking to see what's going to happen next, why are we collected in these groups? We're all sitting down. Something is about to happen.

They're all looking up the hill where Jesus is. And Jesus takes this pile of pizza crusts, which is what it would have looked like to us, five round, flat loaves of bread, and two small fish. And He lifts them and He looks up toward heaven.

Everyone in that crowd knew what He was doing. He was asking God's blessing on this. And what could have been going through their mind? Have you wondered? Have you thought about sitting out there and looking up there and saying, Well, I guess Jesus and a couple of disciples are about to eat.

I don't know what we're going to do. But He's blessing enough food for three or four people up there. Everyone in the crowd knew what Jesus started with.

They saw Him lift these up. They saw Him ask the blessing from God. He looked to heaven and blessed the loaves and blessed the fish.

Everyone in the crowd knew what He started with because it's the symbolism, it's the sign value of what He's about to do that counts. He blessed and broke the loaves and He gave them to His disciples to set before them. And the two fish He divided among them all.

Notice the pattern here. Jesus takes what the disciples have with them. He takes the five loaves and the two fishes.

That's all the resources they have. He takes it to Himself and blesses it. And then He hands it back and He says, You take this and distribute it.

Jesus did not distribute the food. Jesus took it, blessed it, and gave it right back. And the disciples distributed the food.

And there was more and more and more and more. And what everyone thought was insignificant and completely insufficient turned out to be more than sufficient. More than sufficient.

We can't go by what we know. We can't go by our past experience. We have to look at God's power in the presence of faith.

And so they ate and they were all filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish. Here's our number twelve again.

Immediately rings a bell in our mind. Twelve seems to suggest Israel. We're going to have to wait a while to see the ultimate significance of that number, but it's important here that these kophinoi, the word here for baskets is the word from which we get coffin.

K-O-P-H-I-N-O-I in the plural. Kophinoi. Twelve coffins of bread are taken up.

Twelve baskets full of fragments of bread and of the fish. Now those who had eaten the loaves were five thousand men. God's power is not limited by our resources.

God's power is not limited by what we come to expect. What we think will happen based on our past experience. God's power is activated in the presence of faith.

Jesus is demonstrating that time after time after time. And there is significance in the fact that Jesus gathers them together in groups and it is passive. It's like the sheep on the hillside.

It is the provision of the shepherd that feeds the sheep. There are a couple of other observations that we might note here as we close our study of this portion. First of all, what is it that we trust? What is it that nourishes us and equips us for every good work? The religious life in Israel didn't do it.

The Pharisees with their rituals and their codes and their rules, the yoke that they placed on the people didn't do it. The people of Israel are like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus Christ came and taught and He left that commission with His disciples.

We like to quote the Great Commission in Matthew 28 and elsewhere. What does Jesus say? As you go into the world, make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. The emphasis is not going.

Going isn't even an imperative in that verse. The imperative, the command in that verse is teach. Make disciples.

Actually, the imperative is make disciples. How do you make a disciple? You teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. Jesus said, I'm leaving you the Holy Spirit to remind you of everything I've taught you.

He will lead you into all truth. He will take of the things that belong to Me and give them to you. There is an energy that fuels the Christian life and it's not human energy.

There are resources that accomplish the plan of God and they're not human resources. What did the seed parables tell us? It's God's plan. It's God's power.

It's God's design that accomplishes God's work. We are to be recipients and receptacles and places of nourishment, places of good habitation for the things of God to grow and to produce the crop. The man sows the seed and goes away.

He sleeps and rises and sleeps and rises. And when he returns, the crop has grown. Because he planted the seed in good soil.

And he comes back and reaps the harvest. We in the eternal future will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and we will receive rewards because God's power was active in our life. We won't get rewarded for our efforts, the things that we did in our strength and our energy.

That's going to be wood, hay, and stubble. We will be rewarded for being good soil, for letting the seed sink in deep and break up our clods and push aside our rocks and sink its roots in and grow the stalk and the ear and the grain that's in the ear. Some of us will be 30-fold fields.

Some of us will be 60-fold fields. Some of us will be 100-fold fields. What determines the difference? Remember the weeds that choke the word and make it unfruitful? The stones in the soil that keep it from sinking in deep? That's our choice.

We are the soil. We choose whether to make the Word of God the object of our faith. When we go to pursue an objective that we know is a part of the plan of God, do we pursue it the right way or do we do it like David did, moving the ark? We've got to know the Word of God.

We've got to be informed by it and we've got to trust it. It doesn't look like it's going to work. It doesn't look like we have the resources.

It doesn't look like we have what it takes to accomplish the purpose. But Jesus says, go and see what you have. That's enough.

In God's hands, what we have is enough because it's the power of God. And that's why God is glorified in our individual lives and in our life as a church. So, I hope in the future, when you think back and you think, you know, we just went through the feeding of the 5,000 not too long ago, what was the point that we drew out of that episode in Jesus' ministry? It isn't a passage that primarily teaches us to open soup kitchens and to open places for feeding the poor.

Feeding the poor is an important thing and God will judge those who fail in that area. But that's not what this passage is teaching. The sign value that teaches us the principle that we live by is God's power is activated in the presence of faith.

You can't just have faith. You have to believe something. The merit of faith is in the object.

The object is the Word of God. So now, we come down to the rubber meeting the road here. Each of you and I will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and be evaluated.

What was the fruit of our life? That fruit is going to be determined by the amount of faith that we had. You say, okay, I would really like to shine on the day of judgment. I would really like to stand there and have a nice, healthy pile of gold and silver and precious stones.

How can I do that? We know that that fruit is produced by faith. To have faith, we have to have something to believe. We have to know the Word of God.

They have made a movie here that's going to be coming out if it's not already out about the Apollo 13 astronauts. Have you seen the previews of this thing? Ron Howard has made a film that details the account of the Apollo 13 astronauts who were on their way to the moon and had a terrible catastrophe in the spaceship. And they were extremely fortunate to ever get back to earth alive.

Those men were astronauts. They had all of the training and the detailed knowledge to go to the moon and return safely. And then the crisis hit and they had to do all sorts of extraordinary things.

And in the telling of that story, we find out that it is their knowledge, their detailed knowledge of their spacecraft, their detailed knowledge of space flight, their detailed knowledge of all of the workings of that system. So when the unexpected came up, it was the knowledge of the men on the ground and the knowledge of the men in the capsule that gave them ideas to try and courses of action to take. We find ourselves faced with problems and circumstances all the time, don't we? Many times we look at it and we're tempted to throw up our hands and say, I just don't know

what to do in this situation.

I've prayed. I've thought about it. I've talked with the people involved and it just seems like we're at a dead end.

It seems like we're at an impasse. I don't know what to do. That in and of itself should spur us to spend time in the word of God.

God does not test us beyond what we are able to bear. What does that mean? That he turns the screws until the pain is just almost more than we can bear? Not at all. God tests us on subjects where we have or should have knowledge.

We learn something, it's going to be tested. It's a part of the learning process. It's a part of the memory process to review and have these things reinforced.

God won't test us over material we haven't covered, but he will test us over material we have covered. We've got to remember it and make it the object of our faith. Well, it doesn't look like I've got enough money to make it through the end of the year.

I don't know how long I'm going to be able to stay in my present circumstances. There's this person in my periphery and we're at odds and I don't know how it will ever be reconciled. There are principles of the Word of God that we have covered here in church in the last month that address each of those circumstances.

The circumstances that you face today and tomorrow have been addressed by the Word of God in this church as well as Moody Broadcast and many other faithful teachers that supply that object of faith, the Word of God. So, here's the bottom line. The judgment seat of Christ is coming.

Each of us will stand there on the little yellow painted footprints in front of the judgment seat of Christ and our life will be evaluated. What is the key to a good evaluation? Isn't that the most important thing? What more could we ask than to be judged a good and faithful servant? There's nothing more important. That's why we're here.

What purpose could be more important than pleasing our Lord? This is the answer. This is how to do it. The Word of God activates the power of God when we make it the object of our faith.

To make it the object of our faith, we have to know it. If the astronauts had gotten up there and they didn't know how to fly a spacecraft, they'd be out of options. Oh, I don't know what to do in this situation.

They would get on the radio and be praying down to NASA at Mission Control, help us, we don't know what to do. But they did know because they had been thoroughly trained and thoroughly immersed in that subject. What does that mean? Once a week is not enough.

Now, I am not browbeating you into church attendance. What I'm doing is encouraging you to stay in the Word of God wherever it is available for you. If you commute and have a drive, you can play tapes, you can get moody on the radio.

You have access to other good teachers here in Tahlequah besides me. We have three teaching services a week at this church. Do you want a good evaluation? You've got to have faith.

If you want to have faith, you've got to have the Word of God in your soul. If you're going to have the Word of God in your soul, you've got to hear it somewhere. It will not hurt my feelings if you hear it somewhere besides here.

I encourage you. I implore you. Get the Word of God wherever you can find it.

I am doing my best to present it here because it's the key. The power of God will be active in your life. The power of God will be active in this church when we find and latch onto that key.

It is already happening in many ways and in many places here in individual lives and it will happen for us as a church and that's how. There's no doubt. There's no mystery.

There's no confusion. There's no doubt as to how our church will grow and by grow, I mean grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior. We may be a group of 50 instead of a group of 100, but God can use us.

God can bear fruit in our soil. Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for this episode in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

We thank you for the emphasis that you have placed on yourself, on your purposes and your plan and on the resources that you have made available to us. Father, help us to operate in your strength and not in our own. Help us to see life and its challenges from your perspective and not from ours.

Help us to see the truth that even if we have only the five loaves and the two fishes, it is sufficient. In your hands, it is enough. Nothing is impossible in your plan because in your plan things are accomplished by your power.

We pray that we may be both individually and as a church, places where your power is active. We pray that we may be built up and encouraged, nourished up in the word of truth and thoroughly equipped for every good work. We ask it in our Savior's name.

Amen.