

Matthew 21-02-18b

Let's continue our study now, and here's my challenge. Having seen what we've seen thus far, Jesus doesn't make bread on one occasion, he does make it on another. What is the application? How can I make something out of that in my daily life? It occurs to me that there are so many decision points in our day.

Some of them are small, some of them are a bit larger over the course of weeks and months, some of them are very large, but it often boils down to a choice between what would be better for me versus what would be better for someone else. Maybe an individual, maybe a group, maybe my family or elements of my family or friends, co-workers, whatever. But even during the day in small, seemingly negligible things, there are decision points where I can say, well, maybe I'll just leave that there, somebody will handle it.

Or I can stop and say, well, why don't I handle that? And so, in looking at the Lord Jesus and His example, where given the choice to do something that would have gratified Him for the moment, but it would ultimately cost all the rest of us our salvation, He denied Himself. He emptied Himself, took on the form of a servant, came in the likeness of men, being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and was obedient even to that shameful death on the cross, which cost Him an immeasurable amount, but it gave to us and to all of those who have believed an immeasurable amount. Love at its core is sacrificial to self, beneficial to others.

And isn't this a great distillation? If you just think about the link of the bread, Jesus didn't make bread to feed Himself. He made it to feed the multitude. And He was not able to involve His disciples in the desert, but He is able to involve, to teach and to bless them in the process of blessing others.

And we have that privilege all down through history that the work of the Lord Jesus is something that we are able to share with those who are seeking and those who are ready to receive the grace of God, who at the point that God has awakened their conscience to His presence, His eternal power and Godhood manifest in creation, eternity in their hearts, and they seek at that point, instead of turning away at that point, just as in Jesus' day, those that had the love of the Father when Jesus came, they had that and then some. To him who has, more will be given. To him who has the love of the Father, more is going to be given.

It's given to you to discern, it's given to you to understand, it's given to you to see what's going on in the moment, to parse the signs of the times and know who you are and why you're here. But to those who have not, who have not the love of the Father, even what they have is taken away and it's replaced by hatred and vindictiveness and the desire that ultimately puts the Lord Jesus on the cross to preserve their place and their power

to feed themselves. And talking about the scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' day, the religious leadership, can you imagine those who were supposed to know the most and be the most and understand the most were the very perpetrators of the most heinous crime in history.

So as we think about this, Jesus not making bread and then Jesus making bread, it's a wonderful reminder of what our daily task is to not be consumed with doing for ourselves. Doesn't the world offer self-gratification? Years ago they used to say we're the me generation, even in the sound of music. To me this was the beginning of the end, as much as you might like that movie.

I was saddened to see one of my favorite actors of all time, Christopher Plummer, go to glory this past week. He was in the sound of music. He was Captain Von Trapp there, but you know the song that the gal sings up on the mountaintop, climb every mountain, ford every stream, follow every rainbow, till you find your dream.

And from that time to this, the world has been occupied in promising people the moon, pursue your dream, follow your heart, don't give up until you get what you want out of life, where the call in Christ is let God do something in us and through us. Let the grace of God flow through us the way it did through the Lord Jesus. We are here to be Christ, to be his body, to be his representative presence.

And that involves compassion, not vitriol, not a combative, argumentative, hateful spirit as you see so often in Christian circles when there's a doctrinal issue. It just gets as ugly as any cat fight between unbelievers on the floor of Congress that you've ever seen or on the campaign trail. And believers discussing the word of God with other believers and being hateful and spiteful and calling names and impugning character and speculating about ancestry and salvation status and whatnot and saying all sorts of horrible things.

This is not Christ. It doesn't represent Christ. Paul invades against this in his letters to Timothy and says get away from people who all they want to do is wrangle about words, who are spiteful and hateful and vindictive and implacable.

This is not Christ. What we see here in the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus moved with compassion. You think these people were tired after dragging their loved ones around.

Jesus has been exhausted. He's going to be exhausted at many points during his earthly life. But he spends the day healing person after person, family after family, episode after episode, the power of God flowing in him and through him to visibly represent the grace of God in contact with the need of mankind.

And that's what it is. Faith isn't the issue here. Previous belief, what they're thinking as their loved ones get healed, this is purely a demonstration of God's compassion at the point of human need.

He healed them all. Without qualification, without a questionnaire, without a doctrinal test, they bring the sick, he heals them. And it's a picture of the grace of God.

We should be that picture. And at very small decision points, I know that there are so many things that I leave undone and there is another person in my life who quietly comes in behind and does what I fail to do. No complaint, no dragging it up later to beat me over the head with.

And it's a wonderful thing to see that kind of love in the lives of believers. And you have to know that God smiles when he sees us following Christ with that example, being compassionate, putting the best face on things, assuming the best, refusing to think the worst, probably just forgot, wasn't malice aforethought, wasn't laziness, wasn't ineptitude, wasn't callous disregard. Something probably came up.

I can put a shoulder under this load. I can do this thing. I can finish this task.

I can do what was left undone. And to do that in a genuine spirit of love as under the Lord, that's what the Lord Jesus is doing here. Not grabbing a rock and saying, power of God, I'm really hungry right now.

Fix this hunger problem for me. I know you've got the power. Instead, waiting for God's time, God's place, God's opportunity so that God's glory is reflected and God's people are blessed by association.

So you see all of that just in that contrast. Well, now, what happens next? This is truly the prophet who is to come in the world. That's John 6.14. Flip back to the temptation in the wilderness back in Matthew chapter 4. Keep your finger in, John.

Just turn back to Matthew chapter 4. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. If you are the son of God, command that these stones become bread. He answered and said, it is written.

Jesus didn't pull this out of his eternal divine memory. He knows what's written because he has studied the scriptures just as we are doing. It is written, man shall not live by bread alone.

Devil takes him up into the holy city, set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, if you're the son of God, throw yourself down and claim the promise. He will make the angels watch over you and you'll not even bruise your foot on a stone. I think this is really comical.

I can't remember if I pointed this out when we did Matthew 3. But in their hands they shall bear you up lest you dash your foot against a stone. What is it that is going to bruise Jesus' foot? Satan's head, right? Satan is saying the angels will keep you from bruising your foot on a stone. I wonder if the Lord Jesus is thinking back to the garden

when the pronouncement is made to the serpent.

He's going to bruise your head so bad that it's going to leave a bruise on his heel. That's what he's going to dash his foot against is your cabeza de snaco, as they say in Spanish. But then look at verse 8, the devil took him up on it.

That's not real Spanish, by the way. The devil took him up on an exceedingly high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. He said to him, all these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.

Jesus said, away with you, Satan. It is written you shall worship the Lord your God and him only you shall serve. What is the temptation? I will give you rulership of the world, rulership in the world.

What is it that the people want to do with Jesus after they partake of the bread in John chapter 6? Look at verse 15. This truly is the prophet who is to come into the world. Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king.

Satan says, I'll make you king. All you got to do is bow the knee. These people are going to... How do you take somebody and make him a king by force? I think it's happened in England a few times when it's a child and he's 7 or 8 years old and his father or grandpa or uncle or somebody died.

But how do you take a grown man and make him king by force? What they figure is they're going to make him king by popular acclaim. They're going to want it so bad and cheer so hard and rally so fervently. This is not force in the sense of they're going to shackle him and drag him to the throne and chain him to it, is it? This is we will coerce him.

We'll make him by our sheer force of will. When's the last time you saw a reference to something being taken by force recently? What did Jesus say about John the Baptist? From the time of John the Baptist until now, talking about the kingdom of heaven. And there are those who are trying to take it by force.

They're not taking up arms in combat. They're not chaining up prophets. What are they doing? They're trying to get it the way Jacob got his blessing from the man he wrestled with all night.

I will not let you go until you bless me. I will not let you go. I will work so hard that you'll have to give me the kingdom.

I will not let you go until you serve as king of the kingdom as I envision it. I see that you are here at work. I'm going to join you in your work, and I'm going to force you to do the kind of work that I just saw you do.

We're going to make you king. Bread links us back to the temptations, this notion of kingship, being made a king by other than a proper means. Becoming king of the world through Satan is not a proper way to become king.

Becoming king by popular demand because you fed them is not a proper way to be king. Is Jesus qualified? Could he rationalize this and say, well, you know, I am descended from David on both sides of my family, both legally and biologically. I am, in fact, going to someday be the king of kings and lord of lords, have it written on my thigh.

Why not now? Timing is everything. Why we do what we do is everything. People say, well, you know, girlfriend, boyfriend, I know we're going to be married.

So let's go ahead and do what married people do now. No, timing is not right. They who wait upon the Lord renew their strength.

There is a time and a season for every purpose under heaven. It's not always a time to build up. Sometimes it's a time to tear down.

Read Ecclesiastes. We've been through that in great detail. Being sensitive to God's time.

The time that we really want to shorten is our time of testing, our time of uncertainty, our time of adversity, trial, pressure. Things are not going according to the plan of Sam and I want them to change. Think about time.

Wasn't the time to make bread in the wilderness. It's the time to make bread now. Wasn't the time to be king in the wilderness.

And it's still not the right time to be king. Now, how does Jesus know this? How does Jesus discern when it is and isn't the right time? It's not just a matter of, well, this is later. So it's okay.

It's okay to make bread now. Maybe it's okay to be king now. How does Jesus know? It is that time of reflection and contemplation, meditation, prayer, being planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth fruit in the right season.

According to Psalm 1, his delight is in the law of the Lord. He is living by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. God has a time and a place and a purpose.

And it is up to us not to find him and join him in that, but to be prepared so that when he finds us and brings us into his work and brings us into a place of opportunity and function, we're ready. We know how to do what we are called to do. And we can do it well.

And we can do it with excellent judgment. And the ability to discern what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Romans 12, 2. We first present ourselves as a

living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

That's reasonable. Concentrate on not being conformed to the world, but being transformed by the renewing of our minds. Then we will know when and where and how to serve.

Wait for God's time. Wait for God's place. God will light up those opportunities to where we can't miss it, especially if you do what I do and pray for that.

One of my most frequently heard prayers, I'm sure the Lord is tired of hearing it, is please don't let me miss an opportunity. Put great big neon lights and a bunch of arrows like Wile E. Coyote put on the birdseed to try to trap the roadrunner. You know, free birdseed here.

Make it as clear as possible. If I miss it, whop me upside the head with a nice thick two by four. Please use however much direct guidance is necessary.

I do not want to miss. I don't want to fail to wait, and I don't want to wait too long. Ask and seek and knock.

God will always answer those prayers. So Jesus knows that it is the time to multiply bread, but it is still not the time to be king. And when they come to make him king by popular acclaim, how many people have you seen both in fiction and nonfiction get swept up by popularity and voted into office, moved into a position, their popularity goes to their head.

And it can't be wrong because it feels so right. All of these people are telling me this is the time and this is the place. 15,000 people can't be wrong.

If there were two hangers on for every 5,000 men, then there could have been a crowd anywhere from 7 to 15,000 here that Jesus fed with the five loaves and the two fish. Oh, speaking of which. So hopefully that point is clear.

We want to wait. We want to watch. We want to be alert and let the Holy Spirit use the word of God resident in our souls to guide us to do the right thing at the right time.

And one of the ways we'll know it's the right thing is that it reflects love. The right thing is usually harder because it's selfless. I've got to set aside what would please me or gratify me or what I might really want to be doing right now.

I'm going to do something else because it's the better way. Paul says in Corinthians just before the love chapter, I show you a better way. Love.

Three things are going to go into the eternal future. Faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Well, here's the other thing. Five loaves and two fish. Have you ever wondered why five loaves, five, two fish? Why two fish? And the speculation on this is really something to make you smile.

I did a little checking around to see. I know what I think, but I wanted to see what other people think because many times their idea is better than mine. There are five loaves because the story is teaching us that we must consecrate the five senses to a higher calling.

We have five senses. So there's one loaf for your nose. There's one loaf for your ears.

I'm trying to figure out how my sense of smell is going to be dedicated to God in service. Let me know if you've got an idea on that. I get hearing and seeing and touching and so on, but the smell thing has got me baffled.

And what's the other sense? Hearing, seeing, tasting. Taste and see that the Lord is gracious, maybe. I don't know.

The five senses thing. And then, well, what are the two fish? Well, in this construction, the five senses are your physical life with your five senses. And then the two fish are your soul and your spirit.

So five parts body, one part soul, one part spirit. That's several places. The first five gifts of the Holy Spirit, the five loaves, wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength and knowledge.

Tricky, though, if you're looking at the five loaves and Paul has not written Galatians yet. You don't have the fruit of the spirit list and it's not in the Old Testament. But maybe it's talking about the spirit of passage in the Old Testament.

Spirit of wisdom and understanding and strength and so on. The two fish are the people they managed to edify within the region. Well, perhaps.

But here's a double thought. When we've covered this in the past, we've done the other gospels and come to this. And five is just so knee-jerk ready to be the five books of the law.

And Jesus is talking. He's going to say in John 5, you search the scriptures because you think in them you have eternal life. And it is they that testify of me.

And it's a scary thing that you can look at the scriptures for life. You're looking in them to find life. But in looking at them, you miss the life capital L. I am the way, the truth and the life.

You're searching the scriptures because you think that's the key to life. And it is. But the scriptures are testifying of me and you don't recognize me.

Why? You substituted love for the scriptures for the love of the father. The love of the father is not in you. Love of the process.

Love of the community. Love of the vocation. There can be a lot of reasons why people want to get into scripture.

And I think a lot of the wrangling about scripture and fighting with people about doctrines and interpretations and so on comes because people have become enamored with, it's like playing chess. I really love this opening and I'm going to use this to beat you in a game. Instead of recognizing that the scriptures, like Jesus himself, are the way, the truth and the life to come to the father.

It is a means, it is not an end in itself. And pastors and Christians who wind up making the word an end unto itself and an environment unto itself and a purpose and a goal and a habitation unto itself and don't move into it, through it and beyond it to the father himself, miss. Just as Jesus says in John 5, you search the scriptures.

In them you think you have eternal life. It's they that testify of me and you've missed the witness. You've missed the witness.

And because you don't have the love of the father, you can't see his son when he's standing right in front of you, can't identify him, completely miss it, end up crucifying him. Paul later on is going to warn of becoming an enemy of the cross, falling from grace. It's a horrific thing to be searching the scriptures daily and miss their intent and miss their purpose.

How can we avoid that? The measure is love. What is our triad of Christian virtues? Faith is the means, hope is the motivation, love is the measure. If your spiritual life is a success, it is going to evidence, it is going to express, it is going to bear the fruit of love.

What is the first in the list of the fruit of the spirit? Love. Followed by joy and peace. So, five loaves and two fish.

And we say, well, I really like this symmetry that especially to that first generation, the five loaves, the real bread is the law. By the law comes the knowledge of sin. Knowledge of sin gives you a sense of need.

I'm not just mildly interested. I'm not looking for what God can do for me. By the law comes the knowledge of sin.

I have a need for deliverance. I need to be delivered for myself. I need to be delivered from slavery to sin, from bondage to my impulses, to enter into a relationship with God that I don't have.

The law. And then the other two fish, the prophets and the writings. And the

combination, the law being the major portion, because the prophets and the writings largely look back to the law, build upon it, make appeal on that foundation.

So, I really like that. But here's a new thought for you. Just as a, since we're combining our gospel study with our end time study, when you think about the metaphor, I don't think it's literal.

I think it's metaphorical. I think it's partly literal that you have this 7,000 year plan of human history. How many thousands are dedicated to the progenitors of or the actual people of Israel? How many years from Adam to Christ in the metaphorical plan of history? From Adam to Christ, how many years? 4,000 years, right? How many years, just based on speculation here, is the church age likely to last? Look up here.

2,000 years. We know it's lasted more than a thousand years because we're still here. And then how long is the millennium? 1,000.

And to whom is it dedicated? The people of the law, the five books of Moses, have how many books, how many millennia dedicated to them? 5,000 years. What is the sign of the church since earliest days? Ichthus. Fish.

Two fish, 2,000 years. Five loaves, 5,000 years. It's possible.

I wouldn't die for that. But I like the symmetry in the same way. And in both cases, you end up with the five representing the law.

And you really can't get away from that. When God said, bind my word on your hand, you've got those five fingers there. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The writings and the prophets look back on that, call the people of God to return to their covenant relationship with God that was established in that law. And the writings describe the dangers of departing from it as well as the beauty of adhering to it. That's where you get your wisdom books and your poetry books, right? So, five loaves, two fish.

I like both of those equally. I wouldn't pick between them. Instead of either or, I say both.

And I feel satisfied with that understanding. Five loaves and two fish. The numbers are given in all four Gospels.

How many people were fed is given in all four Gospels. And once again, you don't get an exact count, which they could have easily supplied because the people sat down in groups of 50. But it's 5,000 plus women and children.

But 5,000 men. Men represent families in Israel. And here's another interesting factoid.

It's also possible that these groups were set down. And I had this question from last time,

and I'm finally getting around to answering it. You can research this on your own, but culturally speaking, there was, as in Asian cultures, men ate separately from women and children.

And the reason the men were easy to count is it is the men who were set down in groups, and the women and children may have been off to the side. But you can look this up. But in the culture of the ancient Near East, and even well down toward the present day, men would often eat among themselves.

And this was carried down. Some of your more primitive style churches will have all the men on one side of the church and the women on the other because they are partaking of the bread of the word, and they do so separately. Anyway, that's another side note to the setting them down in groups and being able to number the groups.

Well, this brings us to the conclusion of our study for this evening. What is the point? We have two connections back to the temptation. The temptations were all subjective.

Feed yourself. Make an issue out of yourself by jumping off the pinnacle of the temple. You'll make a big splash.

The angels will appear out of nowhere, bear you up and miraculously deliver you. You'll be a sensation. Well, that ends up happening anyway when Jesus feeds the crowd.

He does it out of compassion for them, but they misconstrue it and see him as a physical savior, a physical deliverer, a physical provider. He is the big Excedrin pill. He is the big ibuprofen or Advil or acetaminophen or aspirin or whatever you use to solve a short-term problem.

He's it. And they want to make him king for the wrong reasons. This is not the triumphal entry.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna is it. They want to come and coerce him into becoming king because they like his style of social welfare.

He didn't do it for social welfare. It's one meal on one occasion. They want to turn this into a pattern.

They want to turn it into an all the time thing. He's a goose that can lay golden eggs three times a day. Grab that goose.

Let's stick him on a throne. If we give him what he wants, and surely he wants to be our king. Surely he wants to be feeded and celebrated.

And Jesus knows that that is not right. But this is the equivalent of jumping off the pinnacle of the temple and being immediately a celebrity. And immediately recognized as something special.

Satan says, I'll make you king of every kingdom here on earth if you'll compromise your mission. Here, these people want to make him a king. And he could have become king at that point if he was willing to compromise his mission.

But Jesus avoided these traps, avoided these snares, avoided yielding to these temptations because he was in communion with his Father through prayer, through reflection and meditation on the Word of God by which we are to live. Every word that proceeds from God should guide us. And when we are steeped in it, when we are reflecting on it day and night, when we delight in the law of the Lord, that's when we're stable.

That's when we're planted by the river. That's when we bring forth our fruit in our season. Brings forth its fruit in its season.

How do you know when it's right and when it's wrong? How do you know when it's time? Steeped in the Word, deep roots in the soil, deep roots soaking up water from the river of life. That's how we know. Got a question about what is the will of God in my circumstance? Forget the circumstance and look for that communion with God.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. All of these other logistical problems will be ironed out for you. All these things will be added to you.

It doesn't say seek first the kingdom and then you will have the power to go and grab all of this stuff for yourself. Seek first the kingdom of God. Seek His righteousness.

These things will be added to you. You're going to look behind you and there it sits. Message from the feeding of the 5,000 is not only the miracle itself, which is a sign that this bread that they're eating is a representation of the true bread from heaven that is its source and is a higher and greater and more spiritual food.

That's what we should be looking for. That's what should be nourishing our souls and everything flows out of that. Everything in this life and in the life to come.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. We're going to come to the walking on the sea next time. Oh, this is a fascinating story.

I can't wait to jump into it. I would do it right now, but I'm out of time. So we'll see it this coming Sunday, but we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for the power and the direction, the light that it shines, the energy that it gives to our souls. We pray that as we reflect on it and pray in it and through it that Your Holy Spirit will impress it on our hearts, drive it deep into the soil to have firm roots and the ability to sprout and bear 30-fold, 60-fold, and 100-fold as we wait for our season to serve and to function and to be used in Your plan and purpose to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray these things in His name. Amen.