

**July 10, 2022**

**Please, Sir, I Want Some More!**

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**Mark 6:30-44, 8:1-10**

In his classic story, *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens writes of an orphan who stares longingly into his empty food dish, having eaten his meal, but is still hungry. Against the rules, he goes up to the food pot, and dares to say, "Please, sir! I want some more!" Mayhem and chaos ensue, as the orphan and the school administration fight over what is enough. To the young *Oliver Twist*, it seems that there is never enough.

Economists have a word for this idea. It is called scarcity. Scarcity according to economists, is the "basic fact of life that there is a finite amount of human and non-human resources." It is this limitedness that gives things value.

Think of it this way: A person, we'll call them Adam Smith, opens an apple stand, at which he has two apples for sale, \$1 each. Adam's friend comes up to the stand, and, being hungry buys and eats one of the apples. The next day, the friend remembers how good that apple was, and he's hungry again. So, he returns to the stand. Now, there's only one apple left. Adam decides that, apples being pretty rare these days, this one must be worth \$2. This is scarcity at work.

In Genesis 27 we see an attitude of scarcity at play.

Jacob had already tricked Esau out of his birthright, or the status and inheritance of the older brother. Now, with the help of his mom, Jacob deceives his blind, aged father into believing that he is Esau, and receives the blessing reserved for the eldest son.

This blessing includes wealth, power, security, and authority.

By the time Esau comes in to get the blessing, Isaac says he's got nothing left. So he "blesses" Esau with poverty, dependency, and struggle. But it's a blessing with teeth – he promises that Esau will throw off his younger brother's power when the time is right. It's a story full of family feuding, bitter struggle, and revenge. You can read it in Genesis 27 this afternoon if you want to. . .

The story of Isaac, Jacob and Esau shows us that we extend this "basic truth" of scarcity to God, and blessings. Isaac tells Esau that a blessing, once given, was used up and could no longer be given again. This is scarcity.

This way of thinking is deeply ingrained in us – so much so that when I looked up the definition, it was called the "basic fact of life!" The key question that I want us to ask today is, Can God be used up? Is scarcity really a basic fact of life, or is it a basic misunderstanding of God?

Now, we come to the two feasts in the gospel of Mark. Each of these feasts was designed to make the people think back to the time of the Hebrew's escape from Egypt, where they were slaves. In the story of the Exodus, we read:

In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

A few verses later, we read God's response:

The Lord said to Moses, "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.'"

That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, "It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.

(Exod 16:2-3, 11-15)

A starving horde in the wilderness, leaders with no idea how to feed them, the problem of scarcity staring them in the face. Suddenly, there's meat and bread in a desolate place, and everyone is satisfied. Scarcity, it seems, does not apply in normal ways to God's wandering people. Of course this crowd of five thousand is reminded of God's provision in the exodus, except now they are the new exodus, the new Israel, experiencing the new Moses through Jesus the Messiah.

There are a couple of differences, though.

In Mark, Jesus tells the disciples, "You give them something to eat!"

I can only imagine how that little suggestion landed with the disciples. The half-hearted snickers as Andrew and Matthew think Jesus is joking. Judas poking his fingers around the money pouch, as if he didn't know exactly how much was not in it. Peter's jaw hits the sand, and James rolls his eyes, knowing that his lunch is about to become a sacrifice for the "greater good." John, ever so quietly, to save Jesus the shame of his ignorance, points out the obvious.

Uh, Jesus, that would take way more than we have. We only have a few loaves and a couple fish, basically the brown bag lunch some Jewish mother packed for her kid. . .

Scarcity. Once one of those loaves or fish was eaten by someone, it couldn't be eaten by someone else.

Or, could it?

Suddenly, God is very much present to the people in the wilderness. And what is more, where there is less than half a loaf for each disciple beforehand, afterwards one full basket of bread is gathered for each tribe of Israel. The feast has not diminished, but increased! A nation could eat from God's provision!

Then a few days later. . .

It's like tee-ball. Jesus says flat out: I they have been here a long time. We are in the middle of nowhere. I have compassion on them.

Scarcity: Where are we supposed to find food for them? What do you want us to do, give them our lunch?

"How many loaves do you have?"

I can almost see the disciples squirming! Sure, Jesus provided for the crowd in the wilderness, but that was last week, and that miracle's been done. Surely there couldn't be more food hidden away somewhere!

Yet it all feels very familiar!

There are also some key differences.

Five loaves and two fish has become seven loaves and some fish.

Five thousand men were fed, but here are four thousand people.

Most telling, we've moved locations – from around Jesus' home in the first story to around the Decapolis in the second story.

And afterwards, instead of 12 baskets of leftovers, the disciples gather seven.

While the crowd of 5,000 might have clearly seen the link to their story in the exodus, and the disciples surely would have, this second crowd might not have.

Why?

Because all of the clues in the text point to this crowd of 4,000 being Gentiles, not Jews.

So, first to the Jews, then to the gentiles. That sounds familiar. But it leaves us with a question.

Did the Gentiles get less of God?

These two stories tell us the answer. No, they did not. God was not used up.

The feast, the word of God, was given first to the Jews. They carried the covenant, the promises, the blessing of God. They were the chosen people. Once the blessing was given, did it

get used up just like Isaac's blessing to Jacob, and then Esau goes without? Are God's promises subject to that basic fact of life, the problem of scarcity?

Again, the answer is no. God is not used up.

So, then, what is the benefit, or the purpose of being chosen first?

The answer, I'd suggest, is in six simple words.

"You give them something to eat."

Wow. The purpose in being chosen first is to have compassion on those who don't know God yet.

I recently discovered that there was a superstitious practice that developed in the church of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century of getting baptized not as an infant, not as a believer, but on your death bed. This was risky, because this superstition thought that baptism actually washed away sin! So if you missed your chance, then you were kinda in trouble. But the point was to die with the most possible sin washed off.

This command, you give them something to eat, flips that superstition on its head. Instead of waiting till the end, get on with serving in the kingdom as soon as you can!

As you have been shown compassion, give out of compassion! To everyone.

I think it is very telling that not all of these people in the crowds would become Christians. In fact, there were very likely some in the crowds who would later yell, "Crucify him!" at the trial of Jesus. But he had compassion on them anyways.

This raises a question for me.

What is my thought process, my reaction, to the people who disagree with, or are outside the church, who don't know God?

Is it to judge them? Avoid them? Try to force them to live according to Christian values through legislation? Or is it to have compassion on them? Identify not only their spiritual needs, but also their physical, emotional, and mental needs, and then serve them to meet those needs?

You give them something to eat.

Those words are a deep, direct, call to action for those of us who are God's people. You were chosen early so that others could experience the compassion of God through you, before they even know who God is.

Amazing.

There is one other thing I'd like to point out.

This might seem overly simple, but I need to hear it sometimes, so I figured maybe some of you could use it too.

God is not used up.

Are you ever plagued by the thought that God must get sick and tired of you? Always coming to him for help, always asking for something, always so dependent and so needy? Do you ever think that when you start to pray, God might just roll his eyes a little bit?

God is not a scarce resource. Instead, he is the creator. Instead of giving apples, he gives us apple trees.

I asked God to forgive me for my sin already today. Did I use up his grace for me? Am I out of mercy?

No. God is not used up.

Or maybe the world is beyond saving. War in Ukraine, Myanmar, Syria and other places, mass shootings in the USA, unmarked and unrepented graves in Residential Schools in Canada. Heat waves and earthquakes and floods. COVID, and murder hornets, and anything else on the nightly news feed.

Maybe, just maybe, God is in over his head?

Not even close. God is not used up.

He knows that we can't do life without him. He made it that way. Far from rolling his eyes, the bible describes God as waiting eagerly for us to come to him. Remember the parable of the two lost sons, where the father watches for the return of his prodigal son. Or remember the words of Jesus praying over Jerusalem where he says, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing." (Matt 23:37).

God's patience is not used up, his compassion and mercy and love are not consumed. If I could encourage you with anything today, it is this:

Never stop going to God with what you need. Our need for grace, for provision, for help with global problems, all of these are reminders that we are not big enough, and we can never stop going to God. Not only is this exactly how we were made, it is exactly, and only, what God desires from us. He longs to provide for you.

Not in a health and wealth gospel kind of way. He doesn't want you to have power and money and perfect teeth, necessarily. But God is enough to provide for us. He is neither overcome by our needs or our struggles, nor is he unwilling to provide what we need.

In Lamentations 3, the prophet Jeremiah talks about the awfulness of life, describing darkness, broken bones and aging flesh, death and chains, being mangled by wild animals and the futility

of hope. He is socially mocked and ridiculed, teeth broken with gravel, and face ground in dust. And yet with all this he says,

“I remember my affliction and my wandering,  
the bitterness and the gall.

<sup>20</sup> I well remember them,  
and my soul is downcast within me.

<sup>21</sup> Yet this I call to mind  
and therefore I have hope:

<sup>22</sup> Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.

<sup>23</sup> They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.

<sup>24</sup> I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion;  
therefore I will wait for him.”

<sup>25</sup> The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him,  
to the one who seeks him;

<sup>26</sup> it is good to wait quietly  
for the salvation of the Lord.

Jesus had compassion on the crowd of Jews, and he fed them. On another day, Jesus had compassion on a crowd of Gentiles, and he fed them. Today, in whatever you need, whether it is comfort for your soul, or forgiveness for your sin, or peace for your mind, or provision for your family, Jesus has compassion on you.

Now you give them something to eat.

Amen.

### Benediction

In benediction, a modification of the blessing given to Jacob by Isaac:

May God give you heaven’s dew and earth’s richness – an abundance of grain and new wine.

That you may serve many nations, and your brothers and sisters,

And that they may know the compassion of God through you.

Amen.