



“Intentionally Blessing”

Week 8 | November 25, 2018

John 6

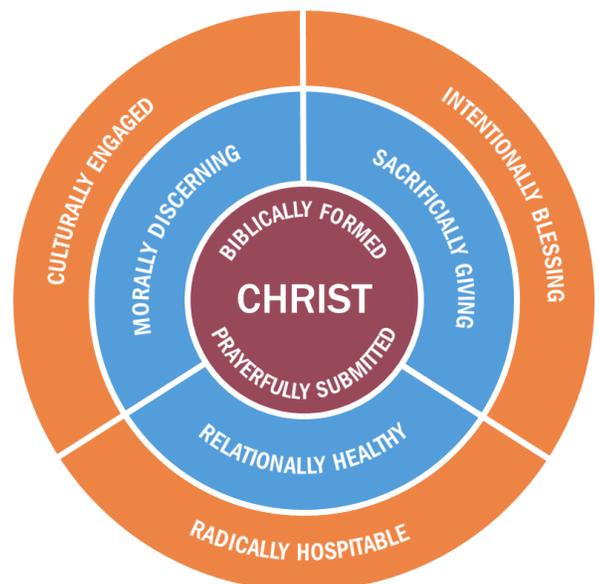
Sermon Summary: At the height of Jesus’ popularity and ministry, a crowd of many thousands followed him into the countryside, marveling at his works. Having compassion on them, he did not want to send them away hungry, so he asked his disciples, “Where will we buy food for all these people?” It was a test. Jesus already knew what he was intending to do, he just wanted to see if the disciples had a vision for the multitudes as well. After all, he came to seek and to save those who were lost—but that mission would be fulfilled in its global dimensions not by Christ alone, but by Christ *through his followers*. Did these disciples have that vision and faith?

It was a mid-term exam. By the way, this is the only miracle, other than Christ’s own resurrection, that is repeated in all four gospels. It is so important not only because it reveals Jesus and his intentions but because it involves us. It challenges us. It is paradigmatic for our ministry. “How will we feed all these people? Or as the other gospels report Jesus saying, “You give them something to eat.” Do you have a vision for blessing the masses? **How will you bless the world?**

The disciples’ answers were disappointing. In the first three gospels they say, “Send the people away.” *Let them feed and fend for themselves. Let them sustain their own lives; discover and live their own truth.* Bad answer. Equally disappointing was Philip’s calculus in John 6: “Two hundred days’ wages would hardly give everyone a bite! It’s impossible.” Bad answer. Andrew does a little better: “Here are five loaves and two fish, but how far will they go?” It’s not a great answer; it’s not full of faith; but there’s at least a spark. So Jesus multiplies the meal to thousands, with twelve baskets left over (symbolic of the tribes of Israel?). And the enduring lesson is taught: **A little is a lot in the hands of Jesus.** Give him your meager resources, your humble gifts, your fumbling words—and watch him multiply them into world-changing impact.

But that’s not the end of the story. The next day the crowds are back for more, but Jesus refuses to feed them again. Instead he says, “Do not work for food that spoils but for food that lasts into eternity....I am the bread of life....Let me feed and satisfy your soul.” And that presents a second test: **How well will you bless the world?** Are you satisfied with meeting physical needs or are you willing to address the deeper need of the human soul? And by the way: Are you feeding on Jesus at soul level? Is he the center of your affections and the source of your satisfaction? Or would you just as soon have the gifts rather than the Giver?

It would have been so easy and so natural for Jesus to string the crowd along with more gracious provisions and more gracious words. But instead he throws down a challenge: What are you really seeking? And if it’s not Me, then....



If Jesus isn't the source of our satisfaction, then we're doomed. It doesn't matter how many of our physical or social needs are met: "What does it profit a person to gain the whole world but forfeit their soul?" If Jesus isn't the Bread of Life to us, then what ensues is sure death. We have to get to the heart of the matter, which is the human heart.

That doesn't mean we want to be bad missionaries who only use good works as a platform for the good news. We don't want to be disingenuous in our witness or transactional with our blessings: *I give you food, you give ear to my message*. No, Jesus cares for the whole person—that's what his miracles and saving acts demonstrate. He has legitimate concern for every kind of human suffering. But he knows the deepest ache is not caused by an empty stomach but by a gaping void in the soul. He intends to bless body and soul. Do we?

It would be very easy to only do good works and never get around to sharing the good news. And that's where we're most prone to fail: Not by preaching too hard or too soon, but by never preaching at all. Never having that conversation where we talk about the heart and present Christ as its sole and ultimate fulfillment.

God help us to intentionally bless the world—in *every way*.

Discussion Guide

1. Read John 6:1-15 and 25-35.
2. Some people might think this looks like bad missionary work, a classic bait-and-switch in which Jesus feeds the crowd and then talks about the Bread of Life. How would you respond to that criticism?
3. How do you see the relationship of good works to good news? Are the works just the platform for the "news," the gospel message?
4. In Jesus' ministry, his good works legitimized his identity and message. But in our experience it seems like our identity and message often undermine our good works—that is, they call into question their sincerity. If you're a Christian with a message, then that's seen as your real agenda. You don't really care about physical or social suffering; you just want to proselytize. And so to be seen as legit, we *never proclaim Christ*.
 - Have you ever felt like this?
 - What is the solution to this bind?
5. At the end of the story in John 6, many people leave Jesus, and he doesn't seem to try overly hard to stop them. Is there a lesson in that for us? What do you think it is?
6. On the happier side of this story, we see how Jesus multiplies the five loaves and two fish. He takes our humble gifts and offerings and makes something of them. "A little is a lot in the hands of Jesus."
 - Have you seen Jesus do anything like that through you? Tell your story.
 - Does this spark any faith or confidence that he might work like this in the future? Explain.
7. The proof of our faith is in our actions. We have to step out and take risks, hoping and believing that Jesus will work through it but not knowing for sure. Like the stories of David, Esther, Peter and John, Shadrach and Meshach and Abednego and so many others: They acted in faith, taking risks that could have led to embarrassment and death—and God only "showed up" after the die was cast.
 - What's one way in which God is calling you to take a risk of faith for the sake of his mission?
 - How can you intentionally bless people who are "far from God but near to you" in such a way that you not only intend to bless them physically or socially, but spiritually with the gospel?