

NEW DAY... NEW WAY

How Do You Care for So Many?

Text: Matt. 15:32-38

INTRODUCTION: I am tempted this morning to ask for a show of hands to see how many of you read my Lighthouse article this week.

You can relax. I am not going to do that because...

- Many of you would be embarrassed.
- I might be discouraged.
- Some of you would be tempted to lie, and I do not want to be a source of temptation.

I am not going to repeat here everything I said there, but let me offer an executive summary because it sets the stage for the Scripture I want us to look at.

I said in my article that we have a problem. By we I mean all of us that count SABC as our church home. So all of you vacationers can rejoice. I'm not going to spoil your beach trip. You can leave here today saying I'm glad that's not my problem!

But folks, the rest of us, all of us home boys and girls, we do have a problem. And if you care about the ministries and mission enterprises of SABC it is a big problem.

Simply put, our giving is down.

- In spite of growth and wonderful things happening in every age segment in our church,
- In spite of the highest mission involvement here at home and around the world we have ever had,
- In spite of people being saved, disciplined, and integrated into SABC from every kind of walk in life,
- In spite of all these wonderful things the Lord is doing among us,

Giving is down, and it is down seriously.

Giving through our **General Fund**, which keeps the church as a whole functioning, pays the utilities at the Center of Hope, funds all our local outreach and discipleship ministries for adults, young adults, students, children, and preschoolers, and sends dollars to career missionaries around the world is less than it was last year and sits today at **79%** of our budget goal.

Our giving through **Global Outreach** is even worse. We are at **66%** of our goal year to date.

And to be perfectly honest with you, this problem makes me sad. But the reason it saddens me may be for different reasons than you will immediately think.

- It is not because I want us to have huge reserves in our bank accounts.

- It is not because I want to make us home folks more comfortable. I'm not wanting to buy more cushy pews or tour busses for our travel.

I am saddened because **a serious shortfall in either General Fund or Global Outreach necessarily reduces our ministries and our missions.** And frankly, that is what I live for.

Ministering to people

Being on mission to share the gospel as a witness for Christ

As far as I am concerned, **that is why God gave me life.** So when I do less of that, for whatever reason, it is as if some of life itself is taken away.

And I have another strange idea. I think **that is why God gave you life also.** Yes, you. All of you. I am aware not all of you believe this. Certainly not all of you want this, but that has nothing to do with whether or not that is the reason God made you and caused you to be born into this world.

And this book, which I happen to believe from cover to cover, says that is why God made each of us, and it is why the Lord **Jesus** established the church. He **founded the church**, of which He Himself is the Head, **so that we could be witnesses, make disciples, and minister in His name.**

So, when something causes SABC to minister less, to disciple less, to be less of His witnesses, it saddens me. And this problem is about to cause us as a church to minister less, disciple less, and be a witness in less places and to fewer people.

I say about to because it has not done so yet. The reason is that we had some healthy reserves left from last year, and we have been using them to keep the ministries going at full tile because that is what we are about. But the reserves are almost gone, and so we are about to have to reduce ministry and missions so that we can operate at 79% and 66% of the budgets we adopted.

Bro. Rick and I spent an entire day last week working out what we are going to do. We **reduced the budget by \$222,000**, but to get there we had to **reduce ministry areas to 75% to 84% of what they were.** Every area of ministry will suffer this reduction. That's the problem.

So ..., I've been really listening and reading in our Bible reading plan for the Lord to speak to me about this out of His Word. I am thinking, "Just one thing Lord. I just need one word about this problem." And it was as if the Lord said, "Mike, you are too thick in the skull for just one word." God sent me six words, actually six passages. But in reality, they are virtually the same passage six times, and they were all in this week's reading plan.

Four times it was the passage describing the feeding of the 5,000.

Twice it was the passage about the feeding of the 4,000.

The two are separate events. It is not that one of the disciples couldn't count. The feeding of the multitude happened twice, a few months separating the two. The details are different, but the message is the same.

So God sent your pastor the same message six times. You only have to hear it once.

But would you really listen? **Would you ask God to speak to your heart about this problem we are facing out of these passages of Scripture?**

Matthew 15:32–38 ³² Now Jesus called His disciples to *Himself* and said, “I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.”

³³ Then His disciples said to Him, “Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?”

³⁴ Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?”

And they said, “Seven, and a few little fish.”

³⁵ So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. ³⁶ And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke *them* and gave *them* to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude. ³⁷ So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. ³⁸ Now those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children.

Can you see as plainly as I do that this passage speaks directly to our problem. Our problem is how do we care for so many?

- How do we give food to more than 43,000 people like we did last year?
- How do we give clothing to more than 38,000 people, including over 18,000 children, like we did last year?
- How do we help mission churches in Baltimore and Portland?
- How do we keep planting as many new churches in West Africa?
- How do we keep training pastors in Brazil?
- How do we keep bringing more children and youth to salvation and disciple them?

How do we care for so many?

The problem facing Jesus and the disciples was exactly the same. I have chosen the text about feeding the 4,000 families instead of the one about the 5,000 families because the one we are looking at is the less familiar of the two. However, you could go to the other and see the exact same message that I see here.

In this case, **this huge crowd of people**, 4,000 men and the women and children with them – it must have been **16 to 20,000** people had been with Jesus three days. You talk about a camp meeting, they were having one! The crowd had come up on a mountain and for three days straight they had a preaching and healing service. That means that most of them brought provisions with them. They had some food they could get by with.

Like us, they had some reserves.

But like us, they ran out!

And then Jesus and the disciples faced the very thing we are facing.

How do you care for so many?

Now, understand, Jesus faced the problem, but He also knew the answer. It was the disciples who needed the answer.

Matthew 15:33 Then His disciples said to Him, “Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?”

Now, here is something interesting: Why did they not know the answer? Every one of them was with Jesus when he fed the 5,000 families, and that was only a few months before. So why didn't they know? They did know. They just weren't thinking about it.

And the things the Lord brought to my attention from this passage weren't new things for me either. But they are things of which I needed to be reminded. And so they will be for some of you. But that does not mean we do not need to hear them again and give them a fresh consideration. So whether these truths are brand new to you or simply a refresher course, let them flow through your veins and find refuge in your soul.

I. JESUS CARES ABOUT MINISTRY TO OTHERS MORE THAN WE DO.

Matthew 15:32 Now Jesus called His disciples to *Himself* and said, “I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.”

- As burdened as we are for the hungry and the needy, Jesus cares more than we do.
- As much as we want the gospel to be shared and received across the street and around the world, our Lord wants it far more.
- More than any of us, more than all of us put together on our best day, Jesus wants the lost to be saved, the saved to be grown in His likeness, and the love of God demonstrated to hurting people all over the world that they may hear and respond to the gospel message.

Folks, listen. If it saddens me, if it saddens you to reduce ministry and missions, know that it saddens the Lord all the more.

Jesus cares about ministry to others more than we do.

Second we see that

II. JESUS HIMSELF IS OUR SOURCE AND OUR PROVISION.

Matthew 15:36–37 ³⁶ And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke *them* and gave *them* to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude. ³⁷ So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left.

Brother, get this! This is what I needed to hear again this week from the Lord.

Sister, listen up! This is what let me sleep at nights after wrestling with this problem this week.

The disciples didn't fix the problem. They couldn't. All they could scrounge together was 7 little loaves of bread and a few small fish. What the disciples were able to do in comparison to the need was nothing.

But Jesus provided for the needs of the people!

**It was His compassion that motivated the feeding.
It was His power that provided the food!**

He is the Lord of Glory!
He owns the cattle on a thousand hills.
The silver is His.
The gold is His.

JESUS HIMSELF IS OUR SOURCE AND OUR PROVISION!

And that is what moves us to pray.

**By prayer we acknowledge
our dependence upon Him.**

By prayer we declare **our insufficiency.**

By prayer we express faith in **His all sufficiency.**

I have called the Deacons and Yokefellows to prayer.

I am calling the church to prayer.

Let us besiege heaven with our prayers, morning, noon, and night. Individually, as families, in little groups, in big groups. Tonight – Prayer First! – VBS and Giving

Luke 11:9 “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

So, you ask, **what place has my own giving to the Lord through His church in all of this?**
We see here the answer to that also.

III. JESUS LEAVES A PLACE FOR US TO PARTICIPATE IN THE MIRACLE.

Matthew 15:34 Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?”
And they said, “Seven, and a few little fish.”

Let me ask you something?

Do you think for a minute that Jesus needed their loaves and fish to feed the multitude?
When Peter needed money to pay the temple tax, Jesus made a fish cough it up!

Do you think that He who filled the oceans of the earth with swarms of living creatures needs seven scrawny fish?

Not on your life!

God does not need your \$10, or your \$100, or your \$1,000, or your \$10,000, or your \$100,000, or your \$1,000,000! Everybody just turned around to see who I was pointing at when I said that one.

Listen, if God needed it, you wouldn't have to give it; He is capable of taking it.
If God needed it, He wouldn't have to give it to you in the first place.

So, **why does God command the tithe?**

**Why does God tell us to give an offering beyond the tithe according to the way He blesses us?
Why did Jesus take the seven loaves and those few small fish?**

Because our giving of the tithe says to us and to God,

- **“You own it all. I have what You have given me.**
- **You say, ‘Give back 10%.’ You´re the Master; I´m the steward. I obey.”**

Because the offering given to God says to us and to God

- **“I know my blessings come from You, and I am grateful.”**
- **“In a tangible way, I want to demonstrate my love, my adoration, and my worship.”**

Because through our giving, God lets us participate in His miracles.

- **The Almighty God allows us to partner with Him.**
- **He lets us share in feeding the hungry and clothing the poor.**
- **He lets us be a part of healing the sick and ministering to the hurting.**
- **He even lets us be a part of ushering lost souls into the Kingdom of God for eternity by being a witness of the Lord Jesus Christ and a proclaimer of the gospel.**

Dear friend, God´s desire is that we shall spend eternity with Him, not as slaves but as friends, as sons and daughters, as members of His family that share in a partnership that goes on forever and forever.

And that is why it is so important that we learn how to partner here and now.

- That is why sometimes God does not feed the hungry when none of His followers partner with Him in giving food.
- That is why some ministries are never done, or are not done in certain places, because believers will not partner with God and bring their fish and loaves.
- That is why in this world where it is physically possible to be anywhere on the globe within 24 hours, that there are still vast numbers of people who have not heard the name of Jesus or the gospel that will save them. They have not heard it even one time, because there are no disciples to partner with God in bringing them the good news.

It is not that God cannot.

It is that often times, without partners, God will not.

That is how important this principle of partnership with God is.

- **We partner with God by giving, not because He needs it, but because He wants our partnership.**
- **We partner with God by serving, not because He needs our abilities, but because He wants our partnership.**
- **We partner with God by praying, not because we must persuade Him, but because He desires that we should ask, seek, and knock.**

Do you know that these truths are even reflected in the Lord´s Supper?

Jesus took the bread and said, “This is my body which is broken for you.”

- Jesus cared enough about all of us that He became a man and sacrificed Himself that we might be saved.

Jesus took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood."

- Jesus alone is the provision of our salvation. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. Apart from the shedding of Jesus' blood upon the cross, there is no salvation for man.

In eating the bread and drinking the cup, we picture our partnership with God through faith in Christ. We invite Him into our lives to be a part of us. Christ in us, the hope of glory.