

## 22. 'Impossible' – not in God's vocabulary

February 20, 2011

Since we started to study the Book of John last August, we came across three of Jesus' miracles so far – turning regular tap water to the best wine which the master of the feast had tasted; healing a nobleman's son 17 miles away from their home in Capernaum; and healing a man who had been sick thirty-eight years at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath day. So far, so good, nothing to the Lord Jesus.

The people of Israel were impressed with this new-found rabbi from the region of Galilee. The following crowd was getting bigger by day. They wanted to see more of His miracles. Everybody in Israel was talking about this young rabbi and the Jewish religious leaders couldn't stand even a mere mention of His name. They hated Him so much that they were willing to kill Him because He dared to call Himself, the Son of God and the worst of all, He dared to challenge their authority. "What a blasphemy!" they were fuming.

Now Jesus was back in His home territory – around the Sea of Galilee. The disciples of Jesus were about to face the impossibility that was directed by the Lord Jesus for their faith building training, and none of them had any idea how to handle it. But not with our God. The word 'impossible' is not in His vocabulary.

*Jeremiah 32:27 "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?"*

*Luke 18:27 But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."*

I strongly believe that just about everyone of us in this room faces some impossibility of its own kind. I also believe that the Holy Spirit who is the Author of this Bible has individually shaped and formed 'impossibility' lesson for everybody. All we have to do is to open our hearts and receive His training lessons and follow diligently.

### A. SETTING

*John 6:1-4 After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. 2 Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. 3 And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. 4 Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near.*

Since apostle John didn't record every single event of Jesus in order to fulfill the theme of his Gospels – "Believe", we must consult 'the Harmony of the Gospels' to see what this "after these things" meant. The Harmony of the Gospels conglomerates all four Gospels in chronological order which helps us understand and track the earthly life of Jesus.

Between the healing of the paralytic in chapter 5 and the feeding of the 5,000 in this chapter, many events had taken place, some of which are mentioned in Luke 6 through 9 and Mark 3 through 6. During this period our Lord preached "the Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 5-7 and gave the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13.

The distance between Jerusalem and the northern part of the Sea of Galilee is about 80 miles which it would take a good 4 to 5 days traveling by walking. Remember they didn't have a car to hop in and drive. The mode of transportation for the majority of people during that time was walking.

Many commentators believed that the location was Golan Heights which was located about 17 miles east of the Sea of Galilee. Celebrating the Passover feast was to Palestinian Jews what the Fourth of July is to Americans. But I don't think that they ate hot dogs though. They just didn't know what they were missing. The Passover feast was a rallying point for intense, nationalistic zeal.

This feeding of the 5000 was such a big miracle that all four Gospels recorded it. Obviously a great multitude had been following Him for several days, they were getting hungry at this point. So much for the resting idea for Jesus and His disciples. Great opportunities are often disguised as unsolvable problems for our spiritual training purpose.

We find four solutions for this great spiritual training opportunity.

## **B. THE DISCIPLES: SEND THEM AWAY**

*John 6:5-6 Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" 6 But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.*

We need to go to the Book of Mark to get what the disciples in general said first to Jesus.

*Mark 6:35-36 When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, "This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. 36 Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat."*

Nice, that is very compassionate, guys. Before we look down on the heartless comment by the disciples, let's think about ourselves. Don't we do the same thing sometimes? Because someone in our fellowship or unbelievers are in our way or an inconvenience to us, we try to brush them off. I am so glad that our Lord God doesn't do that to us. Next time when you have a chance to extend the compassion of God, please remember this lesson.

*Matthew 25:40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'*

Did you notice what Jesus was doing in v6? Was He picking on poor Philip or being mean to him? No, He wanted to build Philip's muscle of faith, to help him grow and make him to rely on the Lord instead of his own capability.

## **C. PHILIP: NOT SUFFICIENT FOR THEM**

*John 6:7 Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little."*

A denarius was approximately a day's wages for the common laborer. Philip was thinking, "200 day wages would not make any dent on feeding these 5000 men plus their women and children," with computer speed, he already calculated their odds against the mass and decided that there is no way they – or not even the miracle worker Jesus could pull off this one.

You see, Philip's balance sheet doesn't include the infinite wealth and power of God, who owns everything in the universe and who can do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.

*Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us*

## **D. ANDREW: WHAT ARE THEY AMONG SO MANY?**

*John 6:8-9 One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, 9 "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"*

You have to give credit to Andrew. He somehow was able to con a kid to give up his lunch lox. But Andrew came up with the same song the second lyrics as Philip.

By the way, some liberal people might say, "Those five barley loaves and two small fish were a healthy and expensive lunch." No, sirree. Barley bread was for poor people during that period and small fish meant to be a couple of pickled sardines, not some big size salmons or trouts.

Speaking of seafood, I used to be one of those daring people who would try different dishes. One time I tried a spoonful of caviar at a fancy restaurant where a group of employees were treated by the company I used to work for. I must admit that I don't have the class, nor taste for it, it tasted like taking a bite of the mud from the bottom of a fish pond. If you like it because you have class, more power to ya.

Andrew probably was holding the kid's lunch box and looked around and saw all those thousands of people, he looked down on the five loaves and two small fish, then he blurted out, "What are they among so many?" He was looking for loaves in all the wrong places.

While Philip was burning his pocket calculator's battery busy checking the numbers, while Andrew was counting the people's heads vs. five loaves and two fish, they all forgot Whom they were with just as the Israelites in the wilderness continuously forgot what kind of God they were serving.

Though the disciples of Jesus heard the claims of Jesus as the Son of God which He meant that He is God Himself, they didn't believe in Him as the Jewish religious leaders didn't. By now, the disciples had been with Jesus about two years, yet they were not getting it.

Ladies and gentlemen, we really cannot laugh at the lack of faith in the disciples' hearts because they represent many of us. We have a tendency to analyze the situation and calculate what God can do according to our limited capability and assume that He cannot do more than what we think He is able. Do you see how we limit God by not trusting Him?

God is faithful to keep what He promises. He means what He says, what He says He means.

When Jesus says, "I will meet all of your needs," He will.

When Jesus says, "I will guide us through the darkness," He will.

When Jesus says, "I will carry your burden on My shoulders," He will.

When Jesus says, "I will give you peace in your heart that passes all understanding and guards your heart as long as you depend on Me," He will.

Whether your impossibility is a health problem, financial problem, family problem, or job problem, the Lord is with you and nothing is impossible to Him. You cannot find a better person to depend on.

## **E. JESUS: MAKE THE PEOPLE SIT DOWN AND FEED THEM**

*John 6:10-11 Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11 And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.*

The Lord took the little boy's lunch, blessed it, broke it, handed it out to His disciples, and they fed the whole multitude. The miracle took place in the hands of the Savior, not in the hands of the disciples. He multiplied the food, they only had the joyful privilege of passing it out as channels of His blessing.

Jesus could have the people to come forward to Him to get foods or had angels from heaven to deliver an "In-N-Out" cheeseburger, fries, and Coke to everyone instantly.

But He chose to use His disciples to distribute the foods. Can you imagine yourself being one of the twelve disciples of Jesus carrying baskets of barley loaves and fish and handing them out? The more you give out, the more you have in your basket and the more you get excited about doing what the Lord told you to do.

We can find two very important principles we must take notice:

### **1) Our God chooses to use us as channels of His blessings to bless others.**

What a joy beyond description to serve the Lord our God and His people! We get to be His representatives to bless others. You really don't have any idea what it is like until you start to serve others and the Lord.

### **2) The more you give and serve others, the more blessings you get from the Lord and receive the fulfillment of your life.**

There are many, many selfish Christians who absolutely do nothing for the Lord and His people, the church. They go to church and sit, listen, get fed from the Word, get served by others, and leave the church building expecting someone else to take care of everything for them. They have the mentality of a slave master instead of the heart of our Servant King Lord Jesus Christ.

Some of you may think, "Did you just call me a selfish Christian because I am not doing anything in this church?" Yes, I did and I don't apologize. It is not because our church needs your help, rather I want you to be blessed beyond measure by serving the Lord and His people.

By the way, I want all of you to notice what Jesus did before He distributed the foods to His disciples: He gave thanks to the Father in heaven for the meal. If you are wondering whether you should pray before your meals or not, especially in restaurants, what do you think? Yes, absolutely pray before your meal and give thanks to Him for the provision. Yes, including the school cafeteria foods and hospital foods.

## **F. TWELVE VIVID VISUAL REMINDERS**

*John 6:12-13 So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." 13 Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.*

The twelve baskets for the twelve disciples as a reminder for them. As each one carried a basketful of the leftovers, I am sure that their hearts were still pounding in excitement and wonder of the identity of Jesus, their Master.

Jesus is generous, but not wasteful.

## **G. APPLICATIONS**

**1) Let's not forget that God's power is unlimited.**

**2) Let's not forget that God's promise is unconditional.**

**3) Let's not forget that God's compassion is uncompromising.**

God doesn't see individual believer's spiritual status and treat us differently. He treats us all the same.

*Matthew 25:40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'*

**4) Let's not forget that God's powerful solution is behind our current seemingly difficult situation.**