

Lesson 25 Matthew 15.33-34(33)

Jesus teaches "little is much when God is in it"

Where is the world's great need?

Today as in this bible setting the great need of the world is centred in arid areas and is aggravated by war and greed. The setting was "a desert place". It was only in the mid 20th century that developing countries began to import wheat. Russia and China were in crisis in the early 20th.C but today Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Malawi Uganda and sub Saharan Africa are impoverished and attract food aid.

Such numbers; such a quantity of food is needed.

The disciples looked at the vast throng *τοσούτων* (Greek original for "So many") around them. At some point they counted for in v.38 they knew the number of men was 4000. The time together was three days-so there was time to become familiar with numbers-and it was the lord's habit to set them down in *συμποσια* parties of 50/100-lets say 40 groups. The need was formidable. To obtain an ample consignment of bread *τοσούτοι* (original for 'so many loaves') that is 4000 at the least, was the big issue.

The question is put to Jesus!

Where could we possibly get such a quantity of bread? They were thinking of the surrounding towns. As it seems it was the heat of the day or later and both would contribute to tiredness and fainting -the bread baked overnight would have been snapped up. So the question was a good one in that sense. They felt that the answer probably did not lie even in the region-and outside of the capitol or the King's bakers a supply would be unobtainable. Besides there was the price and the conveyance-and they were up a mountain after all. Today we find ourselves in kindred circumstances where the country direly in need of food resources really has nothing approaching enough. So 70% of the world's children go to bed hungry and two-thirds of its peoples are underfed or living in famine conditions

The question is sardonic

Where could we get food that would satisfy this crowd once for all so that like cattle in the stall they are full. Though they might give them something exercising their best efforts it would end up being just a pittance.

The Lord's solution

Jesus simply asked, "how many" loaves have you?" Literally "How many are you holding /reserving"! He directed their attention to the provisions they already had. Sometimes we are unwilling to share what we have. This is not a small contributory factor to the world's need. One man's greed doubles another's need. The Lord expects us to use our resources to meet need. He could also have referred to "the bag" or common purse that Judas kept-but He was clearly not confident of an answer from that quarter.

Two sort of resource

They answered that they had seven loaves and a few small fish. But they had also the Son of God in their company. He had shown them that he could take a quantity of water and turn it into wine and He had calmed the storm. Had they remembered their history they would have recollected that the Lord had fed the nation on manna for forty years. As Psalm 78.19 reads, "He has furnished a table in the wilderness". It was a question of faith as well as a question of resources. Indeed the question of meeting human need is at heart a faith question.

The bread of Life

The following lessons direct us to Christ as the answer. Whenever we have the Lord with us we are never without the ability to enterprise by faith to meet some evident need. We are to do this together and to use what the Lord has given us.

An illustration

Some years ago John Searle and his wife felt called of the Lord to support a needy Malawi community. By using profits from their own business and donations I learned they had established a school a church -good homes and a dispensary. Their future vision also included a theological training centre -all with limited resources and full dependence on God Was it not even so with Hudson Taylor who coined the historic expression "with God and two and six pence".



From paper to practice

How does this miracle show that 'little is much when God is in it'?

Is there some target beyond my grasp for which I should trust God appreciating I have some finite resources to offer already?

Should we do like Gideon when seeking guidance on a big challenge or just go on in faith? cf. Judges 6.37