

Sermon Podcast 2-23.MP3

0:06

Today, we're gonna continue in our series on the great questions of faith because we believe, as we've said all along, god can handle our difficulties, god can handle our doubts. And the story today is actually a question that Jesus asks of the disciples, but what what I think is Jesus is actually asking a question of us. And so if you have your Bibles, turn to Matthew chapter 15. We're gonna read verses 29 to 39. And if you don't have your bibles, no worries.

0:31

The words are on the screen. And I'll begin reading this story now from Luke from Matthew's gospel. Jesus went away from there, and he arrived beside the Sea Of Galilee. He went up the mountain and sat down. Large crowds came to him with their lame, blind, crippled, mute, and many others.

0:50

They laid them at his feet and he healed them. When the crowd saw the mute speaking, the crippled made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing, they were astonished, and they gave praise to the god of Israel. And Jesus called his disciples and said, I'm I'm really sorry for the crowd. They've been around me now for three days, and they haven't gotten anything to eat. I don't wanna send them away hungry.

1:14

They might faint on the way home. The disciples said to Jesus, where could we get enough bread to feed a crowd this size out in the country like this? How many loaves have you got? Asked Jesus. Seven, they replied, and a few fish.

1:31

Jesus told the crowd to sit down on the ground, and then he took the seven loaves and the fish gave thanks, broke them, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied. And and they picked up seven baskets full of what was left of the broken pieces. There were 4,000 men who had eaten besides the women and children.

Jesus sent the crowds away and then he got into the boat and went over to the Magden Coast.

2:01

So, you guys one of the things that I get to do in my job is I get to go to a lot of conferences. I get to travel a lot whether I'm just attending one or occasionally presenting at one. And in order to get to said conferences, I have to book flights. And so, I'm apparently an old man because I still use Priceline.com to book my flights. Do I have any other Priceline people in the room?

2:24

Thank you very much. So I get on Priceline, and the thing that is constant, no matter when I am booking, whether it is six months out or a week before, I will get on Priceline, I will look up a flight, I will look up my hotel room, and it says every single time, there's only one ticket left at this price. There's only one room left at this price. And then it will say, right beside it, 7,000,000 people are currently viewing this flight. And it is entirely stressful to me, right?

2:53

And it might not be 7,000,000, but it's legit like, 2,800 people are viewing this room. And so, what it does is it instills in me the sense that I need to book it right now. Does anybody know what I am talking about? Maybe if you don't use Priceline.com but you look at houses occasionally. You'll get on Zillow, and I know y'all are Zillow people right?

3:15

You'll get on Zillow and you will look at this house that is perfect and it shows you how many people have looked at that house in the last twenty four hours. And it's never just one or two, but it's always in the thousands. Because I am convinced we are being sold this idea that there is scarcity, and if you wanna get the thing that you desire then you have to get it now because there's only so much that is out there. One of the great thinkers in economic life is a guy named Milton Friedman. And Milton Friedman from the University of Chicago, one of the Like he formed the way modern people think about economics.

3:53

And talking about what the study of economics is, here's what Friedman says. That economics simply put is the study of the distribution of scarce resources. The economics is the study of the distribution of scarce resources. Because freedmen believe and and so we all believe that in this world there are limited numbers of resources that we can all get. And some people will get, and other people will not.

4:24

Some people will have, and other people will not. It is the basic framework of a capitalist market. And that's good for economics, but here's what I want to suggest to us this morning. And if we think deeply about it, I think you would probably agree. That not only do we think that way about economics as an idea of scarce resources being distributed, But what I think is that each and every one of us has ingrained in our consciousness this idea that life is that sort of way.

4:57

That we live in a world where there is only so much pie, And if I am going to get my piece, then you cannot get as much. It's true as individuals, it's true geopolitically. Right? If we are gonna maintain our standard of living, then there are only so many resources to go around so not everybody else can have what we have. There's only so much generosity that can go around.

5:22

Undoubtedly, I know if you have not said this yourself, you have heard it said, I can't care about everything. I can't care about everything. And and while at some level y'all that is fundamentally true, what I wanna suggest to us this morning and what I want us to spend time thinking about over the next twenty, twenty five minutes or so is how when we begin to think that way, not only does it limit the way we see the world, but ultimately, I think it can limit the way we see God. That we see God as a God of scarcity. We get in the story in Matthew chapter 15, and you gotta remember at this point, the disciples have been with Jesus for almost three years.

6:08

Jesus has called them from their various spaces and places in life as fishermen on the Sea Of Galilee, as tax collectors from wherever they were. And for three years, they have been following Jesus around. And in the course of those three years, what they have done is they have seen him heal people who are sick. They have seen him bring joy into places of death and devastation. They've seen Jesus go to a wedding at Cana Of Galilee, and when the distribution, the scarce distribution of goods has come up, there's no more wine.

6:38

What does Jesus do? He makes more. The disciples have seen all of this. And yet we get to this story in Matthew chapter 15, and it says that the the disciples and a crowd of people, 4,000 men plus women and children, so most scholars are gonna say it's easily 10,000 people when all is said and done. They've gathered together in the Upper Galilee, and that's important because the Upper Galilee is like farm country.

7:04

It is, I don't know, I don't wanna offend anybody. Where's like South Augusta or something like that? I don't know, it's like it's rural, okay? And not many people are living there. And so Jesus is with the crowds teaching them healing the sick, healing the lame, bringing sight to the blind, restoring hearing to those who are deaf.

7:25

And for three days they sit there captive to the teaching of the greatest rabbi that the world has ever known. I I was thinking about that this morning, you guys. Some of y'all can't even listen to a sermon for twenty minutes. And imagine sitting there for three days just listening to Jesus and watching everything that he does. And then the moment comes in the story where Jesus looks around and he goes, man, they've been here for three days.

7:51

And and they're gonna get hungry, and so it's time for us to feed them. It's time for us to feed them. We can't send them out of here because if they leave without having some nourishment, they've gotten the nourishment for their soul. But if they don't

get the nourishment for their body, then they might collapse on their way home. And so we need to do something about it.

8:10

And it's a fascinating moment in this story because I want you to remember that in Matthew chapter 14, right? I read to you from 15. But in Matthew 14, just a few days, weeks maybe before this story happens, Jesus had already fed 5,000 people. He had already taken the loaves and the fish and multiplied them. So this isn't the first time the disciples have encountered a scenario like this.

8:37

And yet what happens in the story is Jesus says, we gotta do something about this. And the disciples, doing what I think most of us would have done, is he they say, well, it's time to send him home. You you don't have to go home, but you can't stay here. Closing time, open all the doors and let you out into the world. Okay?

9:00

It's time for y'all to get out of here. And if you pay attention to what the disciples are doing, I think they are doing what absolutely every single one of us would have done. They root their lives, they root their thoughts in the idea that there is a scarcity of goods. There's only so much generosity that can be distributed. See, it impacts not only the way we think about economics, but it impacts the way we think about everything.

9:30

Just a few weeks before, they had already seen the abundance of God's generosity. And yet faced with this situation and 4,000 people sitting there ready to eat because they're hungry, the disciples do what I think we would all do. They rely and they lean back on a theology of scarcity. They rely and they lean back on a theology of scarcity. God can't do anything else.

9:59

You've already given them three days worth of teaching. Isn't that enough? Just send them home, Jesus. Let them fend for themselves. Because there's only so much abundance that we

can give them.

10:12

There's only so much good stuff that they can have with three days in the Upper Galilee with the greatest teacher that has ever walked the face of the earth. Jesus, don't do anything else. Let's send them home Because our work is done. It's a theology of scarcity. Knowing what God has done in the past, they still find themselves in this moment thinking, the best thing we can do is send them out to fend for themselves.

10:41

And I get it. I I get it. Because these stories that we talk about defy the rules of gravity. They defy the rules of logic. How does something like this happen?

10:52

Because there is scarce goods to be distributed in the world. There's only so much grace and love and generosity that can be given out. And the disciples embody what I think every single one of us has been taught to think. Not only about life, but about God. And why this story is so important for us to sit and listen to this morning is because Jesus provides us with an alternative way forward.

11:19

He asks to me what is the most profound question. How many loaves of bread do you have? How many loaves of bread do you have? And they said, well, we've we've got seven. We've got seven loaves of bread.

11:33

Interestingly, the number seven in Hebrew thought is a number of completeness, it's a number of wholeness, and so Jesus says, actually, I think that'll do. And so he takes the loaves and he takes the few fishes they've got, and he says, take a seat. And the crowd sits down, and the story says that he takes the bread and he breaks it and he blesses it. And over the course of the next, I don't know how long it took, but 4,000 men plus women and children, 10,000 people are fed by the grace of God. Not only does that event happen, but remember what he had done before.

12:07

Right? The blind can see. And in that culture, if you're blind, game's over. And the deaf can hear because he touches them. In a world that says you are an outcast for the rest of your life because you have an infirmity that is given to you by God, Jesus says, no, the abundance of grace will extend even to them.

12:30

See, you guys, when we read this story, we can see this incredible juxtaposition of ways to think about who God is and who we are called to be. Because on the one hand, you have the disciples who very justifiably think there's not enough for everybody to get a piece. So let's just send them out of here. But thanks be to God. That isn't what Jesus thinks.

12:56

That isn't how Jesus sees the world, because Jesus offers us an alternative framework. And that's what I want us to center on this morning. I talk about this guy all the time, Dallas Willard, one of the greatest writers and thinkers of our generation. And in his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, if you have not read that book, go and buy it and read it. Just the fourth chapter alone is worth the entire price of admission.

13:20

Because in the fourth chapter where the title is the God bathed world, To see as Jesus saw. If we want to know how Jesus looks at seven loaves of fish, seven loaves of bread and fish, and he sees not a limitation, but a source of abundance, then we need to pay attention to what Willard says. To Jesus' eyes, this world, it is a God bathed and God permeated place. It's a world that is filled with a glorious reality where every component is within the range of God's direct knowledge and his control. Listen to this you guys.

14:02

It is a world that is inconceivably beautiful, And it is good. Why? Because of God. And because God is always in it. It is a world that is inconceivably good and beautiful, and God permeates the whole thing.

14:24

And if God permeates every square inch of reality, then what we can understand is that anything is possible. Because God is a God of love and grace and abundant generosity. Never forsaking us and never leaving us to our own devices. If we can see the world as Jesus sees the world. And what I want you to understand this morning is that it is entirely possible.

14:51

This is not some kind of cliché nonsense, religious stuff to make you feel better when you see that the world is broken. What I am telling you right now is that this way that Jesus sees the world is the way he invites us to see it. That the world is full of potential and possibility, and abundant generosity. That's what Jesus saw. And that's what He invites each and every one of us to see as well.

15:21

You go back to the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew five, six, and seven. I've talked about this a trillion times over. If you're if you're here this morning and you're not a follower of Jesus, you're watching online, and you don't know his way in the world, listen, just go and read Matthew five, six, and seven, the greatest teaching the world's ever known. And as we get to the end of Matthew, of this Sermon on the Mount, there's this section where Jesus is talking about how do we go about living our day to day lives.

15:45

Because Jesus acknowledges, right? Life is stressful. There's one moment where he says, don't worry about tomorrow because today has enough worry on its own. He's not denying that life can be stressful. But if you take a step back and you read in Matthew chapter six, there's this moment where Jesus is talking about how do we relate to the father?

16:03

How do we relate to the God who is the creator of all things? As we go throughout the stressful existence that we sometimes live, Jesus says, right, don't worry about what you will eat. Don't you see the birds of the sky? That they don't know where their food is

going to come from, but God provides for them. And if God provides for them, how much more does God wanna provide for you?

16:33

Jesus says, look at the lilies of the field. When's the last time you just walked outside and looked at the abundant beauty of God's good creation? Jesus says, go out and look at the lilies of the field. Because if you do, what you will see is that the flowers of the field are more beautiful than Solomon, one of the greatest kings of Israel, in all of his splendor. And if those flowers which are here today and gone tomorrow matter to God, then how much more do you matter to God?

17:04

Don't worry about what you will wear. Because when you do those things, when you worry about the day to day rhythms of life, you are placing God in a box of scarcity. And if we understand who Jesus is and what he teaches us and how he lives, we will remember that he teaches something radically different. God is here to take care of us. God is here to lead us into abundance of life.

17:31

What does he say in the gospel of John? But I came so that you might have abundant life right here and right now. If we understand what Jesus is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, if we understand what Jesus is showing us through this story in Matthew chapter 15, here's what we will recognize. That Jesus lives with a theology of abundance. And each and every person who claims to be a follower of the crucified and resurrected Christ is invited to see the world in the exact same way.

18:09

Can you see the world the way that Jesus does? Or or or do you live with a fixed mindset, where there's only so much to go around, and if I'm gonna get, then someone else isn't? If I'm gonna win, then someone else has to lose. You see, Jesus invites us to see the world through a better lens. Notice that I said not lived with a theology of abundance, but lives.

18:34

Actively ruling over all of creation, seated at the right hand of God the father, and inviting us to live our lives in accordance with his rule. And let me be clear to you, friends. That matters. That matters for us individually, but increasingly, it matters for us corporately. It matters for us as a community of people.

18:55

How do we see God leading us into the future? Because if you understand the abundance of God, if you understand the theology of generosity and abundance, then it changes absolutely everything. Right now, on Wednesday nights, what I'm doing is I'm leading a Bible study. I'm leading leading a Bible study here in the chapel on the book of Acts. And and I absolutely love the book of Acts for a number of reasons.

19:20

Number one, I actually think that the church in 02/2025 is inching ever more close to being like the church in the first century in a post Christian culture, in a culture that no longer embodies Christian values and virtues, we need to pay attention to how the early church went about their business. That's why this book matters so much. But even more than that, when you read through the book of Acts, what you see is what a church looks like when they actually subscribe to the ideas that Jesus teaches. What you see is a church that lives with reckless abandon and crazy generosity. Because they actually took to heart what Jesus said is true.

20:07

If you go and you read in the book of Acts, right, one of the first things that you see in Acts chapter six is there's a daily distribution of bread. A daily distribution of bread, which means nobody in that community is going to go hungry because in God's house, there's always enough. What you see in Acts chapter nine is that the the disciples, they hear the word that there's about to be a famine. There's about to be a shortage of food. Right?

20:38

And in Acts chapter nine, the disciples in Syrian Antioch, it's this

beautiful story. I'll go and read it for yourself. Where the disciples hear, okay, there's gonna be a shortage. And when most of us hear egg prices are rising, what do you do? You go and buy all the eggs you can.

20:55

Because if you've been to Publix lately, the only thing you're gonna get the egg ones best, and they're about \$20 a dozen. Right? So we wanna hoard when we hear something's going wrong. But pay attention to what the disciples do in Acts chapter nine. Hearing that there's gonna be a famine, they instead of hoarding it for themselves, the first impulse of their heart with a theology of generosity is to say, who can we help?

21:21

Who can we help? And they take a collection of their own resources and they send it to the church in Jerusalem. Because they're the most vulnerable and they're the most persecuted. There's this beautiful section at the end of Acts chapter four. It might be one of my favorite lines in the New Testament where it talks about how the church devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to the breaking of bread, and to the sharing of prayers.

21:46

And then there's this one line that can get lost on us if we're not paying attention. In Acts four thirty four, for there were no needy persons among them. There were no needy persons among them. That's actually a direct quote from the book of Deuteronomy, where God gives a promise to Moses where he says, one day I will form a community that is filled with my blessing. One day, I will form a community that is filled with my generosity, and this will be the mark of that community, that there will be no needy people among them.

22:20

You see, friends, we live in a world of scarcity. And if we want to be the radical revolutionary force for good that Jesus says we can be, then we need to pay attention to stories like this because they can shape us into different sorts of people. And I'm telling you right now, y'all, this is one of the greatest challenges for church in this decade. As you see more and more churches

closing their doors, as you see our culture becoming less and less Christian and aligned with the values of Jesus, What you are going to find friends, is that more and more churches, not not buildings, but communities of people, as they shrink, they're going to look inward. And they're gonna stop thinking with a theology of bond of abundance and instead think through the lens of scarcity.

23:11

All you have to do is go into any metro area in the entire country. And I was visiting with a pastor not long ago who works at a church just inside Metro Atlanta. And this church in the nineteen sixties, they were filled with thousands of people in the nineteen sixties. Because guess what? Every church was filled with people in the nineteen sixties.

23:36

But it's not the nineteen sixties anymore. And my friend is telling me a story about this church that he is pastoring now, that on a good Sunday morning in a sanctuary that holds 1,500, they might have 75 people. And with those 75 people, they have a current endowment. Are you ready for this? Of \$40,000,000.

24:01

And instead of looking out at the world and thinking, how can we use these resources God has given us to make Jesus known? What they do is they hoard them from this house. And they don't use what they've got to show the glory and abundance of God. Listen to me right now, y'all. Not just us, but every church that is here in The United States Of America moving forward in the next decade.

24:28

One of the greatest challenges for us is to resist the theology of scarcity, and to believe in the God of abundance. Do you trust that God is leading you into a future that is better, Paul says, than anything you could ever ask or imagine? There's always enough in God's kingdom. Everybody gets to eat, and then there's baskets left over for days. See, when we think with a mindset of scarcity, let me tell you something.

25:06

Not only corporately, but individually, it leads us to a place of death. And this story in Matthew chapter 15 invites us to see that in the kingdom of God, there's always enough. In the kingdom of God, there is bread for everyone. In the kingdom of God, no one goes hungry. In the kingdom of God, everyone is capable of restoration.

25:33

That's why this story matters. How much bread do you have? That's why we come to the table, y'all. That's why we come and we take communion as often as we do. Once a month here at First Baptist because it is a reminder to us.

25:50

Right? Most of us when we think about communion, we think about Jesus' body broken and his blood poured out, which is fantastic and it is true. It is the greatest gift of love that the world has ever known, that this body was broken for you. That this blood was poured out for you. But if we stop there, we're missing something essential about what communion truly is.

26:17

Because if you pay attention to what Jesus teaches. Right? When he teaches parables about the kingdom of God. Do you know how he describes the kingdom of God? He describes it as a feast.

26:31

He describes it as a party, and as a celebration. See when Jesus talks about the kingdom of God, what he talks about is an abundance of generosity that is able to be shared with everyone. And so when we come to this table in just a few minutes, I want you to be mindful of something. Who's gonna get the bread? Everybody.

26:59

Who's gonna get the cup? Everybody. And when we are done, there will be plenty left over. See, this is a reminder to us as you come forward to this table that in the kingdom of God, there's always enough. There's always enough.

27:22

Some of us are here this morning and you live not only your life in faith, but your life in general with a theology of scarcity. And you're constantly worried that you don't have enough. I don't have enough money. I don't have enough prestige. I don't have enough of the things that will help me to keep up with the people that live in my neighborhood that I wanna be like.

27:49

I don't have enough time to spend with my kid because they're not making the hundred and 12 in math that I expect them to make, and every grade is gonna be perfect. Some of us are here, y'all, and we are locked into this theology of scarcity. And what I am inviting you to do this morning is to see the world in a better way, to see it as Jesus sees it. Because the world is filled with the abundant generosity of God. And so the question that every single one of us needs to wrestle with this morning is this, how much bread do you have?

28:28

How much bread do you have? How much generosity can you share out into the world? Because sometimes I feel like I've only got enough for my kids. Sometimes I've only got enough for my wife. But in the kingdom of God, there's enough for everybody.

28:49

How much forgiveness do you have? How much literal bread, financial sustenance do you have? Because in the kingdom of God, what you need to know is that the things that stress us out fade into oblivion. How much bread do you have? We are invited to see the world in a fundamentally different way.

29:18

So as you come to the table in just a few moments, I invite you to think through that lens. And right now, I wanna invite those who are serving communion to come and take their place, and as they're doing so, I'm gonna take a moment and I'm gonna pray for us. If you would, join me now, friends, and let's pray together. God, you are good. You are abundant.

29:42

You are filled with life and generosity. And, Lord, so many of us

approach our lives as a study in the distribution of scarce resources. And, Lord, we believe that there's not enough for your grace to go around. There's not enough for your love to go around. But, God, break our hearts today.

30:02

Help us to see that your body was broken and your blood was poured out and that at this table, we experienced the heart of your goodness. Lord, some of us are here today and we need to trust what Jesus says is true. That there's more than enough through your children. So, god, as we approach this table in just a moment, lord, be with us. Work inside of our hearts and help us to ask those difficult questions.

30:29

God, do we trust in your abundant generosity? As we come to the table now, god, may we be mindful of those questions. This is our prayer, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

30:44

Friends, on the night that Jesus was betrayed, he gathered with his disciples in an upper room, and, well, he shared a meal with those disciples. And after the meal was over, then he took a loaf of bread, he held it up before his disciples, and he said, this is my body, which is broken for you. Take and eat. And afterwards, he took a cup of wine, and he held it up before his disciples, and he said, this is my blood, which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. So take it and drink it, and do this in remembrance of me.

31:15

And so today you're invited to come to these tables and experience the abundant generosity of God. Where wherever you are this morning, whatever tradition you come from, you are welcome at this table. And so I invite you now, come and experience the generosity of God.