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Little is Much

Mark 8:1-21

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How many of you would say you're a person who enjoys surprises? Raise your hand if you are – put them up high. I'd probably say a pretty good chunk of you would say, "Yeah, that's me." You think about a surprise and it excites you. Some of you probably sit out there and think: *Oh no, not me.* I would guess probably some of you who aren't raising your hand, the reason is that somewhere along the way you've had some bad surprises. But if you ask me, there's nothing better than a really good surprise, and I mean one that really hits you where you live in a way that you really enjoy.

I remember a good surprise for me early in my marriage. You see my wife Cynci grew up in a home where her family really thought that birthdays were a big deal. And she loved to celebrate those as really special days. I, on the other hand, grew up in a home where birthdays weren't all that exciting. In fact, at times they were even a little bit disappointing. So as an adult I didn't look forward to them much, didn't think about them, didn't really even care about them. You can imagine the bad surprise my wife had the first year we were married and her birthday rolled around.

But even that didn't deter her, so on the night before my birthday one year, we had gone to bed, I'm pretty sure we had fallen asleep, but at the stroke of midnight, my wife flew into action. She went flying out of bed, and I'm pretty sure she sang "Happy Birthday" to me, but the thing I will always distinctly remember is that she literally jumped up and stood on the bed. And she started looking at me, and she was going, "You're the king! You're the king! You're the king!" And then she started bowing down and going, "Oh, is there anything I can do to serve you, o king? Oh, is there anything that you need, o king?" And on and on it went. And I thought: *Oh, that's kind of cute,* and we went back to sleep. But the thing was it continued the next day. Throughout the day she just kept going, "Oh, is there anything I can do for you, o king? Oh, please don't do that. Let me do that, o king." And she just kept talking and talking, but it wasn't just words. She spent the entire day treating me like I was actually a king. And I distinctly remember beginning to think: *Maybe birthdays aren't so bad after all.* It was a great surprise.

You know, I think our God is a god of great surprises. Throughout Scripture and throughout history, God has done extraordinary and amazing things, and often, they have been to, and through, people that you would least expect. You know, God sent Samuel to the home of Jesse to appoint a new king. David was such a dark horse, he wasn't even invited to the pageant. But it wouldn't be very long before everyone would begin to see the wisdom of God's surprise. In II Kings 21, we read that things had become such a total mess under the leadership of kings so wicked that they were worse than the leaders of the nations who didn't know God. But in chapter 22, it was an 8-year-old boy whom God put on the throne. And when he was only 16, Josiah began to really seek the Lord, and he would later launch a massive campaign to cleanse the country and to lead the people back to God.

And then of course, there's the greatest surprise of all. By the end of the Old Testament, it was abundantly clear that no matter what, man was not capable of honoring God, of doing it right, of even getting it together. The world was in bondage to destruction and desperately in need of a deliverer. The people were waiting. The people of God were longing for a Messiah. But what a surprise that the solution would be God Himself, born of a common girl, born in a common stable, and what a shock that His answer and solution would not be the overthrow of nations, but the sacrifice of a sinless Savior. And what a surprise for each one of us to come to the place in our lives

when we discover that we are absolutely incapable of being good enough for God, and just when we want to give up, we learn that He offers salvation completely freely as life's greatest gift. What a surprising God.

This morning, I want to share with you two stories of amazing surprises from Scripture, and the story of one way that God has completely surprised me in my life. I'm headed toward Mark chapter 8, but I want to begin in Mark 6 to give us the first story. That's where that's found. If you have a Bible with you, turn with me to Mark chapter 6. In the middle of Mark 6, we read the despicable account of Herod killing John the Baptist as a party favor for his birthday entertainer, and he also does that out of fear of what his guests will think of him if he doesn't. And this news reaches Jesus, and Jesus decides it's time to get away for some quiet and some rest. But the amazing thing is, the crowds actually follow, and we pick up the story in Mark 6 verse 33:

The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things. When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and it is already quite late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." (Mark 6:33-36, *NASB)

You know, Jesus' actions in this passage are truly amazing in what was certainly a trying and draining time, particularly on the heels of the news that John the Baptist had been executed, and when some time off was what was on the schedule and they were looking to get away from everyone and everything. And they show up and here are these crowds. It's amazing that Jesus responds not with frustration, and not even with a hint of impatience. Rather, when He sees the crowds, He responds with compassion. And He spends considerable time with them. And then when it's late, and the disciples suggest sending them away using the crowds need for food as an excuse, Jesus has a radically different idea. He tells the disciples in verse 37, **"You give them something to eat!"**

Now think for just a second what it would be like to be one of those disciples. The schedule's been hectic, the pace has been intense, life has been filled with pressure, then you find out that one of the key leaders of your movement has been executed by Herod, and Jesus said, "Let's get alone – away." And you're in the boat and you're looking forward to some alone time with Jesus. You're picturing a pastoral hillside. Little do you know the crowds are literally running around to get to the other side before you get there, and you show up and here they are. And instead of the Master sending them away, He has compassion on them, and He spends time with them and begins to preach – and preach – and preach, and then it says it is "quite late." How would you feel at that time? What would you be thinking? And then to top it all off, when you suggest to them it's time to go, let's get it on, send them home, they need to go home and get some food, and probably are thinking: *And so do we*, Jesus has a completely different answer and says, **"You give them something to eat."** How would you respond?

Their answer is probably much like ours would be. In essence, their response is, "Are you nuts?" That's my translation, but it kind of captures the idea, because what they say when they talk about 200 denarii, they're saying it would take eight months worth of wages to buy a crowd of that size a single meal, and that does seem absolutely crazy. Now I want us to pay very close attention to Jesus' response. Look at verse 38. He tells them to give them something to eat, and they say, "It would take 200 denarii,"

And He said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go look!” And when they found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” (Mark 6:38)

“**How many loaves do you have?**” Make a mental note of that, we’ll come back to it, but let’s keep going for now. Verse 38 again:

And He said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go look!” And when they found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. There were five thousand men who ate the loaves. (Mark 6:38-44)

Jesus continues to do some amazing things that we don’t have time for in Mark 6, goes into Mark 7 and we find that Jesus moves out of the region of Galilee where He’s been doing much of His ministry. He ends up in a region called the Decapolis, and it’s in the beginning of Mark 8 that we find the second story, kind of a familiar story, that we want to look at, so look at Mark 8 verse 1:

In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, “I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance.” And His disciples answered Him, “Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?” (Mark 8:1-4)

Notice again, in spite of what had happened earlier in Galilee, the disciples are once again dumbfounded by the staggering need and what it would take to feed such a massive crowd. Now when I read that, I find myself wondering: *How could they say that after what they’ve already seen?* I’ll come back to that question, but first again, notice Jesus’ response. Look at verse 5:

And He was asking them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven.”

“**How many loaves do you have?**” Sound familiar? Again, make a mental note of that, we’re going to come back to it later. Let’s keep going. Chapter 8 verse 5 again:

And He was asking them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven.” And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people. They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well. And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces. About four thousand were there; and He sent them away. And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha. (Mark 8:5-10)

Isn’t it amazing to read stories like that? To look at chapters like Mark 6 and Mark 8 and to read through those things and think of what it must have been like back in those days when Jesus walked among us. And there He was and His disciples are out there, and there’s a huge crowd, and they need all this food, and He says, “You feed them,” and they don’t have enough, and then Jesus does a miracle! He takes the loaves and the fish and He multiplies them. And in Mark 8 in another

completely different place and another completely different crowd, He does the same thing again. Isn't it neat how Jesus used to do things like that? Isn't it neat how back in those days, that's the kind of thing Jesus would do amongst His people?

You know, most of us wouldn't say it out loud, but I think the truth is that a lot of us, kind of unconsciously, think that way. We read some of the things in the Bible, these incredible accounts, and we think somehow things were different back then. We look at who that Jesus was and how he interacted with His people, some of us even longingly wonder: *Wouldn't it be neat if Jesus did something like that today? Why doesn't He work in the same way in our lives and in our midst?*

This morning I want to share a story with you that God has used in my life to teach me about that very thing. And I want to tell you at the beginning that it's kind of hard for me to share the story because it can be easily misunderstood. But as I look at it and as I've thought of it, I think it was Psalm 96 that says that we are to tell of God's glory and we are to proclaim His wonderful deeds to all people. And some of the things that God has shown Cynci and me, I think are maybe some things that can be an encouragement to you. But I just want to make it clear that all it is is just us watching God at work and seeing something that He did, and I want to tell you about it this morning.

In the early 1990's, God began to put a burden on my heart and my wife's heart for a particular place in the world, and that was the country of India, which we had discovered to be the most spiritually needy place on earth. And one year at Christmas time, we received a mailing in the mail from a ministry called *The Jesus Film* which was a movie on the Gospel of Christ. And it was being used all around the world by God to go into places where people had never heard about Christ, and in their own language to begin to introduce them to who He was for the very first time. And God began to stir Cynci's and my heart about both the needs in India, but also the opportunities because we began to hear about some staggering things God was doing of taking the Gospel to people who had never, never before had the chance to hear. And we received this thing in the mail that said it was a Christmas gift catalogue. What it was was a catalogue that showed various ways you could give to help *The Jesus Film* take the Gospel to various places in the world, and it could be a Christmas gift to God. And we thought: *What a great concept. We want to do that this Christmas.*

The problem was at the time, Cynci and I were supported missionaries ourselves, living on a very limited and very fixed income. And as we flipped through the catalogue, we saw that most of these opportunities had behind them price tags that were in the thousands of dollars. Great, staggering opportunities, but things we simply couldn't do. Some others we looked through had price tags in the hundreds of dollars, and it was a little bit overwhelming when you saw some of the opportunities and some of the needs, and God had so stirred our hearts, and we couldn't do those things. But we still wanted to do something. We wanted to do something. We looked through the catalogue, and we found one thing – one thing in the catalogue that we could do.

And that Christmas, my wife and I wrote out a check for \$45. It was to purchase a light bulb for a 16mm film projector that would be used somewhere, hopefully in a place like India, where that film would be shown through that light onto a screen and people would hear about Christ for the very first time. And it was with joy that my wife and I wrote out that check even though it was such a little thing, but it was an opportunity for us and where we were at to do just something.

Several years later, we were in a different situation, different circumstances, but God had just continued to give us a burden for India, and continued to give us a passion for some of the things He was doing in that part of the world. And He had called us to leave the mission work that we were doing and to go into pastoral ministry. And we were moving to Scottsbluff, Nebraska where I would

be the pastor of our Berean church out there. And we sold our little 760 square foot house. And in the sale of that house, God provided some extra money. In fact it was more money than we had had as disposable income probably ever in our lives. And we were looking at that and we began to pray and think: *What would God want us to do with this money?*

Well, we went back to the concept of India and how God was using *The Jesus Film* to go into these unreached places, and we knew that for \$1,400, which was about how much money we had, we could buy a single film print of The Jesus Film – a single copy of the film. And we knew that if we paid for that copy, that would go to a place in India where they would then take it and they would go village to village to village to village to village and literally thousands of people would hear about Christ for the very first time. And Cynci and I will never forget the excitement that we felt as we took and wrote out a check for \$1,400. And we sent that in knowing that God was giving us this strategic moment in our lives when we could do what we thought was something that was big time. And we were so excited. I remember distinctly even saying to each other, “We’ll probably never have another opportunity like this in all of our lives.”

Well, God has a sense of humor, and He’s full of surprises. And that gift ended up getting us on some database somewhere. And later that year, we got another mailing. And it was an invitation, a brochure, and it said, “We want you to come to Jacksonville, Florida for a world executive briefing.” And it said, “Leaders of Christian ministry from all over the world are going to be coming together, and they’re going to be sharing about what God is doing all over the world.” And we were like, “Oh! That would be so great to go to!” And to top it all off, it said, “We want you to come so be, we’ll pay for your hotel, we’ll pay for all your meals while you’re hear.” And we thought: *Free vacation! Alright!* No, we didn’t. We thought: *That’s probably not a good idea.* So we just kind of stuck it in the bottom of the mail, and we chuckled and we went on with life.

But God did this interesting thing. Over the course of the next several weeks, without having a single conversation with each other, Cynci and I both began to sense individually that God wanted us to go. And eventually we talked about it, and we had this uncanny sense, but as we talked about it, we knew that this would be something that had to do with, probably, they were trying to have givers raise money for these opportunities. And we thought: *We cannot waste the ministry’s money. That would be so inappropriate.* So we set it aside again. But as we continued to pray, God would not let us give up the burden that He wanted us at this conference.

So I shared the burden with the elders of our church, and one of the issues we had is we couldn’t even afford the airfare to go to Florida. And I shared about this with the elders of our church and they said, “You need to go to that conference, and we’ll pay the airfare.” The next thing you know, Cynci and I were on a plane flying to Jacksonville, Florida. And I have to tell you that within 20 minutes, we knew something was dreadfully wrong. The only way I can explain it is if you have kids or you have grandkids, and you’ve ever watched Sesame Street, what they do is they take and divide the screen into four quadrants and four boxes, and they’ll have a lion, and a lion, and a lion, and a donkey. And they’ll say, “Which one of these is not like the other? Which one of these just doesn’t belong?” And that is the only image I can have in my head when we were in Jacksonville, sitting there. We are the donkey in the room full of lions. What are we doing here?

And we would later discover that actually some of the events that they were doing like this, they were designed to give exposure and opportunities to people who actually had the ability to give a million dollars. And we sat there in that conference going, “Lord, what are we doing here?” and actually, for much of the time, feeling kind of horrible about being there. We talked to the leadership of the ministry and kind of shared our story, and said, “We don’t know why we’re here.”

And to be honest, they didn't say it, but I think they were thinking: *Why are you here?* But we kept talking to God throughout the entire time we were there. And God did something in that conference that has completely changed my life.

For the first time in my life, I began to see another way that God might want to use us. For my life up to that point, we had asked God, "How can You use us? How do You want to use us as a part of building Your kingdom?" And we tried to do everything we could to build His church locally where we were and to extend that influence to the other side of the world. And we thought, *Maybe God would use us as a pastor to send people to other parts of the world to reach unreached places.* But at that conference for the first time, I discovered some unique things about who I was. The first thing I discovered that was unique is the fact that I lived in America. And I began to realize that God had me, according to His grace and His sovereign plan, living in the wealthiest nation on earth. In fact, what was probably the wealthiest nation in the history of the earth, and I began to wonder and ask the question of, "Why? Why has God amassed the wealth that He has in this country in such a unique way?"

And the second thing I began to understand is that God had given me a platform. That as a pastor maybe He had not personally blessed me with lots of financial resources, but maybe He would use me to mobilize other people. And at that conference I began to understand that one of the greatest ways the church of Jesus Christ in America could be used to literally transform the world was simply through resourcing the needs of ministries all around the world. And Cynici and I actually began to pray and have serious talks at that conference about making a significant pledge. And we're sitting there going, "This is crazy."

Well, we came to the end of the conference and they had the time where you fill out the pledge card, and we didn't make a pledge. I just did not want to do anything on the basis of emotion; I didn't want to do anything that was just a reaction to the setting that we were in; I just didn't feel like we should go there. So we slipped that thing in our bag, and we slipped out of town and we headed back to Nebraska. Now when we got back to Nebraska, I got back into the ministry of the church and immersed in things that we were doing in our community. And part of that was because I was excited about those things, but I have to tell you the honest truth is that I just wanted to forget all about Jacksonville. I just didn't want to think about it. I didn't even want to consider it.

But God would not let my wife give up the burden of the things that He had birthed in those days. And she began to pray and pray and pray. And God began to give her a vision of a way that He could use us. And she began to do research and she discovered that if we could somehow see God raise up \$25,000, we could have *The Jesus Film* translated in the language of a people called the Bhatiri people who live in Central India. They were people who at that time had no church, no missionaries, no Christian workers, not a single passage of the Scripture in their language, not a single Gospel cassette, no way whatsoever of hearing the good news about Jesus Christ, and they never had. And Cynici began to discover that if we could somehow see God raise up \$25,000, these people would have a chance to hear about Christ for the first time.

And then if we did that in one year, and then in a second year, we saw God raise up \$100,000, we could literally send in teams of people that would begin to penetrate the darkness and begin to expose these people and begin building the kingdom of God among the Bhatiri in the Bastar district of Central India. And she started sharing this burden with me. And she kept sharing this burden with me. And she'd share it, and I didn't respond very well. And I'd just kind of try to put it off and put it off, but God would not let her give it up. And she began to say, "I really feel like God wants us to do this. Would you pray about it?" And I have to tell you, I was just simply scared to death. But I

began to pray. And I began to really think about this thing, and it just seemed so enormous, and it seemed so overwhelming, but after praying and praying and praying, one day...I'll come back to that.

First, let's check in and see how the disciples are doing. Look back at Mark chapter 8. I want to pick up their story in verse 11. In verse 9, we see this amazing culmination of the second miraculous feeding, then in verse 10 Jesus and His disciples get in the boat, they head to another place, and upon arrival the joy-robbers are there ready to take the wind out of their sails. Mark 8 verse 11:

The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." (Mark 8:11-12)

In these verses we find an interesting irony. The one who had just fed over 4,000 people with seven loaves and a few fish adamantly refuses to give a sign to the Pharisees. I think we'll discover why in a minute, but we'll keep going with verse 13:

Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side. And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread. (Mark 8:13-16)

They all get in the boat and the disciples are saying, "Bummer, we didn't bring enough bread for the journey." And just as that realization is hitting home, Jesus begins to warn them about what He calls the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. Now, "leaven" in that culture was a little piece of last week's dough that was saved, and it was set aside, and it was fermented to be used as a homemade rising agent for this week's bread. But the problem with leaven is that it could easily become tainted, and it actually could become a health hazard that would poison the entire batch of bread, and if undetected, the next batch, and so on and so on. And that's the insidious nature of the Pharisees and their false teaching. And that's what Jesus is warning the disciples about – this major problem that both the Pharisees and Herod have. But the disciples completely miss it.

Instead of understanding the spiritual principle that Jesus was trying to teach, they actually end up illustrating it. Verse 16 again:

They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread. And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." "When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him, "Seven." And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?" (Mark 8: 16-21)

"Do you not yet understand?" In this passage, Jesus strips away any masks and He clearly reveals the need for growth in the lives of the disciples because Jesus is on mission and He is trying to equip these guys for literally what will be a world-changing future, but they are completely stuck on the irrelevant and the insignificant. And for Jesus, it must have been absolutely maddening. I mean,

what did He have to do to get through to these guys. And Jesus asks them, “Do you still not get it? Are your hearts hard? Your eyes blind? Your ears closed? He even, in verse 18, quotes a prophetic condemnation of Israel from the prophet Jeremiah, but still they are not getting it. So Jesus walks them through it again, step by step, story by story. And what’s really amazing is that in verses 19-21, the disciples can recount every detail of the events, and yet still they miss the lesson that was for their lives.

Earlier when we were looking at Mark 8:4, I said that when I read the disciples’ statement about how they could possibly find enough bread, I find myself wondering: *How could they say that after already seeing the miracle in Galilee?* Well, when I read Mark 8:16, I find myself saying, “What is the matter with these guys?” I mean, “You’ve got to be kidding. They have seen Jesus feed over 5,000. They have seen Jesus miraculously feed over 4,000, and they’re stressing about lunch? Give me a break.”

But again, it’s so easy to see that from our vantage point, isn’t it, when we know the whole story in context? It’s an entirely different thing to actually live out the journey, isn’t it? Which reminds me, in that story about Cynici and I, I was struggling, wasn’t I? But why? Because the reality is, by that point in my life, I had seen God be faithful in amazing ways. Time and time again I had seen Him show up in the face of what seemed impossible. But now – now I was sitting there, my wife had this burden and I was praying it through, and God began to show me this is what He wanted to do. But I was on the verge of signing my name on the dotted line of a pledge card for a two year commitment that was more than five times our annual income, and I was absolutely scared to death. And Mark 8:4 didn’t seem crazy to me then. The disciples asked Jesus, “**Where will anyone be able to find enough bread?**”

When we became convinced that that’s what God wanted to do, with quite a bit of trepidation frankly, I wrote out and signed a pledge card for \$125,000 in two years - \$25,000 the first year, \$100,000 the second year. Now I wanted to have real integrity with this thing, so I wrote on there, “We do not have this money. This is completely a faith pledge that we are trusting God sensing He wants to do this and we don’t know how it’s going to work.”

Now by the time we got back from the conference – I think the conference was in like February and we talked about doing it that year and the next year – by the time I got over my fear and actually signed the pledge, it was fall. And we started to think through: *Okay, how are we going to do this?* Well, we knew we had to begin to mobilize other people, and we decided: *Okay, what are we going to do?* And we knew that we couldn’t ask others to enter into something that we ourselves would not lead out in. So Cynici and I looked at really what was our small income in that first year, and we said, “We want to figure out how we can give everything we can to this.” We tried to look at some things within our budget, and we did some things with that, and then we made a decision that we would live just on our paycheck, and we said to God, “Lord, any other cash, no matter where it comes from or what it is, that You give to us in the next two years –any cash whatsoever – we’ll live on the paycheck here and the rest of it will go to this and go to You. And we’ll just see what You do.”

We decided we’d lead out in that way with our people, and then on the Sunday after Thanksgiving, I stood up before our little church and announced that we believed God wanted us to go on this journey of trusting Him to raise \$25,000 in the next six weeks so the Bhatari people in India could hear about Christ.

Now let me just give you a little context about our church. This was not like going to Lincoln Berean. This was a small church. Our monthly budget was \$4,300. So what I was asking our church

to do was six months of our monthly income, and this was a church that had such great vision that what we usually did at Christmas was give an extra \$25 to the missionaries. Never in their history had they done anything like this. But it was just awesome to see how God had prepared the people, and how God began to move and to work. And to make a long story short, people came together from the littlest kids to the oldest adults over the course of six weeks, and it was amazing. And on New Year's Eve we stood together, had a night of worship and celebration, and as a church, we wrote out a check for \$25,000. And a 67 year-old elder stood up with tears in his eyes and said, "I've never in my life had a more meaningful Christmas than this." And we celebrated and we rejoiced together.

The next year, we knew that it was going to take a whole lot more than just our little church, so we began to form a team and we began to share the vision more broadly. We shared it all over our city. We partnered with our local Christian radio station which reached most of Western Nebraska and Eastern Wyoming. We literally drove from Chadron to Imperial and throughout Eastern Wyoming going from church to church meeting with pastors and talking about what God was doing, and the needs and the opportunities in India and inviting them to be a part of this. And many, many people and many, many churches began to be involved, and God began to bring in resources. And by the time we were coming to the end of the year, God had done an amazing thing. He had brought in more than \$57,000.

We were excited about that, but we thought: *It's going to take \$100,000, and where's the rest of the money?* But we later found out that while all this was happening in Western Nebraska and Eastern Wyoming, God was working in the hearts of some business people in Colorado. They found out about our project, they agreed to match whatever we raised, and that year over \$100,000 went. And as a result, *The Jesus Film* was translated into the language of those people, and teams the next year did go in and began the work of the Gospel that started in the Bastar District of India. And in fact, I went to India on my first trip and began the relationships that would eventually lead to our church planting partnership. And as the movement of *The Jesus Film* spread across India, and as they began to see that God had saturated and penetrated so many places with the Gospel, I talked with the leadership over there and they said, "The desperate need we have is church planting." And that was the birthing of what most of you know about today where we now have 298 church planters and 24 Berean Fellowship Districts all over India making a difference and planting churches in villages that have never before had a church.

And for Cynci and I, the journey began with a light bulb. And I have to tell you one other part of the story for us personally, and again, I hesitate to share it but I feel like it's important because I believe it gives context to show you that for us what this has been is truly like Mark 6 and Mark 8 is a miracle – it is a miracle that God has done that we can't explain. You know it's interesting, you read some scholars and they want to try to explain how the bread was multiplied. "Well, you it was this ingredient or..." It's a miracle.

In the first year of this project when Cynci and I said, "We'll give to You whatever You want." And we tried to be a part of this thing our annual income was \$23,000. Our giving for that year was over \$11,000. That's what God had put through us. In the second year, our income had increased slightly – it was \$26,000 – the total that God brought through us as a conduit to do what He wanted to do in India was over \$15,000.

In fact, when we did our taxes, we couldn't even declare all of our charitable contributions because it was more than 50% of our income. And to this day I look back and I look at those days, and I ask God, "How did we make it? And how did You do that?" And I have no idea. I have absolutely no

idea. It was for us an absolute miracle of watching that if we would entrust our little to God, like the loaves and the fish, He would do something that was amazing and multiply it in ways that we never could have imagined.

Now you would think that after watching God take the couple that could only afford to give a light bulb and somehow allowing them to be a part of a harvest across India – and by the way, already more than \$1,000,000 has now gone to reaching lost people in India and by the time we're done it will be over \$2,000,000 – and you would think after having seen God do all of that, you would think that I'd get it. But I have to confess to you that sometimes I am still as blind as the disciples in the boat. I get my eyes on the size of the crowd, on the need, on the massive obstacles. Or I get my eyes fixed on the limited resources rather than fixing my eyes on the reality of the presence of God right here in my boat. And I'm sure that Jesus must sometimes find my thinking to be maddening. And thus I think it's important for me, and for you, to learn the lesson Jesus is trying so hard to teach the disciples in Mark 8.

I mentioned earlier the danger of leaven in the first century bread. Again, that's the illustration Jesus uses in the boat. He talks about the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. Well, while the Pharisees and Herod had completely different lives, I think the root of their problem was identical. The root – the leaven – was unbelief. Why was it that this same Jesus who just fed 4,000 people with a few loaves wouldn't do any miraculous signs for the Pharisees? It's because they weren't seeking. Verse 11 tells us they were testing. They were completely bound by unbelief. Herod was the same. While he was fascinated by what John the Baptist had to say, Scripture even goes so far as to say that he was afraid of John. He knew him to be a righteous and holy man. Ultimately Herod's refusal to believe prevented him from having the courage to do what was right.

But here's the hard part. Even the disciples, those closest followers of Christ, were susceptible to the same problem - to unbelief. And I think it's because they made so *much* of so little and so *little* of so much. Remember that when I read both Mark 6:38 and Mark 8:5, I mentioned I wanted us to pay close attention to Jesus' response. The disciples were thinking: *It's absolutely impossible to feed the massive crowd.* Their eyes are fixed on the overwhelming need, their eyes are fixed on the limited resources, and they simply can't see past it.

But Jesus asks a simple but important question – the same question each time, each story – look at it in Mark 8:5. He tells the disciples to feed them, they say, “How could we possibly have enough bread?” Verse 5, “**And He was asking them, “How many loaves do you have?”**” You see, that's all He's asking. That's all He's asking.

When Cyni and I began to discover the massive needs in India and the overwhelming reality of a billion people in darkness, and when we received that first *Jesus Film* gift catalogue, it was hard because we saw so many needs and we just didn't have the resources. All we could do was purchase a light bulb and that seemed so trivial – silly in comparison to the reality of the need. It was like a few loaves for a crowd of thousands. But it was not trivial to God, and He took it and He multiplied it in ways we never could have dreamed. And He has used even us on our meager income to financially impact the world. And it has been one of the most amazing surprises of my life because the reality is that one of God's great surprises is He can take the little and make it so much if we will simply entrust it to Him.

Now perhaps God has you in a situation like Cyni and I found ourselves in. You know, here at Lincoln Berean we're talking a lot about great opportunities and enormous ministry and in the *For This Purpose I Live* campaign all the things God's doing, and we talk about staggering sums of

millions of dollars. And perhaps you look at what you have, and you think: *What good is this for such great needs?*

You know, interestingly, in the parallel passage to the text in Mark 6 that's found in John 6, we discover that after Jesus asked, "How many loaves do you have?" Andrew wonders aloud with the very same question. He looks at the loaves, he looks at the crowd, and he says, "But what are these for so many people?" Well, surprise. In the hands of an awesome God, they were even more than enough. The problem is that we don't see that when we only look at the need and our supply. Jesus' desire is that we'd fix our eyes on Him, that we would see the reality of His life transforming presence and His incomprehensible power, and we would grow to understand the lesson that the disciples failed to grasp. It is not about the bread.

Last week, Mark Kremer shared some statistics and one that struck me was the greatest ambition of 81% of college students after graduation is simply to get rich. That is fixing our eyes on bread and wasting your life on so very little. God's calling is so much more than that. He will take care of the provision if we'll simply entrust what we have to Him. And He will free us as we focus on Him to live lives of purpose, impact, relationship, and joy as we seek to know Him as our greatest treasure and to advance His life transforming mission as our greatest calling. And the question for this morning is a simple one: What are you living for?

Herod lived for the little of pleasing people. The Pharisees lived for the little of position and power. Even at times, the disciples lived for the little of provision. How about you? I want to have a life that is about far more than the little. But that requires trusting Him. And as long as we are living for things as trivial and temporal as bread and money, we'll never see the glory of God even when it's being amazingly displayed right before our eyes. God is still multiplying the loaves to meet the needs of the masses. He's still taking so very little and making it into so very much. But unfortunately, as Mark 8:21 implies, there are some disciples who still do not yet understand. Sometimes I'm one of them. How about you?

Father, I would just ask that You would have our hearts and that You would cause us to fix our eyes on You, Lord, not on the masses of the needs, not on the littleness of the provision, and not to have little minds that see nothing but the trivial. God, I would ask and pray that You would give each and every one of us in this place an understanding of the wonder of the God who wants to be right there in our boat. And God, I want each of us to have the experience of seeing Your glory as You reveal Yourself in ways that are beyond our ability to even imagine. Surprise us with Your greatness, O God. In Your name we pray, amen.

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