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Questions Jesus Asked: A Question to Expand Your Vision

Mark 6:30-43

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish.

We're looking at these questions that Jesus asked, and of course, we can take them as questions that He might ask us in any given situation, and we can decide how we would answer them or how seriously to take these questions, each of us individually.

We've looked at open-ended questions that Jesus has asked, provoking deeper thinking of those He was teaching and leading. Of course, this is the greatest leader of all time asking these questions. He asked far more questions than He answered. He used questions as a way to direct people's lives physically and spiritually. He asked rhetorical questions to emphasize a point and get something across. He asked many direct and specific personal questions of those around Him.

And today we're looking at another one of those.

The context is this: Jesus has recently called these 12 disciples to be His students. He's a rabbi. They are following Him, and He's starting to train them. They're new in their training. This is their rookie year,

and He has sent them out two by two to do some ministry after He has modeled doing ministry for them. Ministry is involving yourself with the pain and the issues in other people's lives. So Jesus has done this Himself, and now He is sending out His disciples to be involved with other people's lives, two by two.

During this time, the great John the Baptist, the one whom Jesus said, "Of men born of women, there is none greater," prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah given by God. John the Baptist has been brutally beheaded because of Herod's lovely wife and daughter. They asked for his head delivered on a platter. So there is tension and drama brewing in the area.

The disciples are out ministering. They're seeing God work, but there's also a sense of trepidation of what's happening around them.

The apostles gathered around Jesus, the text said, and reported to Him all they had done, all they had seen. They were seeing people healed. They were seeing people's hearts softened and come to repentance before God. They were seeing demonic beings dealt with, evil being resisted. They gathered around Jesus and reported all that they had experienced.

But because so many people were coming and going, they did not even have a chance to eat. So Jesus said to them, "Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

Ministry is emotionally and physically taxing, and Jesus knew this. So He said, "It's time to rest."

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

As a good shepherd of our souls and our lives, God cares not only about our doing but our resting. I love this about God. He cares about the whole of us as people. Yes, He wants us to experience the adventure of doing and seeing an impact in the world, but He also wants us rejuvenated and refreshed as we pour out our lives in service.

That's what a good shepherd does. He encourages growth and stretching, but also gives time for resting.

But the text says many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there to this solitary place ahead of them. The crowd beat them there. They went by boat.

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things.

This is what Jesus did. He ushered in grace and what's true, what's real. And because He had a heart for all these people, He wanted them to know what's true and what's real. And so, even though they all needed rest, He re-upped for ministry and started pouring Himself out again.

God not only cares about His disciples and the pace of their lives, but He cares about the multitudes of lost people in this world. As a matter of fact, the Bible says God is being patient with the world right now, not wanting any to be separated from Him for all eternity, but all to come to a knowledge of Him. That's why the world is still here, because of God's patience and love, wanting more and more people to come to Him. He cares about the multitudes of lost people in the world that don't know Him.

Now, in the middle of this, as they're all being stretched in a long day, it became late in the day. So the disciples came to Him and said the obvious: "This is a remote place, and it's already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

As normal human beings, the disciples here are quite practical. They're pragmatic. They're commonsensical. They let, like many of us do, the normal needs of daily life drive a lot of their decisions. They're sort of ruled by the plans and thinking that come from, "When do we eat next? What kind of rest do we need? What's an appropriate pace for life?" and all of these things.

That's how we often think. We're just driven by pragmatism, common sense.

Now, I love this text. Those of you that have walked with God for some time will know this. God sometimes interrupts our pragmatic, commonsensical plans with ideas of His own, inviting us to be stretched.

It was late in the day. They came to Him with their basic plan: send the people away. There's no food out here. There's restaurants, people cooking in the villages and other places. They can go there and buy something to eat.

But He answered them, "You give them something to eat."

You give them something to eat.

Sometimes God has far bigger plans for us than we've ever thought of or dreamed of. He often invites us to think bigger, to trust Him more, to depend on Him more than we ever dreamed.

He's stretching His new young disciples to expand their thinking about the Creator.

"You give them something to eat."

In this time, wine was often put in wineskins. They would ferment new wine, and they would create new wineskins out of animal leathers. They would sew them together, and if you put new wine in new wineskins, it worked. The new wineskins would stretch with the new wine as it expanded, as it aged.

But if you tried to put new wine, after you used up some old wine out of an old wineskin, tried to put new wine in the old wineskin, the new wine would stretch the old wineskin, break the wineskin, and you'd lose the wine and the wineskin.

Jesus talked about this when He talked about God creating new packages in the world for new wine to be poured out.

What Jesus is doing here with His disciples, He's saying, "Stretch your thinking a little bit. God wants to do more through you than you ever thought. Expand your mindset. Don't get it crusty and kind of old and stiff with an old mindset. Think in a new way. Expand your thinking."

We're not going to send these people away to buy food, as would seem commonsensical. I want you to feed them.

Well, it's hard to think differently. It really is hard.

They couldn't quite comprehend this call, so they said to Him, "That would take more than a half year's wages of our money."

Now, the disciples were a ministry, and people would give to their ministry. So they had a certain amount of money in the coffers. And certainly they all sort of shared in the resources together. And they're saying, "This is going to be half of our year's sustenance. Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

They just don't get it. That's all they can see.

And so Jesus asks them a question. Here's the question:

"How much bread do you have? How many loaves do you have? Let's just take a little inventory, see what we got."

Not of money, but of bread, a different resource.

Now, in the Bible, bread is understood to be a real nourishing source of food. I think a correct interpretation of this is about barley bread, which is a heavy source of nutrition. But bread is also used as a metaphor by God for the dispensing of all of life.

Keep that in mind. He's asking them, "What do you have that you can offer to nourish these people? How many loaves do you have?"

Take an inventory. Go and see. Take an assessment.

They found out, and they said, "Five loaves and two fish."

Now, 12 guys could probably deal with five loaves—I don't know how big they were—and two fish. It's not an enormous amount of resources. But basically they're saying, "Jesus, we got five loaves and two fish, and You can have them. Just take what we got. Five loaves, two fish."

Now He's asked them to feed them. He's trying to expand their vision, their thinking. They've come to Him with more willing hearts now.

"Here's what we have."

I don't know about you, if you've ever experienced this, but I love it in life when Jesus takes over. I love it when we offer Him what we have and say, "Lord, do what You will with what we have. It's Yours."

And then we lay it in His hands, and He starts to take over and move with what we've offered to Him.

Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.

I wish I could have been there. Hundreds and fifties of groups of people all over the place. Five loaves and two fish.

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves.

What does that symbolize? The pouring out for others.

Then He gave them to His disciples to distribute to the people, the calling of the church to be involved in the distribution of life.

He gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them.

They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up 12 basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of just men who had eaten was 5,000.

It's very hard to predict or even give an estimate to what God might be able to do with what we offer Him. He is the great multiplier, the Creator of all things, the orchestrator of life. Everything He touches grows and expands with life. That's who God is.

Well, everybody was filled and ministered to and enjoyed this. And so the crowds followed Him the next day.

And He said to them on the next day, "Truly I say to you, you're seeking Me not because you saw the miracle and the sign, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."

We got a good social program started here. Free food for everyone. You're following Me now because you don't have to work for this food, and I'm going to feed you.

But that was not His intent. Something more is going on here from the Great Leader.

He says to them, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life."

He simply met their needs so that He could invite them to a place where He could meet a much greater need in their lives.

"Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on Him God the Father has set His seal."

Then they said to Him, "What must we do to be doing this kind of work, the work of God?"

Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, quite simply, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

Believe in Him. Trust in Him. Have confidence in Him.

Well, they said to Him, "What sign do You do that we may see and believe in You?" Not that He just fed them the night before.

"What sign do You have that we may believe You? What work do You perform? Our fathers ate manna in the wilderness. As it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

Jesus, the masterful leader, inviting these people beyond human lust, beyond human needs, beyond the biological, into the supernatural, into the spiritual.

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave them the bread from heaven, but My Father, who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Sir," they said to Him, "give us this bread."

Jesus said to them, "That bread is Me. I am the bread of life. I'm the one who's going to be broken so that you can live forever. Whoever comes to Me shall not hunger. Whoever believes in Me shall never thirst."

There's a lot of good things to give to in the world, friends. It's good to give money to feed people who don't have food, to give shelter to people, to help educate people.

But friends, the most important thing going on, no matter how long a person lives or suffers here on the earth, is whether or not they come to the Bread of Life. Eternity is at stake.

And we can meet people's physical needs for 30, 40, 50, 60 years, and they can still go to hell for all eternity without Jesus.

I am so thankful to be a part of a church that gives money and resources to support the sharing of the good news of the Bread of Life. We meet a lot of other needs, but the Church of Jesus Christ is uniquely positioned, among all institutions in the world, to hold out the word of life in Christ.

Thank you to all of you who have been so faithful through all of these past years, working for this, praying for this, striving for this.

May God continue to, as we give to this end, expand the number of people in the multitudes that we can offer the Bread of Life to.

Praise God for His goodness and His kindness.