

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias),<sup>2</sup> and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick.<sup>3</sup> Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.<sup>4</sup> The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

<sup>5</sup>When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”<sup>6</sup> He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

<sup>7</sup>Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages<sup>[a]</sup> to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

<sup>8</sup>Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up,<sup>9</sup> “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

<sup>10</sup>Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there).<sup>11</sup> Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

<sup>12</sup>When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.”<sup>13</sup> So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

<sup>14</sup>After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”<sup>15</sup> Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

### **Testing Failures**

Believe it or not I actually passed my classes in college and seminary. Probably thinking, “He was just passed on because the teachers didn’t want to deal with him for another year. They must have felt sorry for you.” But that wasn’t the case. I wasn’t even one of those students who loved Hebrew so much as to take it again. Much to my amazement I actually passed the majority of my tests, not all of them, but enough of them to continue on in my studies.

I wonder if the disciples felt the same way, amazed they’re still with Jesus. After all they haven’t passed many tests. At this point Jesus takes them off to a quiet place to get some rest then decides to pull out a pop quiz. Where they all fail - but that’s not the point. The point Jesus wants them to understand is that they are not to look to their resources and what they can do when God is with them and God is for them. Jesus wants his disciples to look to him when facing the minor inconvenience or major problems in life.

Maybe it’s as minor as a meal or maybe it’s as major as something terminal. Don’t look to your strength or what little you have but look to the greatest resource: our God. We may find a quiet place

to rest and then something happens. It may feel like God is pulling out a pop quiz and setting us up for more failure. In these moments look to the one who provides tests for failures.

The disciples have a problem although it doesn't seem like a major problem. More like a pop quiz rather than an exam. The people need to eat. But it's not that serious. I think it's safe to say that most of us could go without a meal on more than one occasion. I'm certain that the people of Jesus' time could have gone without food. It just doesn't seem like its that big of a deal whether they eat or not. This just doesn't seem miracle worthy.

The big deal is that Jesus tests his disciples and he tells them, "*You feed them. You give them to eat.*" That is an impossible situation because even if they had money there wouldn't be any buffet capable of feeding all 5,000 plus women and children. Instead of an answer like that of Ezekiel when he was met with impossible odds, "Can these bones live?" , "You know Lord." They have another solution, "Tell them to go away." The tax collector turns accountant and suddenly fisherman are adding and subtracting, Judas is holding the money bag a bit tighter before they realize they don't have enough fingers and toes between them - It's not enough. We don't have enough. It's just a few pieces of barley bread (the cheapest bread of the all. Poor people food and a few small fish). This is saltines and sardines for everyone.

This was a pass fail - proposition. They failed. Miserably. They looked around at their resources and failed to find the greatest resource they had. They looked to themselves when they should have looked to Jesus. The one who has already provided an abundance of wine on another occasion. He is the one who didn't just partially heal the sick and crippled. He fully healed and restored them. They only looked to themselves and what they had to offer rather than to Jesus. They failed this test.

In much the same way we often fail our tests. Sure we trust in God for our salvation, the big things in life, but when it comes to the small stuff - that's suddenly outside of God's control and we look to ourselves, our resources. We count the costs, assess the situations, and come to conclusions but the one thing we need to take into account and usually don't is our greatest asset - God. When we fail to remember him we are essentially saying, "God, this is out of your control. You aren't enough. You haven't given us enough. You can't possible work anything from nothing." It's no wonder David writes, "*The fool says in his heart there is no God!*" What we don't recognize is that David is writing about us, not atheists, but those who believe their is a God but then behave as if there is no god. That's foolish, a failure on our part.

To think I can turn this around on my own betrays our ability to do anything, it's like bringing five barley loaves and three little fish to feed 5,000. The answer is "We aren't big enough." We don't

have enough time. We haven't studied enough. We've failed the same test. We are completely inadequate. This is a problem we can't solve on our own. So are we to simply, "Go away"? Is Jesus too busy tuning harps to care?

Life is hard. There is often no hope of healing, no hope of reconciliation. There are more problems than answers. Life is often out of our control. We can't pretend as we won't have problems. We can't even pretend we will pass every test. We are failures with a God who expects perfection but we have a God who cares enough to give tests.

When a teacher administers a test they do so to determine what you know and what needs more work. When Jesus administers a test he already knows what you believe, he isn't trying to determine anything but to strengthen your faith, and to help you realize, "You aren't enough. Failure is not enough," but I am more than enough for all of your failure. God has done something about our failure. He not only provides for our daily needs. He provides for our eternal welfare.

It's not just the simple and trivial things that God looks after. John makes note that the Passover was near. During the Passover God prepared for his people by providing the blood of the lamb - so the angel of the Lord would pass over their house and not destroy them. While Jesus had them sit in the green grass, he fed them abundantly (leftovers even), and he was that sacrificial lamb. The people followed him not because of a poor man's meal but because they were looking for hope and hope was the one thing Jesus offered. He filled their needs. He provided for them the forgiveness that they needed. It wasn't just the food for their bellies (although later they would follow him for a free meal). It was the provision as the passover lamb. He is the bread of life. He would take up the sin of the world, for all the fools who lived like there is no God.

He provided them an ample supply of food. The disciples are now filled for some time. They don't have to worry about what they will eat or what they will drink. This doesn't depend on them. Their work, their effort but on their God who abundantly pours out provision. Our lesson echos Isaiah 55 - *Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.*

This God has done through Jesus, who lived, died, and rose perfectly and in our place. He didn't half heartedly give his all. He took the test, aced it, and then wrote your name on the top. He didn't cheat. He took your failure and gave us his grade. He gave everything he had. It should come as no surprise when we are ushered into heaven and greeted with a, "*Well done, good and faithful servant,*" with honors.

God still provides for us. Just because what we need doesn't appear out of thin air doesn't mean God hasn't provided for us. Most of the time God provides through the abilities that he has given us as well as to others such as doctors, plumbers, engineers, and mechanics. Those who have passed tests we've never taken. Who have grown in their knowledge and understanding of how this world works and how God provides for people through people. Pray for provision and trust that God will provide though he often provides for us through our own hands.

That doesn't mean we can just sit around on what little we have and expect God to put the food in our mouths and make us chew. We may have little but we will use whatever we have to give glory to God. That doesn't mean giving all your money to the church either. Instead of looking at our gifts, our resources, and seeing something significant or insufficient - focus on your God. Focus on God using our gifts through us. Instead of an attitude of scarcity and failure - recognize who is with us and what he can do with a bit of bread and fish. Look to him and trust that he will provide. It's not up to us our strength our power our grit or gumption but all depends on our God who graciously provides for failures.

Just look at how he's made use of me. Look at what he has done in your life through you. If you still feel like a failure - you're not alone. Jesus disciples are right there with us. Having overlooked our greatest resource - the one who speaks something out of nothing - creates faith in spite of our failings and tests us so we look to him in all things. Thank God he passed every test. Amen.