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John 6:5-14

“ONE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE”

“Solly, your lunch is ready,” a Jewish mother called to her young son, who was getting ready to spend the day hiking in the hills near Galilee. “Solly” was his nickname. Solomon was his proper name. Yes, he was named after the great king of Jewish history.

Solly had been planning this hiking trip with his friend, “Ike” (short for Isaac), for weeks now. They wanted to get an early start, before it got too hot. So their mothers had each packed them a lunch. Solly had five barley muffins and two small dried fish, rolled up in a big cloth napkins.

He kissed his mother good-bye. And off the two boys started across the rolling hills, in the region of the Sea of Galilee. It was a beautiful morning with a pleasant breeze. The young men felt like bold adventurers, as they left their small village far behind and headed for the highest spot to view the surrounding countryside.

The time seemed to fly, as they picked up rocks and poked in every hole trying to discover all they could about their world. Before they knew it, it was almost lunchtime. The sun was directly overhead.

But what was this? A huge crowd of people were following a man in a white robe. He was dressed like a Rabbi, a teacher. Why, there were more people than the two boys had ever seen at one time. There must have been thousands. They had come from many villages.

What could be going on, they wondered? Quickly, they lost all interest in their mature hike, and they ran to catch up to the crowd, where they just blended in.

The man in white stopped at the top of a small hill and turned to the crowd of men and women. With a voice that was clear and powerful, He began to talk to them.

He taught them how to be a part of God’s great kingdom. He taught them how to pray, by talking to God like you would talk to a father. He reminded them of how God takes care of the birds of the air and the wild flowers, which grow in the fields. And that’s how God wants to take care of us.

Why, these were the things which the two boys had set out to discover that morning. And here this teacher was talking about those very things.

They sat there, hanging on His every word. They had been to Sabbath school often, but they had never been so fascinated to learn about God.

Solly was sitting by a big bearded man, who was dressed like a fisherman. The man had said “hello” to him and seemed to take an interest in the boy. He said that his name was Andrew and that he was a follower of the man who was speaking, whom he called “Jesus.”

Solly was so wrapped up in what was going on that he completely forgot about his lunch. And it was not until the sun had moved far across the sky that he even thought about it. In fact, he may have never thought about it, if he hadn’t heard a few people say that it was getting late and they’d better start home and eat, before it got dark.

He also heard a couple of Andrew’s friends talking. They said that the teacher wanted to feed the people something, before they made the long journey home.

But his companions couldn’t figure how to do it. There were so many people there. They were scratching their heads and trying to figure where they would ever get enough money, in order to buy bread for that huge mass of humanity.

Suddenly, Solly remembered his lunch. He reached down beside the rock where he was sitting and produced his lunch, still wrapped neatly in the napkin. Running to Andrew, he said: “Jesus can have my lunch. I have five muffins and two fish. Maybe that will help.”

Andrew's friends turned their heads and chuckled to one another. "Ah, the enthusiasm of youth," they thought. They told the boy "Thank you, but..." and walked off.

But Andrew smiled with appreciation. His mind began to wonder. Maybe the boy's offer was a valid one. After all, he had seen Jesus do some pretty amazing things before.

"Come with me, Solly," he said. And together, they began to pick their way through that huge crowd of people, threading their way through aisles which were not even there, until—finally—they were standing face-to-face with Jesus. Ike stood back a little way, wondering what was going to happen.

"This lad has offered you his lunch," said Andrew. "But what is so little among so many?"

Jesus looked right at Solly, and He smiled in such a way that the boy was not afraid. His eyes showed appreciation for the boy's offer. He said, "Thank you, young man. Let's see what we can do with this."

It all happened so fast. Solly could hardly believe what he was seeing.

Jesus instructed the crowd to divide up into groups, with open spaces between them, like aisles. Then He told Andrew and the other disciples to bring baskets. Jesus prayed, giving thanks to His Father in Heaven for this food. Then Jesus reached into Solly's lunch pack and began to lift out the muffins and the fishes. He kept bringing out more muffins and fish, until He filled Andrew's basket!

But wait, there were only five muffins and two fishes? Where did it all come from? The boy stared in unbelief. Ike's eyes were about to pop out of their sockets. He looked white as a ghost.

Andrew took his basket down one of the aisles, and began to pass out the food. Soon his companions had their baskets full of food to distribute, also. They kept giving out muffins and fish and then coming back to Jesus for more. Then they went back to the crowd, until everyone had been fed.

Andrew's brother had guessed that there were around 5,000 men there, besides the women and children. And all of them were fed that day, because one small boy gave what he had to Jesus, and Jesus multiplied it.

This story has much to say to us today. From it we can understand...

I. The PRINCIPLE of God's Multiplication.

I've always loved this story. It has given me hope and inspiration that my small life and meager influence might be multiplied somehow, so that Jesus could use me to bless many other people.

I'll never forget listening to the older Dr. Bob Jones, the man who led me to Jesus. He said, "Boys and girls,..." (we were college students, but he still called us his "boys and girls"). "Boys and girls, give your lives to Jesus. He can do more with it than you can! He can multiply whatever you give Him and do something greater than you can imagine with it."

And I thought of this story. Thank God, for some reason, I believed what he said. I decided to give whatever little bit, which I had, to Jesus, so that He could multiply it.

And I have never been sorry. I have seen Him do more with what I gave Him than I could ever have imagined.

Do you know? One of the saddest things about our modern society is how easy it is to get lost in the crowd...how easy it is to feel unimportant and insignificant and useless. We are such little people in such a big world. We are only one in the midst of so many.

We wonder, "What difference can I make?" "What am I among so many?" What good is my small influence, in the midst of a world full of problems? Of what use is my little voice, amidst a noisy din of so many conflicting voices and opinions? Of what use are my talents and abilities in the face of a world, which is so full of needs? No wonder people feel helpless, useless, frustrated and isolated.

There was a day when we had heroes. Even if we just fantasized and isolated. Lone Ranger, or Zorro, we had the idea that one person could make a difference.

But today, even in the movies, we have anti-heroes. These are people who learn to roll with the punches, go with the flow, and make their highest goal the quest for "survival." These are the people, with whom most folks relate.

How sad! How futile and frustrating.

Oh, if such modern people could only believe this ancient story. If people were only willing to give whatever they have to Jesus, they could watch Him multiply it and use it to make a difference. It will still work in our day.

But listen, my friend, "Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever." He has never lost His power, and He has never lost His desire to take what we give to Him and to multiply it.

Oh, let's learn from that young boy. Won't you dare to give yourself to Jesus? He can do more with your life than you can!

But let's take it a step farther. Let me offer you...

II. The **PROOF** of God's Multiplication.

This principle, of Jesus being able to multiply our influence, has proven itself to be true in every generation. Ordinary men and women, like the lad with his lunch, have given themselves to Jesus, and He has multiplied their efforts and abilities and has used them to bless the world. The pages of history are full of illustrations of God, using one person to make a difference.

God started with a small Jew named **Paul**. He was not much to look at. He was a poor public speaker. He could hardly see well enough to write his own letters. Besides that, he had to endure the miserable fevers of chronic malaria and was often laid up, terribly sick with it.

And yet, he gave himself to Jesus. And Jesus multiplied him.

In his lifetime, the Apostle Paul made three journeys around the civilized world. He established churches on two continents, wrote one-third of the New Testament, and has continued to inspire Christians for 19 centuries. He gave himself to Jesus, and Jesus multiplied that one little man to make a difference.

Later, a man named **Augustine** decided to give what was left of his life to Jesus. He had lived a debauched and dissipated life, being driven to self-destruction by his own sexual lusts and perverted thoughts. But Jesus saved him. And Jesus took him and filled that mind with deep and profound thoughts. Those thoughts became so great that Augustine changed the thinking of the entire Western world, with his writings. And he brought the world of his day, along with subsequent generations, much closer to God!

A young lawyer named **Martin Luther**, defeated by his own guilt and insecurity, finally gave up and completely trusted Jesus as his only hope. He gave all that he had to Jesus, in hopes that Jesus could multiply it.

And Jesus did multiply his influence, until he gave birth, not only to the Protestant Reformation, but to the Cultural Renaissance, which brought Europe out of the Dark Ages!

In England, God called to Himself a young aristocrat named **William Wilburforce**. Wilburforce was a politician and a member of Parliament. After being converted, He gave himself completely to Jesus Christ. And Jesus used him as "the conscience of an empire," speaking out to abolish the inhuman practice of slave-trading.

Nearly single-handedly, at first, he stood against one of his nation's more evil and profitable enterprises. And his one voice made such a difference that it eventually led to the ending of this abominable practice. Jesus literally multiplied Wilburforce, until he was able to change the history of the black race and to help to atone for the worst sins of his own people!

A young doctor named **Livingstone** gave himself to Jesus. He went alone to the mysterious continent of Africa, to try to make a difference with the good news of Jesus Christ. Jesus literally multiplied Livingstone's influence and effectiveness, until he opened that dark continent to the light of the Christian gospel.

And so much did the African people love this man that, when he died, they insisted that his heart be buried in African soil, even though a grateful England wanted his body to be buried in Westminster Abbey. Jesus used one small man to move the hearts of an entire continent!

A simple shoemaker, named **William Carey** gave himself to Jesus. And Jesus multiplied his vision, until he could see nothing but the lost multitudes of India. He put a map of India above his shoemaker's bench and prayed that he could be used to make a difference. Finally, he challenged the local Baptist association to help him to go there. "You hold the ropes, and I will descend into India," he begged them. They took up an offering of about \$30, in a snuff box.

Jesus not only multiplied his vision, but Jesus multiplied his abilities. He became a genius in learning foreign languages and dialects.

And with Jesus' help, he did "descend into India," where he single-handedly translated parts of the Bible into more than 50 languages and dialects, started 1,000 churches, and awakened that sleeping giant of humanity to the voice of their true Creator.

He later became England's ambassador to India, and brought about many improvements for the people, whom God had helped to love so greatly. It's amazing how much one man could accomplish in one short lifetime. That's what can happen, when we give ourselves to Jesus, to multiply!

A wealthy young Englishman named **Hudson Taylor**, tired of the self-indulgent lifestyles of the rich and famous, decided to give himself to Jesus. And Jesus used his life to open the vastness of China to the truth of the Gospel and to inspire countless others to serve Christ in the Orient. This one man made the original inroads to China with the gospel, won many to the Savior, and gave birth to the China Inland Mission organization, which has literally sent hundreds of others to that land. Oh, how Jesus multiplied the life of this man!

Or what of that young man in Chicago, named **Dwight L. Moody**, who could not seem to succeed in anything he tried. While unsuccessfully trying to sell shoes, he was introduced to Jesus Christ.

Soon thereafter, he heard it said that "This would have never yet seen what God can do with a man who is totally committed to Him." And Moody said: "I'll be that man!"

He took a pony into the slums of Chicago, giving rides to the children, if they would come to his Bible class. From that humble beginning came a teaching and preaching ministry, which reached around the world.

Moody lacked formal education. When he spoke, he was accused of murdering the king's English. People came to his meeting, in order to scoff at his ignorance. Yet they would leave with lives changed. And from the life, of that unlettered man, arose the great Moody Bible Institute, which has literally sent powerhouse leaders for Jesus around the world.

Someone has said that "Moody took one continent in each of his hands and rocked them both closer to God." That's how God can multiply even an apparent "loser," when he gives himself to Jesus!

In a few weeks, everyone around here is going to be making a big fuss over Jim Holbrook. Certainly, I do not stand among the ranks of those, to whom I have just referred. But after 30 years, there are a lot of people who love me and who want to encourage me.

You will probably hear a lot of things said. People will testify of how God used me to touch their lives. I am grateful and humbled by these lives.

But if you remember nothing else, please remember what God can do with the most unlikely material. Nobody knows, any better than I, how introverted, insecure, scared and obviously flawed that Jim Holbrook really is. But it should be a glory to Jesus Christ that He could take such a weak man and do anything at all. And I can just praise Him for taking my life and multiplying its influence beyond what I deserved and beyond the wildest dreams of my timid imagination! To God be the glory!

Oh, my friends, if time permitted, I could go on and on with the list of those, whose influence and usefulness Jesus has multiplied. I just pray that we can add your name to that great list of people, who gave themselves to Jesus and who made a difference.

But this is not likely to happen, unless you understand...

III. The PRACTICE of God's Multiplication.

If you are not content to simply be an insignificant survivor in an impersonal world, where it seems futile to try to make any difference...if you truly want God to multiply your life and influence, so that you can leave a mark and be a blessing...then I suggest **two steps**. Like the young boy in the story...

Come face to face with Jesus this morning. Don't stand off in the crowd and observe Him from afar. Don't just listen to His teaching and try to put a few of the more obvious ones into practice.

No, come face to face with Him today! Don't leave here today without meeting Him personally. Speak to Him, in prayer, and invite Him to become your personal Savior and your Lord. Our only hope of having our lives multiplied, so that we can make a difference, is to establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now, if you have any conscience at all, perhaps you are troubled about how you can get close to the holy Son of God, with all of your past sins and mistakes. If you were to come face-to-face with Son of God, He would see these stains and be repelled by them. Because of this, you may be afraid to face Jesus.

Well, my friend, I have good news. Jesus already took care of that problem. He already sacrificed His own life, when He died on Calvary's cross, in order to pay for your sins. That problem is all taken care of, once and for all. And now He can offer you complete forgiveness and cleansing from the stains of the past. "For the blood of Jesus Christ...cleanses us from all sin. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:7-9). Confess to Him that you are a sinner. Accept the forgiveness He has promised. Then draw close and come face-to-face with Him.

Then #2, **Offer what you have to Jesus**. You may think that you have nothing to offer. Your abilities may seem as ridiculously small as that boy's small lunch seemed, in the face of the multitude.

Won't you be a little more child-like. Offer what you have to Jesus, anyway, and see what He can do with it.

Let me suggest seven things to offer Jesus (like the five loaves and two fishes equal seven):

Give Him your **BODY** – Romans 12:1. “Present your body, a living sacrifice. And keep it holy, so it will be acceptable for His use.”

Today, God has no body on earth except our bodies. The Church, or the people of God, becomes the Body of Christ. We become the only hands which He has, through which to minister... the only feet He has, through which to go... and the only mouths He has, through which to speak His love. Present your body for service each morning.

Give Him your **IMAGINATION**. Let Him give you His great dreams of what can be done. He will cause “old men to dream dreams and young men to see visions” of what can be done to make a difference in our world.

Give Him your **INFLUENCE**. Each one of us has a sphere of influence. Somebody notices us and is affected by us. “Let your light (of influence) so shine that men may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

Give Him your **ENERGY**. “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.” And do it “as unto God and not for the praise of men.” Give to His service 110% effort.

Give Him back the **NATURAL GIFTS**, which He has given to you. You may have the gift of money-making, of leadership, of wisdom, of creativity, organization. Return these to the service of the One, who gave them to you.

Give Him your **DEVELOPED SKILLS**. We have each trained and studied, to excel in some fields of expertise. This skill is our “meal ticket,” but it can also be given to Jesus, so that He can multiply it for His own use.

Then give Him your **HEART** – your concern for others, your empathy for your fellow man. He will use you to touch and bless others and to make a difference in the world in which they live.

Gut we must give ourselves to Him, to break and use as He sees fit.

“Five broken loaves beside the sea and thousands fed
As Thy hand, Lord, in breaking, blessed the bread.
Men would the throng in emptiness have sent away
Whose need was met, with broken bread, that day.

A broken vase, of priceless worth, rich fragrance shed
In ointment, poured in worship on Thy head.
A lovely thing, all shattered thus—“What waste,” they thought;
But Mary's deed of love Thy blessing brought.

A broken form upon the cross, and souls set free.
Thy anguish there has paid the penalty –
Sin's awful price in riven flesh and pain and blood –
Redemption's cost, the broken Lamb of God.

Oh, break my life, if need must be.
No longer mine, I give it Thee.
Oh, break my will; the off'ring take.
For blessing comes when Thou dost break”..and multiply!!
(Bob Jones, Jr.)