

THE FIDELITY OF FRAGMENTS

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And as the church recovers and seeks to reassert herself in the world, we are charged with leading a church that has not yet fully redefined herself. In many markets, the people are returning slowly, if at all, income is down, mortgage payments are still due, and the people most directly impacted by the financial burden of it all the people sitting in this room.

In the grip of those truths, there is a passage that is instructive, as we, as the senior leaders of churches (plural), seek to reassert the influence of the church in the world around us –

12And when they had eaten their fill, He told His disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” 13So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. (John 6:12-13)

Among the people, no one has been overlooked or neglected. These people have eaten to the point of satisfaction (v. 12). That is essential to the text, because the idea of “**eating their fill,**” means that each person took fish and bread until they were satisfied.

This phrase goes beyond Philip’s suggestion that they should provide “a little” for each person (v. 7). Verse 7 diminishes the miraculous by placing boundaries on what Jesus can do when we offer Him our _____ . Philip had a light lunch in mind, while Jesus was offering satisfaction.

Observation #1: Offer Jesus the insufficiency of your ministry and let Him handle the satisfaction.

There is no record in chapter 6 that the disciples ate anything. Jesus blessed the meager provisions and handed the work over to the disciples; they fed the multitude but were left _____ .

Given the present circumstances, their only hope of provision is now lying on the ground, sitting in people’s laps, or God forbid, some errant person had already tried to pack up their leftovers. And it is under those circumstances that Jesus commands us to pick up the fragments, “that nothing be lost.”

Observation #2: Jesus is concerned about our loss. Amid this abundance offered to others; Jesus is concerned about what happens to the fragments.

That is a word for every pastor in this room that continued to serve God’s people when things were slim. We never stopped, in fact, every pastor I know worked harder during the pandemic. We had to learn new technologies, work longer hours, do more direct engagement to hold the church together and while everyone else was getting satisfied, we were subsisting on what was left.

Why is Jesus so concerned with fragments?

A fragment is a part broken off, a small, detached portion, an imperfect part.

What's so special about fragments? Fragments belong to us, and fragments get the job done.

THEME 1: THE DIVISION OF CAANAN

When Canaan was divided, and the tribes were given an inheritance in the land, everyone got a major parcel of land except the tribe of _____. Listen to what God prescribes for our tribe in Deuteronomy 18:1-2, ***“The Levitical priests, all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel. They shall eat the LORD’s food offerings as their inheritance. They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the LORD is their inheritance [portion], as He promised them.”***

THEME 2: RUTH THE MOABITRESS

According to Leviticus 23:22, the _____ (including widows) and foreigners living among Israel, were allowed to glean the leftovers behind the reapers at the edge of the field. Ruth qualifies in both cases. These reapers were professional workers with a vested interest in dropping little to nothing; but grain-by-grain, she was able to eke out a suitable existence for herself and Naomi. She must pull weeds aside, sweep leaves and chaff out of the way, but little by little, grain by grain, she always had enough.

Observation #3: We invest ourselves expecting the miraculous and depending on God to do the elaborate when sometimes God just wants to know if you'll pick up the portion designed for you.

On the ground of the Lord's field that you're working is a grain-by-grain portion that nobody wants and if you leave it, it will go to waste. Listen to Jesus again, “nobody wants these fragments...they are on the ground, in people's laps and if you pick them up, you will not suffer loss!”

THEME 3: THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN

In Matthew 15, we encounter a Syrophenician woman, she understood something about fragments. She had a personal (_____), painful (_____), and plaguing (_____) problem, and she comes to Jesus for help. Jesus admonishes her and comments, seemingly to Himself, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24).

“It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs” (15:26). But she saw those same crumbs that Jesus told the disciples to pick up – the leftovers that nobody wanted – which was fit for dogs. She accepts that she might not deserve a seat at the Master's table; she was unfit, she was unworthy, but she affirms that crumbs can get the job done.

THEME 4: PAUL'S SHIPWRECK

In Acts chapter 4, Paul has boarded a ship bound for Rome and despite his prophetic warning that they should not sail (v. 10) the master and owner of the ship decided to sail anyway. Paul delivered lifesaving counsel and they ignored the word of Lord. The south wind is blowing softly (v. 13), and they saw circumstances that were favorable, but soon a tempestuous wind has then in fear for their lives (v. 14).

Fourteen days of violent storms later, they ran the ship into a reef (v. 41) and the front was stuck but the waves were so violent that they broke the back end of the ship in _____. If you asked Paul, he would testify that when he was shipwrecked ***“some made it on boards, and some on fragments of the ship, but 276 people made it safely to land”*** (v. 44, paraphrased).

BACK TO THE FEEDING OF THE 5,000

The disciples took up twelve baskets of fragments and were left with more than the people got. It's never a question of whether God wants you to have more – the question is whether you'll take it in fragments.

Mark 6:41 makes a distinction between how Jesus distributed the bread and of fish.

41And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke [kataklaō] the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided [merizo] the two fish among them all.

Jesus broke [kataklaō] the loaves, into pieces. But He shared or distributed [merizo] the fish. As He offered the fish to the disciples, they either received a _____ fish, or the fish continued to regenerate in pieces as He cut. Because there is no reference to Him breaking or cutting in the text, the former is more likely true.

Even though our portion most often comes in fragments, sometimes the Lord will let you have a whole fish. Is there anybody in the room that knows that it doesn't matter whether you get it in singles or twenties, fifties or hundreds... the Lord will provide even if He has to do it grain-by-grain?

That's how I want us to end this time together. I want us to end this time together being reminded that no matter how many members you have, or what your annual budget. Whether the people are in the building or catching the Live Stream online. God can re-define the role of His church in the world, the same way, He is re-defining you, grain-by-grain. Little-by-little. Piece-by-piece.

Will you join me, and trust Him, in this prayer?