

Wasted? The radical values of Jesus **“A Waste of Food?”**

Passages: James 2:14–18

John 6:1–14

This is the second sermon in a new series that we've entitled, "Wasted? The upside-down values of Jesus." Our purpose is to compare and contrast our modern, Western-based value-system with the value-system that Jesus lived by and to see whether or not our core values (the values we live by every day) have been shaped by Jesus or by the world. So often, the things that we think are a waste of our time, our energy or our money are exactly the things that Jesus treasures, whereas the things that we treasure are often a waste in Jesus eyes!

Of course, the need for this kind of discernment is critical in being a disciple of Jesus. Back in the days of the Old Testament prophet Amos, Israel was living in a way that was contrary to the ways of God. They no longer shared His value-system! And so, God rebuked Israel, saying, **“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”** The same question must be asked of us today! To call ourselves believers/followers of Jesus means that we willingly agree to walk with Jesus by sharing His value-system. But, do we? Do we really accept the things that Jesus says are of value and reject those things which are not?

Indeed, **what is the value-system of Jesus?** Well, today we will examine a second snapshot of Jesus' life and ministry. Once again, we will see His value-system, beautifully revealed in the feeding of the 5000.

Let's pray.

As today's story unfolds in John 6, we see five thousand men, not counting women and children, who have followed Jesus into the desert. Why? Well, verse 2 tells us that it was **“...because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.”**

Clearly, they were mesmerised by Jesus; mesmerised by His miraculous powers. They were so convinced that He was the

Messiah... the saviour and healer of Israel...the One promised throughout the Old Testament...that they followed Him into the desert without any food!

But now, all of a sudden, the people are beginning to realise how hungry they are. Perhaps the children were starting to cry; perhaps the mothers were wondering what to do. Whatever was going on, everyone knew that it was time to eat and there was no food!

Of course, there's a certain irony here that must not be missed! Look at verse 4. In what looks like a "throw-away line", John informs us that **"the Jewish Passover feast was near!"** Do you get it? The Jewish feast of Passover was the biggest party in Israel. While these people were starving in the desert, everybody else in Israel would have been heading down to Jerusalem for the feast! But, of course, **that is the irony!** Added to this irony is the fact that, for the first 40 years of Israel's existence, Passover was celebrated in a desert-- the desert of Sinai-- under the leadership of Moses! Now, almost 1500 years later, it is going to be celebrated again in the desert,... but this time it will be celebrated under a new Moses; the Messiah Jesus!

But, of course, before this supernatural desert feast can even begin, there's the question of food and where will it come from!? I mean, who is capable of providing enough unleavened bread and meat to feed 5000-plus people, way out here in the desert? It is to this end that Jesus turns to Phillip and, as a way of testing him, asks, **"Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"**

Interestingly, in verse 6 we're informed that Jesus already knew exactly what He was going to do. But the disciples didn't! Neither did the people! And so, Andrew pipes up rather sheepishly--(v 9) **"Here is a boy with 5 small barley loaves and 2 small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"** Yes, Jesus knew what He was going to do, but this food was offered to Jesus without much hope that such meagre offerings could really satisfy anyone!

Nevertheless, it was offered! And that's when Jesus, **the Lord of the Passover feast**, did what only He is able to do; He multiplied that bread and fish until everyone was filled! Jesus was able to bring the true Feast of Passover back to the desert, just like it was in "the good-old-days"! Once again, the true people of God (the ones who longed to know Him and follow Him) were gathered together in a desert cathedral, in worship around their Saviour and their King!

It's a beautiful story, elevating the Messiahship of Jesus and the bounty of His Kingdom.

Sadly, however, that's usually where we end the story! But, that's not where John ends the story! Indeed, today, I want us to consider the forgotten ending of the story—for this is where we really Jesus' value-system at work!

Let's read **verses 12 and 13!**

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

So, what are the things that Jesus values, here? I think it's summarised in those four little words: **"Let nothing be wasted!"** What do I mean by that? Well, let's take a moment to reflect on the situation. Jesus had just fed a multitude in the desert. They had their Passover feast in grand style! But now comes the time to clean up. And what is Jesus' primary concern? **"Let nothing be wasted!"**

That's huge! I mean, who really would have cared if the left-overs were thrown aside? Who would have cared if the stray dogs picked them up? Who would have cared if the crumbs were thrown to the birds? When you are surrounded by overflowing abundance, who even stops to think about left-overs?

But Jesus does! Furthermore, He instructs His disciples to carefully gather everything up in baskets? **But why?**

Before I suggest an answer to that question, let's take a look at our own society...our "throw-away" society. It seems that our value-system is in direct contrast to the value-system of the One who said, "**Let nothing be wasted!**" I mean, we live with so much! We live in a world of plenty...of abundance! Compared to the majority of people in the world, we celebrate a feast every single day! Could that be why there is so much in our society that is wasted every day? (Did you know, for example, that the western world throws 1/3 of its food away; either because we let it go bad, or simply because we've had enough to eat.) It's as if the bounty of our daily feast gives us a license to waste.

Now, of course, it's not so much the **act** of being wasteful that is the real problem. Essentially, the problem is in our **attitude!** In other words, it's not sufficient to simply say, like my mother used to say, "Waste not, want not!" or, "Eat your peas- just think of all the starving children in Africa!" Wasting things (like food) actually reveals a fundamental sense of independence and lack of responsibility towards others. It's really a problem with the way we see the world...as if we live in a bubble of our own comforts, overflowing abundance and subsequent wastefulness, without any care for the welfare of others. (Some estimate that the Western world consumes over 90% of the world's resources!)

But, the text from John 6 takes us even further than this.

Think about it: When Jesus ordered His disciples to gather up all the left-overs, there was an obvious intention on His part for it to be recycled. And it wasn't simply going to be brought out later that day for afternoon tea, or offered to the crowd for breakfast the next day! The fact is that Jesus already had 12 baskets waiting, ready to be given to His 12 disciples! This fact makes it clear (to me, at least) that Jesus intended for each disciple to take

his overflowing basket to a nearby town and village, and to distribute that food to anyone who was in need!

Why this seems so obvious to me relates back to verse 4 and the seemingly innocuous comment that John makes about the Passover feast. Remember? John told us in verse 4 that —“**The Jewish feast of Passover was near!**” This means that God’s people from all over Israel were heading down to Jerusalem, where the annual celebrations were held. The only problem, however, was that many people in Israel were excluded from going:

- **the poor**, for example, who could not afford the trip;
- there were also **the disabled, the crippled and the handicapped** who, because of their defects, were not allowed to enter the Temple.
- **the unclean** of Israel were unwelcome at the feast. This included most women, excluded because of the blood of menstruation.

These are the people who were still in their villages! And these are the people (I imagine) that Jesus was targeting as worthy recipients of those 12 overflowing baskets of food! Jesus, **the Lord of the Passover Feast**, was making sure that His disciples deliberately included those in Israel who had hitherto been excluded.

And, of course, **it is with this idea that we discover a key element in Jesus’ value-system!** Central to the identity of Jesus is this notion of inclusion! “**Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest!**”

Now, isn’t it therefore true that, as His disciples, it is imperative that we, too, should “**Let nothing be wasted!**” ? Isn’t it true that, as His disciples, we should also be gathering up the left-overs from the abundance of God’s miraculous blessings that we have received in Jesus Christ and taking them out to a world which has

been excluded. Don't we each have the responsibility of carrying our overflowing baskets of food...both physical and spiritual food... and sharing this abundance with the lost and the lonely, the outcast and the stranger, the poor and the sick, the rejected and the recluse? As I understand it, if this was the value-system of Jesus, "the Lord of the Passover", then it must be ours as well. **"Let nothing be wasted!"**

I must confess to you that, in all my days reading this story of Jesus feeding the 5000, I've never really considered this ending part as all that important! I always thought that the central point of this miracle was to show Jesus as our miracle worker and Messianic King; the One who provides for our needs in all our desert situations.

But now it differently! In Jesus' command to His disciples that we find a mandate for us all! Like the disciples, we are called to gather up the left-overs and use what God has so abundantly provided in Christ to feed a hungry world. **"Let nothing be wasted!"**

Indeed, once we get a fix on this idea, then the rest of this 6th chapter of John's Gospel makes perfect sense! Jesus, you see, goes on to speak about the most nourishing food of all-- the **"bread of heaven"**—His body broken for the life of the world! Moreover, Jesus will go on to speak in detail about His flesh as true food and His blood as true drink. He is essentially describing Himself as the true Passover Lamb, crucified and shared out as heavenly food for an earth-bound and starving humanity.

So, friends, let's take up our overflowing baskets! Ultimately, Jesus has given us the food that will satisfy a hungry world.

"Let nothing be wasted!" Let's pray.