

Fill the Hungry With Good Things

Impact Series, February 6/7 | John 6:35-40
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DO YOU WANT TO IMPACT OUR WORLD?

I replaced the boards on my deck two summers ago.

I kept up with staining the deck boards for years.

As the boards wore out over time, the stain started flaking off worse and worse each year.

When a few boards rotted through, I knew it was time to replace all the decking.

Since so many screws were rusted or stripped, removing the boards became a big job.

When it was time to put the new deck boards down, I thought the hard work was done.

However, as I cut and placed the new boards, my drill just didn't want to drive the nails through quickly or easily. Screws kept getting stuck and stripped. I was getting quite frustrated.

But my father-in-law loaned me a tool I had never used before, an impact driver.

I won't get into all the differences between a cordless drill and an impact driver. Let's just say that the regular drill turns a bit that can drive a screw into the wood, if the wood is okay with the idea. But an impact driver has higher torque, and when it runs into resistance, it gives bursts of power and drives a screw into wood, whether the wood likes it or not.

Impact. In tools, it's a good thing.

Our vision statement calls for us to impact our world.

Our vision is to build a community of believers who actively impact our world for Christ.

"Impact" can be a noun.

As a verb, "impact" narrowly means "to hit with great force."

More broadly, "impact" implies "to affect a situation, person, or process."

That second definition gets at what we mean when we say that we want to impact actively our world for Christ. We want to affect our world for Jesus in big, good ways.

As Christians, that means leaving the world with more righteousness, and justice, and with more disciples of Jesus than it had when we started.

Jesus shows us how.

Between now and Easter, we're going to look at times when Jesus impacted the world during his earthly ministry. We're going to look very practically at what he did.

We're also going to look at who he is. Jesus told us who he is in a series of statements in the Gospel according to John that include the phrase, "I am." These statements tell us powerful things about Jesus and explain why he chose to impact the world in the ways he did.

Jesus changes our lives in those very same ways. He does for us what he did for the people of the first century, because Jesus is our living, reigning Lord!

Jesus also sets the example for us. As we think about impacting our world, he shows us how we can change the world in his name and with his power.

So, do you want to impact our world for Christ? Let's look to Jesus' example to see how.

JESUS MET THE MULTITUDES' NEEDS

Jesus had compassion on a massive crowd.

You heard John 6:35-40 read just a short time ago.

Earlier in chapter 6, Jesus did something absolutely amazing. It's the only miracle recorded in all four of the Gospels. When you put all four Gospels side by side, a clear picture emerges.

Jesus and his apostles had just completed a grueling season of ministry. Jesus wanted to get away with them to process and rest.

They crossed the Sea of Galilee by boat and came to the wilderness outside of Bethsaida.

Crowds heard he was coming and were waiting for him when he arrived.

Jesus had compassion on the crowds and began teaching and healing them.

After a while, Jesus presented his disciples with a problem. It was getting late in the day, and there was a large crowd out in the wilderness. Where would they get food for the people to eat?

The pragmatic, logistically minded apostles had already been wrestling with this question.

They had even developed a budget. Two hundred days' worth of wages wouldn't even begin to feed the crowd. They wanted to send the crowd away to locate and buy their own food.

One of the apostles, Andrew, had found a boy in the crowd with five barley loaves and two fish.

Jesus instructed the apostles to seat the crowd, which included five thousand men plus women and children.

Jesus took the loaves and fish, blessed them, and broke them into pieces. He gave them to the disciples. The disciple/apostles passed the pieces to the crowd.

Everyone ate their fill. Then Jesus instructed the disciple/apostles to gather the leftovers. There were twelve baskets filled with leftovers. Jesus had fed the crowd miraculously.

Jesus' actions reminded people of the manna God sent when Israel was in the wilderness.

Exodus chapter 16 is set two-and-a-half months after God delivered the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. They were in the wilderness.

People started to run out of food and got angry, longing for the food they had in Egypt.

God told the people through Moses, his servant, that he would rain bread from heaven.

The next morning, dew covered the ground around the camp. When the dew dried up in the morning sun, it left behind a fine, flakey substance that looked like frost on the ground.

It was white and tasted like wafers made with honey. It was manna.

The people of Israel gathered as much as they needed for each day.

God fed the Israelites manna for forty years as they wandered in the wilderness.

Our physical needs are actually very important.

This lesson was driven home for me by a program called "Good to Go Kids."

It's a program that serves food to insecure children in a school district I once knew.

The schools have programs that feed hungry children lunch and sometimes breakfast as well.

However, over the weekends, those children go to homes where their caregivers were running out of food at the end of the week. Consequently, they eat sporadically over the weekends.

The school district realized that these children would frequently misbehave on Monday mornings. By Monday afternoon, after they had gotten a good lunch and/or breakfast, the children would settle down and start learning.

When children are hungry, they have a difficult time behaving and learning.

So, they started sending children home on Friday with bags of groceries so that they had something to eat over the weekend.

These kids started coming to class ready to learn on Monday mornings.

It's a powerful reminder that our physical needs matter.

Our basic needs matter to God.

God's feeding Israel in the wilderness and Jesus' feeding the crowds when they were hungry aren't an isolated or out-of-place details in the Bible.

Jesus tells us directly that he cares about these basic, physical needs that we have.

In his model prayer in Matthew 6:11 Jesus told us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Jesus was telling us to ask our Father to do in our lives what he did for the Israelites in the wilderness and for the crowd on the shore. He was telling us to ask our Heavenly Father to meet our basic needs each day. They are important to us, and they're important to God.

Jesus cares about our basic needs, because he's the bread of life!

JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE

Jesus told us that he is the bread of life in John 6:35-40.

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Jesus let us know that he is the solution to a problem we understand.

We hunger and thirst.

Of course, to hunger or thirst is a very physical, literal type of sensation.

To be hungry is to need food and to feel that need for food.

To be thirsty is to need water and to feel that need for water.

We all get hungry and thirsty, so Jesus was starting with something we all understand.

But Jesus used that to explain something more than just physical hunger and thirst. Jesus used hunger and thirst to remind us that we experience a lack of something that is necessary. Filling that void feels urgent to us.

We are empty inside. Only Jesus can satisfy that emptiness.

Therefore, Jesus called us to come to him and believe in him.

Jesus said that *coming to him* **and** *believing in him* would leave us filled to never hungering and sated to never thirsting.

He was confronting the crowds that were following him with the fact that they did neither.

They chased him from town to town to see the celebrity and be there for the miracles.

However, they didn't believe in him. To believe in Jesus means much more than to accept the truth of certain statements about him. The word translated "believe in" means "to have faith in and to put our trust in." Believing leads to following and obeying.

Believing in him was the real test of coming to him. The crowd hadn't really come to him.

There is more to the image of Jesus' being the bread of life than we recognize immediately.

It's like Norman Rockwell's *Saturday Evening Post* cover illustration, "Blank Canvas."

The artist painted himself sitting at an easel working on an illustration. However, the canvas is blank. The artist is disheveled and scratching his head. On the top left of the blank canvas, we see a note about the deadline and a pocket watch to remind us that time is ticking.

The message seems to be obvious. The artist was under a deadline, and inspiration hadn't struck. At least, that's what it looks like.

People who know Rockwell and have studied the illustration say that there was more going on.

We get our first clue in the stack of sketches to Rockwell's right. He had plenty of ideas. And those sketches are now scattered all over the place, instead of stacked neatly.

His paints and brushes are on the floor and have been used without being put away.

There are a couple of other clues, including the matches and the stick under Rockwell's chair.

And there's actually a story. Rockwell produced this illustration after a day with his kids. His three sons had gotten into his studio and made a mess of things that day.

Rather than banishing the boys from the studio, Rockwell taught his boys how to clean up what they had played with. And his studio became a place where the boys were welcome.

But the moment he captured was the moment when he didn't know what to do with his sons.

There's far more going on than you might catch at first.

The same is true when Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." That image has so many layers!

JESUS GIVES US WHAT WE TRULY NEED

The crowd wanted Jesus to feed them.

After Jesus fed them, they concluded that he was a prophet and wanted to make him king!

The crowds followed him the next day to Capernaum—miles away.

Jesus told them they were only following him because they wanted more food.

He told them to work for a kind of food that would produce eternal life. Jesus told them that he would be able to give them that kind of food. Jesus called them to believe in the one the Father had sent if they wanted something more. The crowds got that he meant himself.

Before they were willing to believe in him in that way, they wanted more miracles. They wanted Jesus to do the manna miracle for them the way they thought Moses had done in the wilderness. They were still focused on food!

However, we're not just physical beings.

Jesus kept calling the crowds to look deeper, but they just weren't ready to come to him and believe in him the way Jesus expected.

But if we're going to understand what Jesus means when he calls himself the bread of life and if we're going to get what Jesus is offering us, then we have to look deeper.

Matthew 5:6 lets us know that the Bread of Life will satisfy our hunger for righteousness.

In Matthew 5:6, Jesus used hunger and thirst as an image for wanting something badly.

He implied that we could hunger and thirst for righteousness. He said,

"6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

What he meant is that if we desire righteousness with the same intensity that we desire food and water, then our desire will be satisfied.

Don't miss the fact that there is an emotional and relational hunger here.

Jesus makes us right and fills our emotional and relational hunger for God.

Jesus makes us right and puts us in a family where we can have our hunger for relationships with others met.

So Jesus is saying that he is the bread of life who fills our desire for righteousness, he fills our desire for God, and he fills our desire to be part of something bigger.

However, Jesus means more. He calls us to look deeper still.

In Deuteronomy 8:3, we find that having the Bread of Life means having Jesus himself.

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus went out into the wilderness himself to pray, fast, and face temptation by Satan. When Jesus had gone without food for 40 days and was experiencing deep hunger, Satan pointed out that he could turn the stones to bread.

Even when he was hungry in the desert, Jesus saw that bread was more than something we eat to nourish us and make our physical hunger go away. We need something more. Jesus countered in Luke 4:4,

"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"

He was referring to a passage from the Old Testament in Deuteronomy where Moses was explaining the miracle of manna to the Israelites. In Deuteronomy 8:3 Moses said,

"And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."

First of all, notice that even when God provided bread to feed his hungry people, there was a deeper point. He was teaching them to trust him. He was pointing them to himself.

But look at what Moses added. We don't live by bread alone. We live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Of course, that meant the Law. We need God's will to teach us how to live.

But what other Word came from the mouth of the Lord?

John 1:1 tells us,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

What is the Word that comes from the mouth of the Lord? It's Jesus. Jesus was telling us that hunger reminds us of our need for him. He is personally the bread of life.

True life is to know him personally.

We live because he gave us life. Our life is sustained by him.

He nourishes us spiritually the way bread nourishes us physically. Jesus gives us spiritual life.

Amazingly, Jesus calls us even deeper still! Is that possible?

John 6:35-40 then fills in the final piece, which is eternal life.

Jesus said that his Father sent him down from heaven to do something.

The Father has given the Son followers. Some people will come to him and believe in him.

Jesus said that he won't lose anyone his Father sends to him.

Instead, he will raise up those who follow him at the last day.

That means that we will get eternal life. We may experience death, but we will also experience resurrection and live with Jesus forever.

Of course, eternal life is all about what happens to us someday—when Jesus returns if he returns soon, possibly after we experience death if Jesus waits a while longer to return. Eternal life is about what happens someday.

However, eternal life starts now. Even right now, Jesus gives us new, spiritual life that is springing up inside of us and changing us from the inside out.

Jesus gives us what we truly need!

Jesus cares about our physical needs and gives us what we truly need.

Jesus cares about our emotional needs and gives us a right relationship with his Father and with people around us.

Jesus cares about our spiritual needs and gives us himself and eternal life.

We are physical, emotional, spiritual beings. Jesus addresses us on all of these levels.

Jesus gives us what we truly need on the deepest levels.

LIKE JESUS, WILL WE DO WHAT PEOPLE TRULY NEED?

I missed out on a Jesus moment in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Hurricane Katrina was a massive, powerful storm that hit New Orleans, southern Louisiana, and Mississippi in August of 2005.

The storm surge and flooding caused the levees around New Orleans to fail.

I was in New Orleans after the storm waters receded. I toured a downtown neighborhood and saw a car that had been slammed into the second story of a home. So many people had been displaced and forced to leave that most of New Orleans felt like a ghost town.

The church I was serving at the time went on a mission trip the next year to help with recovery in a suburb. Teams helped clear houses that had been destroyed. Another team did construction projects for a church serving the community. I served on a team that went to a FEMA trailer community to do Bible Clubs for the children of the community.

I remember driving into the FEMA trailer community. We handed out flyers. We set up tents and tables and a sound system. We had a backdrop that we created to go on the back of the tent; I remember getting frustrated that when I fastened the backdrop to the pop-up tent, it turned the tent into a sail. I remember our team's running games and crafts and Bible stories. I remember packing up at the end of each day, debriefing, and getting ready for the next day.

Looking back, I can't believe what I missed. Our team (I) was in the middle of a village of people who had lost everything. They were living in small, white, single-wide FEMA trailers—many of them with everything they had left in the world. They had no timeline on when life would get back to something that felt normal. They were raising children in a disaster zone.

All I could see was a kids' program to run—schedules to coordinate, talks to give, and volunteers to shepherd.

I didn't see the pain. I didn't see the kids. I didn't see the parents. I didn't see the people.

Can we see people?

Jesus sees people. He sees us.

He sees us as people with physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

He has compassion on us and on our needs.

Can we be like Jesus and see people with all their pain, all their needs, and all their potential?

Can we see the moment?

The moments in our lives when we are most aware of our needs are the moments when we are most open to help and to the Gospel.

When we're hurting or grieving, when we're changing jobs, when we're going through a broken relationship, when we're fighting addiction, when we're moving, when we get married—those are the moments when we need somebody and something.

Those are also the moments when our assumptions about life and truth are turned upside down, and we are searching for answers and solutions.

Those are the moments when we turn to people AND the moments when we turn to God.

Can we see those moments of need in a person's life as the moments when they need us, they need help, they might turn to God?

Will we do something?

James, Jesus' brother, wrote the letter we call "James" in the New Testament.

He wrote words that sound like they could have come directly from the mouth of his half-brother during his earthly ministry in **James 2:15-16** which reads:

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

He was warning us to that while we can never forget that people are spiritual beings with spiritual needs, neither can we forget that people are physical and emotional beings with physical and emotional needs.

He was warning us not to ignore people's physical and emotional needs.

He warned that if we do, our faith isn't good for much.

Will we do something for those in need?

Will we do what people truly need?

Jesus sets the example for us here.

People have profound physical and emotional needs. We have an opportunity and an obligation to do something about those needs.

Meeting those needs becomes a critical gateway to the matters Jesus knew were most profound—our spiritual needs.

Jesus met them all. We must as well.