

The bread of grace and the leaven of performance

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 May 2023

Preacher: Bo Wong

[0 : 00] My name's Linda, for those who don't know me. I'm just going to do the reading today. It's from Matthew 15, starting at verse 32.

Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat, and I am unwilling to send them away hungry lest they faint on the way.

And the disciples said to him, Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd? And Jesus said to them, How many loaves do you have?

They said, Seven, and a few small fish. And directing the crowd to sit on the ground, he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

And they all ate and were satisfied, and they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children.

[1 : 02] And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan. And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him, they asked him to show them a sign from heaven.

He answered them, When it is evening, you say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.

You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.

So he left them and departed. When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. Jesus said to them, Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, We bought no bread. But Jesus, aware of this, said, Oh, you little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact you have no bread?

[2 : 10] Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand and how many baskets you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand and how many baskets you gathered?

How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

My name is Bo, and I want the elders. Welcome to church. And for those who are online as well, I understand that there are quite a number of us who are not well.

And I think over this winter, as the viruses are spreading around, I think every week there will be some of us who would not be well enough to come. But yeah, just gather with us on Zoom.

Today the title that I'm speaking on is the bread of grace and the leaven of performance. So on the picture, you can see there are two types of bread.

[3 : 23] One has got leaven, that is more with A inside, and the other one is unleavened. At first, I put down the name as the yeast of performance, but actually the Lord used the word leaven.

What is the difference between leaven and yeast? Yeast is just the organism itself. Leaven means that the organism has infused or permeated the bread.

So that's why it's called leaven. Leaven on Greek actually translates into English, I think into the word enzyme. Enzyme, the same word.

Enzyme is the substance that we use to change. A little bit of enzyme can change a lot of material and our body functions on enzyme.

Let us pray before we start. Father God, we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah who has come, who has done wondrous things, and who has given us life.

[4 : 32] Help us as we read your word and meditate on your word today that we might appreciate and know that we do have this treasure, great treasure in us.

Help us to live out such a life, a life that contains the treasure that is unspeakable. Thank you, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. About a month ago, after the elders' meeting, David Coderwood told us about someone who was being interviewed for a job.

And he said, the question the interviewer asked was that, tell us why we should employ you. And David was a bit perturbed by such a question.

Maybe he's a bit too old and he didn't know that this is how the world operates now. But that is a very common question, isn't it, for those who have gone to an interview.

[5 : 34] But that question actually made me start thinking. And that's how this sermon came about, even from his random remarks. And yes, if the interviewer asked you this question, why we should employ you, how will your answer?

And if your answer is, because I need the money, then your answer could be the most truthful one among all the candidates. But you are not likely to get the job.

Why is that so? Because a company needs people to give it life and growth. It cannot employ people who does not perform.

So just for the young people here, if you come to an interview, I can tell you that, this is from what I experienced this, I'm not an expert on this, but there are four EEs that you can remember.

The first one is, you talk about education or expertise, what level of knowledge you have, and how your knowledge is related to the job you apply for.

[6 : 47] So they want to know your qualifications. Number two is experience. And they want to know if you have done similar jobs before and for how long and how you perform.

Number three is efforts. They want to know if you have put in some effort to find out about this job, what you know about this job and how hard working you'll be.

In general, they want to know that. And the fourth EEs is exceptional skills. So that one is a bonus. If you have any exceptional skills or talents, such as photographic memory or speedy calculation, so this will improve your chance of getting the job.

So the fourth EEs, why am I telling you this? But this is not a talk about interview. But I thought this knowledge is useful for young people if you want to be selected as school captain or president of a club or employee.

There's good knowledge. But more importantly, I'm telling you this because this is how the world outside your family operates. Your parents may put up with you regardless of your performance in any four EEs, but the world outside will not.

[8 : 01] The world outside is a huge place of needs. It needs capable people to run businesses, schools, factories, hospitals. Because we live in this world of needs, we tend to assess people with respect to their usefulness.

So we come to today's reading. We see Jesus interacting with three groups of people. How does the world assess them?

How do we see them ourselves? And how does Jesus see them? And how do they see Jesus? So we just spend some time looking at these three groups of people.

The first group, I call the nobodies, that is from Matthew 15, 32-39. So in all the history of the world, there's always a last row of people who do not make it above the poverty line.

They are dispensable and they play no important role in their societies. As far as the rest of the world is concerned, they are the nobodies.

[9 : 11] You know that for most of us, we live above the poverty line. We have education. We have a comfortable life.

This is not common in the history of the world or even today in many parts of the world. because for people to live as we do, we need to have a stable society.

We need to have good healthcare. Otherwise, people get sick and they die young and they are not productive. And if the society is not stable, you can't be sure that what you earn will not be robbed

by other people.

And so it's hard to put in any effort to do things. But most people who are poor, not because of laziness, but because they do not have any opportunity to get education or healthcare or such thing that we enjoy.

And if you're not in those societies or those people, it's very difficult to understand the feeling of happiness and desperation of the poor. We just simply don't.

[10:25] I didn't until I went to the Philippines and Cambodia and lived and see how those young, poor people lived. I would not actually have felt very much for them or understand their situation.

It's difficult to imagine the pain of parents when they can't afford to get their children to have any healthcare, a child has a toothache, what do you do?

And it's difficult to understand the hunger that people suffer, people who don't know whether they can have the next meal. And that is still very common in our world today.

In Matthew 15, 32 to 39, we see Jesus living among this group of mostly Gentile, Gentile nobodies for three days.

He went through hunger with them. Right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he was led by the Holy Spirit to be in the wilderness and went through hunger for 40 days.

[11:34] Why did he do that? Jesus was identifying with the poor and needy. He knew what it was like to be hungry. We see these thousands of people over these three days, they enjoyed their starvation, but they did not go home because they found one who cared for them and they latched on to Jesus to get some relief from their sufferings.

Were they worthy to be helped? Not really. Nobody was worthy to get help from Jesus. Like us, they were foolish people.

They were disobedient people. They were led astray by their sinful desires. They were slaves to their various passions and pleasure, passing their days in malaise and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

This is what Paul said in Titus. But Jesus had compassion on them. The disciples said, where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?

When we read this, we would be surprised. Didn't Jesus just feed the 5,000 not too long ago at a similar situation? Didn't Jesus just heal so many people over the last three days?

[12:59] So, were those disciples slow? Were they dumb? I don't think so. I think they were just tired and they have had enough.

After spending three days serving these people, they wished that Jesus would send them away. They had already done so much for them. What more would they expect?

The disciples could not see any benefit for them to keep helping this group of nobodies. And so, as a contrast, we see the grace of Jesus.

The Canaanite woman, as what Gareth mentioned just now, might be asking just for some crumbs, but Jesus was giving these Gentiles bread.

And he did not care for these people because they were useful to him, but because he had compassion on them. He fed them with so much bread that they could not eat anymore with seven baskets full of broken pieces left over.

[14:08] And this is the grace of God. It is free and satisfying and he will feed you until you overflow with it. The next score of people we can read from Matthew 16, 1 to 4, I call them the sunbodies.

For a society to be established, we need sunbodies to unite, to organize, to judge the population, to keep the law and order.

These people usually have more education, experience, and skills. and they tend to rule the society, to rule the nobody with iron fees. They knew that if they were soft, people would become disobedient and defiant.

They could not afford to rule with compassion because people would take advantage of their compassion. They saw Jesus feeding the 4,000. They might think that Jesus was a fool for giving up free food.

If you give people free food, they will become lazy. a wise leader will always make people work for their needs. They do not appreciate Jesus' generosity, even if it was a miraculous act.

[15:24] However, they need to do something about Jesus because more and more people were being attracted to Jesus and they were losing control of the crowd, of the people.

so they wanted Jesus to either join their rank and to be one of them or to disappear from their circle. Jesus did not have any formal education like they did. Jesus did not have many years of experience in leadership and Jesus did not even want to uphold somebody's creed and their direction.

Jesus tended to oppose to what they, the way of doing things. So, as far as somebody's are concerned, Jesus failed to qualify regarding to the law.

Perhaps Jesus could join the ranks as a prophet. Perhaps Jesus had exceptional skills that would promote his status. And so, in Matthew 16, 1-4, we see the Pharisees and Sadducees coming together to test Jesus.

[16:41] So, both of this group of people were the religious elite of the Jews. They actually dislike each other. They have their own stand.

but now that they have a bigger threat to their status, they work together to see what they can do to Jesus.

So, they request Jesus to perform a miracle, one that will validate or disqualify Jesus. Depends on what Jesus could do.

So, Jesus said, you can associate the appearance of morning sky, with the weather of the day. You should also be able to associate what I have done so far with what the scripture has prophesied about me.

So, what the scripture has foretold about me. You read, you knew, and you should be able to associate that with what I have done. You do not recognize my identity, not because there was not enough evidence, it is because of your rebellious heart.

[17:51] In Psalm 18, 25-26, we read, With the merciful, you show yourself merciful. With the blameless man, you show yourself blameless.

With the purified, you show yourself pure. With the crooked, you make yourself seem torturous. mercy. So, these assemblies, they work hard to establish and maintain their position.

They did not know what mercy was. They know that if they did not work hard, they won't get what they want, and they don't expect any mercy from anyone. So, they therefore could not appreciate the mercy of Jesus.

They thought Jesus was either a fool or he had ulterior motive in helping the people. No one would give out free lunch. Jesus must be seeking something from the crowd.

Because their hearts had not been purified by God, they could not see the purity in Jesus. Because their minds are crooked, they could not associate what Jesus has said and done with purity and righteousness.

[19:02] They could only assume there's something Jesus was after in what Jesus has done. For an evil and adulterous generation, nothing Jesus could do would convince the somebody because they did not know what mercy and purity were.

However, Jesus remained merciful. While these people could not accept him, Jesus would still give them an ultimate sign, the sign of Jonah. In chapter 12 of Matthew, which has gone through, Jesus explained what the sign of Jonah was.

Matthew 12, 40, it says, For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Jesus was telling them that there is one sign, the ultimate sign that will happen. You just have to wait for it.

Jesus' death and resurrection will prove Jesus' purity in his motive and his righteousness in his action. In Jesus' death, we know that Jesus gave his life.

[20:14] What more could he do to prove his compassion? His death was only restricted to only three days. His resurrection will prove that death could not hold on to him because it was without sin.

So what he has done were all righteous. So this is the group of the sun bodies. The last group we read from Matthew 16 5 to 12.

The third group of people were those who followed Jesus as their masters. I call them the antibodies because they were walking on a path opposite to that of Jesus. They were a group of nobodies hoping to become somebody by following Jesus.

Like many people, they put in a lot of effort to upgrade their social status. However, without education, experience, or exceptional skills, they could not advance themselves on the lateral status.

How do I know they did not share the same aspirations with Jesus? You can see this in their failure to understand what Jesus said. They failed to understand not because of lack of intelligence, but their mindset has been contaminated with the level of performance.

[21 : 30] The most obvious example was when Nathaniel heard about Jesus in John 1. He said, can anything good come from Lazarus?

He did not believe that somebody can come out of a nobody town. When he later saw Jesus having exceptional skills because Jesus could see him at a distance and knew what he was thinking about, so he changed his mind and acknowledged that Jesus was his king.

But Jesus told him to hold on to his impression until he saw Jesus on the cross. So Jesus asked to not to be impressed by what miracles sign that he had done but the last sign to prove who Jesus was that is on the cross when he was there.

So these disciples were hoping that Jesus would move them from being nobody to becoming somebody. However Jesus was on the path from being somebody to being nobody.

So they were crossing in their aspiration. The disciples wanted to have authority and influence in the society. Maybe they have good intention.

[22 : 54] They might want to bring justice and equity to the society. The disciples would be happy to see Jesus calling down lightning to strike all their opponents. They wanted Jesus who was like a superman who would bring justice and order to the world.

But Jesus was sending them like sheep into the world. And Jesus himself was living like a lamb that was led to the slaughter. in the scripture we read today Jesus was again helping them to align their aspiration with his this time they forgot to bring bread with them.

They might have given the seven basket full of bread away or they might eaten all after all these days. And then after Jesus interacting with the religious leaders Jesus warned the disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Sadducees.

Upon hearing the word leaven the disciples associated it with bread. The association itself was correct because leaven at that time was only used to make bread.

Where they went wrong was thinking that Jesus was admonishing them or hinting them that they were doing something wrong for forgetting to bring some bread or food.

[24 : 23] They feared their failure to perform would displease Jesus. Jesus reminded them about the leftover bread in the feeding of 5,000 and of the 4,000.

Jesus was saying, Don't you see, my grace is free and overflowing. I'm not like the rulers of this world who would give you rewards based on your performance.

Your thinking has been contaminated by the level of the religious leaders. That is the level of performance. In this world, we all live the mindset of performance.

Part of becoming an adult is for us to learn that there is no free lunch in the world. You need to pay to get what you want. We also want to pay for it because that shows that we are capable and worthy of what we get.

And that is the mindset that we grow up in. Mindset is a part of our life. That is what controls what we are looking for in life.

[25 : 30] What we do right now. Talking about mindset reminds me that Brendan asked me how the coffee was last Sunday.

I said I don't drink coffee. Then Brendan said what's wrong with you? And then he proceeded to tell me that he spent seven hours including last Sunday morning from 2am to 6am trying to calibrate the coffee machine to make the best possible coffee.

You see there's a different mindset. To Brendan coffee is such an important thing. he needs to perfect it for himself and everybody else. For me water is important so coffee doesn't taste anything unusual or extraordinary to me.

for different mindsets we see different things and there's something wrong with me not drinking coffee but there's something wrong with Brendan for spending so much time on such a thing as coffee so there's the mindset that we live in.

So today we have two different mindsets in this scripture. The first one I'll talk about is 11 of performance 11 improved appearance and palatable lust of bread.

[27 : 01] The teaching of Jesus is like unleavened bread. It is full of substance but it is a bit difficult to chew and swallow. The teaching of the Pharisees and Pharisees is like leavened bread.

It appears to be good for food and delight to the eyes but it is also full of air. Jesus teaches that we can do nothing to gain us and we receive.

The religious leaders teach that we can do something to earn God's favor. We perform and God rewards us. We all want to prove ourselves to be performers that we can do it.

We therefore naturally listen to the religious leader. And in so many at the funeral one of the favorite songs you know that is that I do it my way that is what people want to show how we can do it.

And that is the level of performance. The Pharisees and Theresees are no longer around their age. You don't know about them. But their level is still as prevalent now as it was during their days.

[28 : 16] Think about the themes of movies and story book. They usually tell you that you can be the hero. You can change yourself and make yourself great, make yourself powerful, attractive.

You can change the world around you or you can do something to earn God's favor. Think about the money we spend on things in weddings. We want to tell our wedding guests how successful and perfect we are.

We accept the level of performance and act we feel ashamed when we cannot afford an expensive wedding or holiday.

Sometimes we might only come to church when it is our turn to lead or to serve because we earn our respect from performing such services and that is very much part of our thinking.

But Jesus' mindset is different. Jesus wants to give us bread without leaven. That is the bread of grace. In John 6 41 we read that so the Jews scrambled about him because he said I am the bread that came down from heaven.

[29 : 31] To the Jews Jesus was talking nonsense. First isn't Jesus the son of Joseph? How can he say he come down from heaven? Second how can a man say it is the bread who in his right mind will offer himself to be eaten?

To the Jews Jesus was just a lowly man born in a lowly family. They thought that anything from heaven would appear majestic like the connotation of a king.

And that is the performance mindset. If Jesus was from heaven he should have shown it by being born in a royal family. Jesus was a nobody. Jesus is the bread of grace.

He came to serve and not to be served. He came to give his life away. Many who were fed by Jesus eventually left him when they found Jesus work difficult to digest.

Like unleavened bread, God's words may appear hard to chew, but if you chew them slowly and patiently, you will find them sweeter than honey. Jesus is the bread in giving his body for us.

[30 : 39] He is also the bread as he brought us the eternal truth, God's word. I hope you can spend more time reading and meditating in his word. At the gate of heaven, if you are interviewed by God and the question is why should I let you in?

I hope your answer is not because I do something then I think you will be disqualified from getting into heaven.

There's only one acceptable answer to God is because Jesus. At the gate of heaven there are not four criteria or three criteria or two criteria there's only one criterion for anyone who wants to enter. It is not my performance that saved me. It is the performance of Jesus and the grace of Jesus that saved me. Jesus' obedience to God fulfilled the requirement of God's law.

Jesus' step on the cross and removed God's wrath. Jesus' grace towards us humbles us and changes us. Like the disciples you can never fully understand the grace of Jesus.

[31 : 57] We can be followers of Jesus and have a mindset that is opposite to that of Jesus. Like the disciples you may hope that the Lord Jesus will improve our social status but the Lord is doing more than that.

He wants to change our mindset. I hope that we can have more and more freedom from the mindset of this world and as our minds are being renewed by God's word daily.

Once you understand that we have been accepted by God not need to prove ourselves anymore and we will be free to be nobody.

What difference does becoming nobody make? Many I can mention. One with regard to church. You might think that you don't have any education experience or exceptional skill to contribute to the church and therefore feel a bit useless.

Church is a place for the gathering of nobody. Church is a place for people to know that they are not because of their performance but because Jesus loved them.

[33 : 06] And when we serve in the church we are free from the fear of failure or making a fool ourselves. It doesn't matter. We are not performing.

Church is also a place for people to learn to love others the same way. Loving others when we become nobody we can begin to have compassion on others.

There is this episode of To Dianatus written in 13080.

It's quite early. Actually this letter I didn't know about the letter until I heard this from Tim Kailar who passed away yesterday. This letter is from a Christian written in Greek to a non-Christian experience explaining why the Christianity became even being persecuted why the Christianity was still spreading in the Roman Empire.

It's a long letter only it's very well written I only could just a small portion of it. He says as citizens they share in all things with others and yet enjoy all things as if foreigners.

[34 : 37] Every foreign land is to them as their native country and every land of their birth is as a land of strangers. They marry as to all other people. They beget children but they do not destroy their offspring.

They have a common table but not a common bed. They are in the flesh but they do not live after the flesh. The part I want to say is that these Christians treat other people differently and that's why Christianity becomes such an attraction to most people especially those who are nobodies.

They as this person in the letter said they share in all things with other people. They just naturally share even non-Christians they share.

They do not treat their homeland as if it is their permanent place but they live as a stranger sojourners in the land.

They marry the five people they have children but they do not destroy their offspring it means that if they like during that time it's basically for girls they will throw them in the river because to them girls are not youthful but they have the changed mindset they learn to love their children regardless whether they are youthful or not in future they have a common table it means that they share the table food with people but not a common bed it means that they are not promiscuous they respect and love people so they respect sex because of that and they are generous with their food and their money so that is the change that makes to us and to ourselves as well so we are no longer driven by the need to have titles and position and when we become nobodies we can be free from having to prove ourselves we can own up our failure and sinful behavior and makes life so much easier when we can own up to our sinful behavior when we become nobody we can also face our guilt and shame because it's not dependent on our performance because we know that there's now no condemnation for those who are in

[37 : 18] Christ Jesus and we know that Jesus has paid it all may we may we be free from the Lebanon religion and have the freedom to love God and other people let us pray Father we thank you for your goodness to us that you send the Lord Jesus to free us that we might to live in freedom how does that we might truly have our mindset change that we might live out a glorious life for your own glory thank you Lord we pray in Jesus name Amen