

There is a Boy Here

One of the American virtues deeply embedded in every patriot is the "can-do" spirit, an attitude of self-reliance. In his essay on the topic, Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string." And, "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself."

In recent years, this same outlook was made famous in the song by Frank Sinatra:

And now, the end is here
 And so I face the final curtain
 My friend, I'll say it clear
 I'll state my case, of which I'm certain
 I've lived a life that's full
 I traveled each and ev'ry highway
 And more, much more than this, I did it my way

For what is a man, what has he got?
 If not himself, then he has naught
 To say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels
 The record shows I took the blows and did it my way.

What often is a very positive trait, can become one of the greatest impediments to the progress of the gospel in our hearts. This is not just an American problem, but a human problem. Today's text helps us deal with this common spiritual malady.

John 6:1-15

1 After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. **2** And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. **3** Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. **4** Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. **5** Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" **6** He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. **7** Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little." **8** One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, **9** "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" **10** Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. **11** Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. **12** And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." **13** So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. **14** When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" **15** Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

There are two life-transforming principles we need to grasp from this great Scripture story.

I. **We must receive help from Jesus (vv. 1-13)**

The first reason we must receive help from the Lord is that we can't help ourselves (vv.1-9). The key to understanding John's main thrust in this text is his comment in v. 4 that this was the Passover. The Passover feast was a time for Israel to remember what God had done for them when they couldn't help themselves—when He divided the Red Sea and took them into the wilderness to test them. (Notice in v.6 He was testing Philip and the other disciples.) He tested Philip by asking him where they could buy bread for all the people, because Philip was a

"local" (Bethsaida) and would know the possibilities. Having observed Jesus for several months, the right answer for Philip would have been: "Master, I don't know, but I know that you are gracious and powerful and can do all things well." But, instead, Philip flunked the test by looking to the problem and his technical abilities to analyze and then concluding that there was no answer. Andrew didn't do much better. He brought the boy and his little lunch to the Lord, but he had no hopes that it would make any difference: "...but what are they for so many?" In our times of affliction and testing, the Lord is sometimes simply teaching us again of our need of Him.

But not only do we learn of our helplessness without the Lord, but we also learn here of His gracious willingness to help us (vv.10-13). Notice what Jesus did: he took the equivalent of a FedEx Forum crowd, with a hungry person in every seat (18,119) and then called a little boy to center court who had five little biscuits and two sardines and fed the entire, massive crowd. Amazing! You, therefore, can trust Him with your sins, your ambitions, your loved ones, and your hopes for eternal life, for He is truly able to do what you can't do for yourself.

II. **We must receive Jesus (vv. 14-15)**

After witnessing such an extraordinary moment in history, the crowd made a response that was partly good and partly bad. On the one hand, the people knew that Jesus was someone special. His miracle exceeded that even of Elisha (II Kings 4:42-44). He must be the One Moses predicted—the coming Prophet Who would be greater than Moses himself (Dt. 18:15-18). When we truly behold the glory of Christ, we become worshipers and evangelists. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!"

At the same time, notice in verse 15 that Jesus withdraws from them. Why? Because, first of all, He did not want their enthronement of Him to throw off His predestined redemptive schedule. The time of the cross had not yet come. But also because they wanted to make Him the king of their kingdom. They figured that if Jesus were King, there would be a chicken in every pot, two donkeys in every barn, healing for all Israel, and, especially, deliverance from the Romans. The great St. Augustine, in his commentary on this text, said, "Jesus is usually sought after for something else, not for His own sake." But when we enthrone Jesus rightly, He must be the King of His Kingdom, and the only King the people shall see is one hanging spread eagle on a wooden cross, who calls to His disciples, "Come, take up your cross, and follow me."

When we do receive His help and also receive Him, in all of His power and grace, and when we submit to His Kingdom agenda, and seek to please Him, we shall find His fellowship and His favor and His enablement the sweetest gift of all.

The American can-do spirit can be a wonderful thing, but even better is the love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. How have you seen the American can-do spirit at work for the good? How have you seen it serve as an impediment to God's work of grace in our lives?

2. Sam Levenson, one of early TV's best known broadcasters, once said, "It was on my fifth birthday that Papa put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'Remember, my son, if you ever need a helping hand, you'll find one at the end of your arm.'" What's right about that statement? What's not right about that statement?

3. Why is it significant that the feeding of the five thousand (and their wives and children) took place during the Passover Feast? What are the parallels between what the Israelites learned in the wilderness and what the disciples learned here in John 6?

4. Why do you think this is the only miracle story found in all four gospels? What is particularly impressive to you about what Jesus did on this occasion?

5. In what ways do you see the "crowds" today making the same mistake that the crowd made in verse 15?

Going Deeper

1. Contemplate a recent trial or affliction you endured. Looking back on those events, can you now discern God's testing of you in those circumstances? Why would He do that to us?

2. When is it that you are most likely to want to enthrone Christ over your kingdom, rather than over His? How can you prepare for the next time of testing in your life?