

Jesus asked his disciples where they could buy enough bread for the five thousand households to have enough to eat. He asked this question to test his disciples. Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us that Jesus' disciples demanded that he send the multitudes away. Jesus responded to their demand with his own demand. He said, "You give them something to eat." This shows a major difference between how we naturally look at God's law and how God looks at his law. When we look at the law, we have to cut our losses. It's impossible to feed five thousand households out in the wilderness, especially if all you have is five loaves of bread and a couple fish. As Andrew asks, "What are these among so many?" We don't have any choice but to lower the bar of the law. Otherwise, nothing would ever get done. But God keeps his law with all its weight. God's law isn't concerned about whether we are able to fulfill its demands. Man's law makes itself manageable.

Now, this isn't to say that God's law demands that we find a way to end everyone's hunger or to hit some quota of feeding this or that amount of people. The point is not about numbers. In fact, it is our sinful nature's obsession with numbers that gets in the way. People imagine that if they can just have the right programs or the right enough of funds, then they can end hunger. Yet, this misses the point of God's law. As St. Paul says, I can give all my money away to feed the poor and give my body up to be burned, but if I don't have love, then it doesn't do me any good" (1 Cor 13:3).

God's law is not about helping this or that number of people. Instead, it is simply about loving God and your neighbor. Jesus tells his disciples to give the five thousand households something to eat. It's impossible for them to do this. He asks where they could buy enough bread to feed these people. Even if they sold all they had, they still wouldn't have enough money. This is the test. God's law makes demands, which our natural reason and strength consider unreasonable and absurd. But the test isn't to put our heads together and find a way to accomplish the task by our own ingenuity and can-do attitude. No, Jesus is testing and exercising the love of his disciples. Do they love these people? Do they have the compassion their Lord has for the multitudes?

The law tests our love. But the law won't ever make us love anyone. It will describe what love is, but it won't give us the love to fulfill it. Instead, it reveals our sin. It reveals our lack of love. But it does this so that we would turn to our only source of love.

We can only have love if we have faith in Christ. We love because God first loved us. We have been justified by faith in Christ, and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. God has given us his Holy Spirit. This is why we have love. He pours his love into our hearts so that we begin to love as he loved. But we can't even begin to have this love unless we have faith in Christ who loved us and gave himself up for us. Jesus therefore tests his disciples' love for their neighbor by testing their faith in him.

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This is how God deals with his Christians. He gives us our duties in this life. He calls us to various stations in the home, in the church, and in our communities. He gives you your neighbors, your parents, your spouse, your children, those who are above you, and those who are under you. He assigns various levels of work. And through it all, he teaches you to love. He tests your love. All these duties are summarized in this – love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm. Love is therefore the fulfillment of the law. In the work God gives you for your neighbor, he is testing your love. And in doing this, he tests your faith in him.

This is why our works always have crosses and trials attached to them. God is proving to us that the work he gave us is good. He proves this by making it appear evil. Consider what he did with Adam and Eve after they sinned. He told the woman that her great blessing of bearing children would be plagued by pain and sorrow, and her loving relationship with her husband as her caring head would turn into a power struggle in which he would rule over her. God told Adam that he would work with toil on the earth cursed by his sin. He would eat bread by the sweat of his brow. The work, which God originally gave to Adam as a joy and a blessing, is now surrounded by pain, sorrow, and frustration.

And yet, we can't forget that God gave this pain and toil to Adam and his wife only after he condemned the devil and promised to send the Savior. God increased the pain of the woman's childbearing. He cursed the earth because of Adam's sin. But in light of his promise of the Savior, these punishments are transformed into fatherly discipline designed to test and prove their faith, hope, and love. From our sinful perspective, we look at our daily bread and our daily duties as burdens we need to carry. But God is simply testing us. He is teaching us to bear one another's burdens in love as we trust in Christ who bore our burden of sin. In this way, God teaches us to see our works as good. Not because of how much we toil. Not because we manage to earn God's favor by them. No, God teaches us to see our works as good, because he who saved us from sin is the one who gave us these works. He gave you your neighbor to love. And despite how much you fall short, he covers your sins with his love and continues to provide your daily bread.

Jesus therefore asks Philip, "Where will we buy bread to feed all these people?" It's an impossible task. But the truly lofty task is to love them.

It's when we dwell on the size and the numbers that we get distracted from the weightiness of love. People are intimidated by numbers. Married couples get intimidated by the thought of having children, wondering whether they will be able to afford them. The demands of work and career are used as an excuse to avoid gathering with your fellow Christians. And the small number of people who show up to church often discourages those who are attending. But if we obsess over the numbers

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or the size, then we are missing the point. You don't owe anyone anything except to love.

You might earn X amount of money by X amount of work you put into your job or business. But your daily bread is not something you earn. Sure, it might seem like it. After all, you need money to buy food and other bodily necessities, and you need to work to get money. Work brings with it toil and labor. But God is not obligated to reward your work. He isn't legally bound to bring the rain, sunshine, and good crop for a bountiful harvest. No, all our daily bread is given purely by his fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness on our part. Whatever toil or hard work God gives you in the meantime is simply his way of testing and proving your love for your neighbor and your faith in his free promise of salvation in Jesus Christ.

All your sweat, all your toil, all the pressures of this life – even the attacks and temptations of the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh – God uses to test and prove that what he himself has given you is good. He has given you your work and your duties toward your neighbor. He has poured his love into your heart. And this all flows out of the fact that he himself has given you faith to trust in his only begotten Son, whom he gave up into death for your sins. He is the Bread of Life who gave his flesh for the life of the world and shed his blood for the forgiveness of all sins.

When you work to put food on the table, God makes you more aware of how much you fall short in the truly heavy task of loving your neighbor, your children, your spouse, your parents, your coworkers, or anyone he puts in your life. It's a weight that is simply too much for you to bear by your own reason and strength. It doesn't do you any good to lower the bar. Instead, God is teaching you to repent of your sins, rely on his gracious promise, and commend your toils and anxieties to him who cares for you.

I remember when Leah was pregnant with Kristiana. I was talking to two older women, and I told them that we were going to have another baby. The one woman looked very concerned about whether we could afford to have another child. The other woman encouraged me to give thanks to God and trust in him. She said that she had been duped and had given into the notion that she couldn't afford to raise more children. But after God taught her to love the ones she had, this made her reflect on his promise to provide.

We worry too much about bread. It's nothing unusual. Our Lord's first disciples worried about the same thing. But no amount of our worrying or manipulating of our circumstances is going to help us fulfill the law. Our Lord, who fulfilled the law and made full satisfaction for our sins, promises that we will never lack anything good from him. He freely gives us everything he worked for. He covers us with his righteousness, which is saturated by his suffering and bloody sweat.

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If God was willing to give up his own dear Son for us in this way, then certainly he won't leave us in our toil and worries. He will provide. He already does provide. Jesus teaches us to recognize this and receive our daily bread with thanksgiving. He teaches us to love by giving us faith in God's loving kindness.

Jesus fed the multitudes with just a few pieces of bread and fish. What were these morsels of food before so many? In themselves, nothing. But it was our Lord's Word and promise that satisfied the hungry crowd. Even the thought of how this food was distributed boggles the mind. How the eternal Son of God came in the flesh also boggles the mind. It is an especially amazing mystery that the law's unbending and seemingly impossible demand of love could be fulfilled so perfectly by Christ.

As much as the kings and rulers of the earth should strive to uphold God's law, they can't help but relax it. This is the reality in this world. They simply need to make allowances. Otherwise, they couldn't govern their people. They would have to throw everyone in jail and lock themselves up while they're at it. But Jesus is not an earthly king. He did what was impossible for our sinful nature. He loved God and his neighbor with his undying, self-giving love. In this way, he gave us more than enough. He gave us peace with God.

While your love remains imperfect in this life, your faith rests in this perfect love of God in Christ. So don't be discouraged by the work God gives you in this life. He is only testing you, training you to trust in him as you love one another. Numbers rise and fall. Toil and pain come and go. But faith, hope, and love remain. And God gives us our daily bread. Amen.