

Mark 6:37

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?

Analysis

He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat? Jesus' command confronts the disciples with their inadequacy, driving them to recognize impossibility and thus necessity of divine intervention. 'Give ye them to eat' (Δότε αὐτοῖς ὑμεῖς φαγεῖν, Dote autois hymeis phagein)—the emphatic 'ye' (hymeis) stresses their responsibility. Jesus didn't merely suggest they help; He commanded they feed the multitude. Their response reveals shocked incredulity: 'Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread?' (Ἀπελθόντες ἀγοράσωμεν διακοσίων δηναρίων ἄρτους, Apelthontes agorasōmen diakosiōn dēnariōn artous). Two hundred denarii represented over six months' wages for a laborer (one denarius = one day's wage). Their rhetorical question essentially said: 'Do you expect us to spend half a year's salary on bread?' They calculated cost and concluded it was impossible. Yet Jesus' command wasn't about what they could do but what He would do through them. The pattern continues: God commands what humans cannot accomplish, forcing dependence on divine power. This develops faith—recognizing that God's commands always include His enabling. Reformed theology emphasizes that divine commands accompanied by divine grace make possible what human effort alone cannot achieve.

Historical Context

A denarius was standard daily wage for agricultural laborers. Two hundred denarii represented substantial sum—roughly eight months' wages at one denarius per day (accounting for Sabbath rest). This calculation shows the disciples did quick mental math about the crowd's size and bread costs. Ancient bread was staple food, but feeding thousands required enormous quantities. The disciples' focus on financial impossibility prevented them from considering miraculous possibility. Philip made similar calculation in John's account (John 6:7), showing how multiple disciples independently assessed the situation financially. Archaeological evidence from first-century Palestine indicates bread prices varied, but feeding thousands would indeed cost many denarii. The disciples' treasury (kept by Judas, John 12:6) certainly didn't contain two hundred denarii—their question may have been sarcastic or desperate. This financial calculation, while practical, ignored Jesus' prior miracles of multiplication and provision. Early church application: when God commands impossibility, He intends to demonstrate divine power, not human resourcefulness. The obstacle is the opportunity.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' command to 'give them to eat' when we have nothing illustrate how God's commands often exceed our resources to demonstrate His sufficiency?
2. What does the disciples' immediate calculation of costs rather than considering miraculous provision teach about faith's relationship to financial planning?

Interlinear Text

ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς δώμεν αὐτοῖς ὑμεῖς
G3588 **and** **He answered** **said** **them** **Give** **them** **ye**
G1161 G611 G2036 G846 G1325 G846 G5210

φαγεῖν καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτοῖς Ἀπελθόντες ἀγοράσωμεν
to eat **And** **they say** **them** **Shall we go** **and buy**
G5315 G2532 G3004 G846 G565 G59

διακοσίων δηναρίων ἄρτους καὶ δώμεν αὐτοῖς φαγεῖν
two hundred **pennyworth** **of bread** **And** **Give** **them** **to eat**
G1250 G1220 G740 G2532 G1325 G846 G5315

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 11:13 (Parallel theme): Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.

Matthew 14:16 (Parallel theme): But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.

Luke 9:13 (Parallel theme): But he said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we should go and buy meat for all this people.

2 Kings 7:2 (Parallel theme): Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.