Mark 6:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

> He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see.
> And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes.

Analysis

He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes. Jesus redirects from what they lack to what they have. 'How many loaves have ye?' (Πόσους ἄρτους ἔχετε, Posous artous echete) shifts focus from impossible cost to available resources. 'Go and see' (ὑπάγετε ἴδετε, hypageteidete)—Jesus sends them on inventory mission. 'When they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes' (καὶ γνόντες λέγουσιν· Πέντε, καὶ δύο ἰχθύας, kai gnontes legousin· Pente, kai dyo ichthyas). John's Gospel identifies the boy who provided these (John 6:9). Five barley loaves and two fish—laughably inadequate for feeding thousands, yet sufficient in Jesus' hands. This illustrates kingdom principle: God uses what we offer, however insufficient it seems. He doesn't require vast resources before working; He multiplies small offerings surrendered to Him. The disciples' focus on what they lacked (two hundred denarii) prevented them from offering what they had (five loaves, two fish) until Jesus specifically asked. This teaches that obedience begins with surrendering available resources, trusting God to multiply them beyond natural capacity. Reformed theology emphasizes that faith acts on God's command with available means, trusting Him for supernatural results.

Historical Context

Barley loaves were poor person's bread (wheat was preferred by those who could afford it). These were likely small round flatbreads, perhaps equivalent to modern pita. Two fish—probably dried or pickled for preservation—provided protein for the

original owner's meal. This was one person's simple lunch, not feast provisions. Ancient Jewish practice included sharing food, so someone (the boy) offered his modest meal when need arose. The disproportion between five loaves, two fish and five thousand men (plus women, children) was absurd—highlighting that this was miracle, not clever resource management. Archaeological discoveries of first-century fishing industry around Sea of Galilee show fish were caught, preserved (drying, salting, pickling), and distributed. The fish mentioned were likely small, enough for one person's protein portion. Jesus' question 'How many loaves have ye?' trained disciples to assess resources before declaring impossibility. Often we claim inability without first determining what we actually have available. Early church fathers saw spiritual application: we think we have nothing to offer Christ, yet He uses our 'five loaves'—whatever we surrender—for Kingdom purposes beyond our imagination.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' question 'How many loaves have ye?' challenge our tendency to focus on what we lack rather than offering what we have, however inadequate it seems?
2. What does the boy's willingness to surrender his entire lunch teach about faith that trusts God to multiply small offerings beyond natural capacity?

Interlinear Text

ὁ	δὲ	λέγουσιν	αὐτοῖς	Πόσους	ἄρτους	ἔχετε	ὑπάγετε
		He saith	**unto them**	**How many**	**loaves**	**have ye**	**go**
G3588	G1161	G3004	G846	G4214	G740	G2192	G5217

καὶ	ἴδετε	καὶ	γνόντες	λέγουσιν	Πέντε	καὶ	δύο
And	**see**	**And**	**when they knew**	**He saith**	**Five**	**And**	**two**
G2532	G1492	G2532	G1097	G3004	G4002	G2532	G1417

ἰχθύας
fishes
G2486

Additional Cross-References

Mark 8:5 (Parallel theme): And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven.

Matthew 15:34 (Parallel theme): And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

John 6:9 (Parallel theme): There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?

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.