

Matthew 14:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.

Analysis

'And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.' Disciples respond to Jesus's command (v.16) by stating their resources: 'five loaves and two fishes' (πέντε ἄρτους καὶ δύο ἰχθύας/pente artous kai dyo ichthyas). The word 'but' (εἰ μή/ei mē, except, only) emphasizes limitation. John's Gospel adds these belonged to a boy (John 6:9)—the resources were both minimal and borrowed. Reformed theology sees significance in stating our poverty before experiencing God's provision. The disciples didn't pretend adequacy or hide their lack. Honesty about inadequacy is prerequisite for experiencing supernatural supply. God doesn't multiply what we don't acknowledge we lack. The verse also demonstrates that God uses what we have, however inadequate. Disciples didn't need more resources; they needed Jesus to multiply existing resources. Modern application: bring your inadequacy to Christ—limited gifts, insufficient strength, meager resources—He specializes in multiplying the insufficient.

Historical Context

Barley loaves were peasant food—wheat was expensive, barley cheap. Five loaves represented minimal supply, possibly one person's meal. Two fish (ὀψάρια/opsaria, John 6:9—small fish) were appetizers or condiments, not main course. Total food was laughably inadequate for 5000+ people. Yet Jesus took these, blessed them, multiplied them. The principle echoes widow's oil (2 Kings 4:1-7): God multiplies what's surrendered to Him. Disciples could have hidden the inadequate supply, embarrassed to present it. Instead, they stated plainly what they had. This honesty

enabled the miracle. Throughout redemptive history, God uses inadequate means: Gideon's 300 vs Midianite thousands (Judges 7), David's sling vs Goliath's armor (1 Samuel 17), early church's weakness vs Roman power. Paul celebrates this: 'when I am weak, then am I strong' (2 Corinthians 12:10). God's power operates best through obvious human inadequacy, ensuring He receives glory. Modern church needs this reminder: adequate resources can become barrier to experiencing God's supernatural provision; acknowledged inadequacy invites divine multiplication.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What inadequate resources (gifts, time, strength, money) do you need to bring to Jesus rather than hiding them or considering them useless?
2. How does honestly acknowledging insufficiency position you to experience God's supernatural provision?
3. What's the difference between false humility that refuses to steward available resources versus genuine humility that acknowledges inadequacy while offering what exists?

Interlinear Text

οἱ	δὲ	λέγουσιν	αὐτῷ	Οὐκ	ἔχομεν	ᾧδε	εἰ	μὴ	πέντε
G3588	And	they say	unto him	but	We have	here	G1487	G3361	five
	G1161	G3004	G846	G3756	G2192	G5602			G4002
ἄρτους	καὶ	δύο	ἰχθύας						
loaves	and	two	fishes						
G740	G2532	G1417	G2486						

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 16:9 (Parallel theme): Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

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.