

John 6:1-34

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 September 2019

Preacher: Bing Nieh

[0 : 00] Let me add my greetings to those who are finding their way as new students and their accompanying parents here to the University of Chicago. Thank you for choosing to spend your morning with us.

Let me just pray as we get into the word of the Lord. Father, we come and we acknowledge with the psalmist that thy word, your word, is a lamp unto our feet and a light to our path.

That we would be those who would be groping around in the darkness, meandering and lost if it were not for your word. And so we come to this word.

We ask that you would illuminate our hearts, that you would capture our minds, that you would harness our wills so that we would be men and women that see the beauty in the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. We live in a day where we are increasingly aware of the potential of scarcity.

[1 : 09] We are warned that our aggressive consumption and our reckless depletion of the earth's valuable minerals, fossil fuels, and natural resources threaten our future existence.

And we are rightfully alarmed by reckless deforestation, new offshore drilling, and uncontrolled mining.

Some even speculate that the world cannot sustain life at the rate we multiply, calling for aggressive population control.

In my home state, water usage is regulated. And severe fines are implemented when those measures aren't heeded. These regulations emerge from the concern and the fear that there won't be enough.

What happens when we run out? What happens when it's all used up? What happens when the demand exceeds the supply?

[2 : 18] And authors in literature, producers in Hollywood have taken liberty to show us what the end of the road may look like in an all-consumed world.

These are not only worldwide fears. These are home fears. Fear of a bank account that has insufficient funds for a bill or a meal.

Fear of an environment that is deficient in love to nurture a marriage or children. As students, we fear insufficient knowledge to pass the next test or to survive the course.

Not enough money for physical provision. Not enough love for emotional health. Not enough intellect to make sense of our world.

We fear not enoughness. We fear lack. And this morning, I want to argue from our text this resounding truth.

[3 : 28] Jesus both satisfies and secures those who receive him. Jesus both satisfies and secures those who receive him.

We'll see that at his disposal is an abundant supply. And we'll see that with his presence, you and I find safe passage. The songwriters of the Bible wrote many lyrics encapsulating these realities.

The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. In other words, the Lord is my shepherd. I will have no lack. God is our refuge and our strength.

Our very present help in time of trouble. Jesus both satisfies and secures those who receive him.

Well, verses 1 to 15. Jesus satisfies those who seek him. Jesus has gained a significant following. Word has gotten around the Galilean region that there was a man who made paralytics walk.

[4 : 32] Who cured illness without medicine or even being in physical proximity. It wasn't a spectacle or a show of any sorts. But each time it was a simple spoken word.

This word restored life to the suffering. And a large crowd, the Bible tells us, has found their way to him on a mountain during Passover.

However, the signs were incredible. And here the crowd approached our Lord Jesus. And what was a moment of respite for Jesus and the disciples drastically changes as a large crowd approaches. And Jesus turns to one of the disciples, Philip, and inquires to the whereabouts of securing food for such a crowd. Where can we find food for all these people, Philip?

Philip's mind immediately shifts. Not to where to find food, but how to buy food. His mind immediately goes to economics and finance.

[5 : 39] Jesus, 200 days of wages would not be enough to buy everyone a bite to eat. It would not be enough. The need is too great.

The resources are limited. Another disciple, Andrew, goes out and finds five barley loaves and two cured fish.

But it's laughable to consider how far these may go. If they were just a small meal for a young boy, they certainly would not be enough to supply food for just a handful of individuals, let alone a large crowd.

Once again, the supply could not meet the demand. The need is too great. The resources were too little.

What takes place is attested in all four of the, by all the other three gospel writers. This is the only account outside the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus that all four gospels record.

[6 : 41] Five thousand men are fed. Upwards to twenty thousand if you consider the presence of women and children. They are not only fed a bite to eat each, but they ate as much as they wanted according to verse eleven.

They had eaten their fill according to verse twelve. The crowd was not only satisfied, but there was a surplus that was collected at the end.

Twelve baskets to be precise. Have you ever seen an elephant jump? Have you ever seen an elephant jump?

I haven't. And you're probably asking, what does this have to do with anything in this story? How many people would it take to lift a full-grown African elephant?

Upwards of fourteen thousand pounds. Five thousand kilograms. What would it take? I recall growing up, we went to a nearby theme park at, where, growing up in California, and I remember we would go to the elephant show, and there were a few large African elephants.

[8 : 06] And during this show, they summoned, I believe it was about twenty volunteers. And they said, these twenty volunteers are going to play tug-of-war with this single African elephant.

And so the rope was harnessed around the elephant's torso, and the rope kind of proceeded, and they started. And I remember it vividly, because I was chuckling.

And so the zookeeper would tap the back leg of the elephant, and the elephant would walk backwards. And of course, the crowd would cheer, because the twenty individuals were winning the tug-of-war.

And when the rope, the center rope, got to the edge, almost as to think the elephant would lose, the zookeeper walked up to the elephant, tapped the front leg, and off he went.

As if there were no resistance. The power and the strength of the elephant. Courtesy of the math performed by one of our resident physicists.

[9 : 19] Listen to this. Assuming that Jesus didn't collect pre-existing matter, because he surely could have, it doesn't seem like he did.

His other miracles were all, he turned water into wine, he took something that existed and transformed it. He healed people. He took broken bodies and restored them.

But this miracle, Jesus did something out of nothing. And that would make sense, because all things were made through him, and without him, nothing was made. But given the energy required to create and feed 5,000, Jesus produced enough energy to launch 3 trillion elephants one mile in the air.

Alternatively, nearly 1 billion elephants could be launched into space.

Now, the proof is here. I actually had this gentleman do it, so the formulas are here, you can check the math.

[10 : 40] But why do I share that? Because it gives you an idea of what just happened.

I have never seen an elephant jump. I doubt I will ever see an elephant jump. But the power in the Lord Jesus Christ to feed a crowd, if translated to moving elephants, he moved 3 trillion a mile in the air.

Even given modern technological advancement, the prospects of lifting a single elephant are still challenging. The fact of the matter is whether it's 5,000, 50,000, or 500,000 fed, the result would be the same.

The resources of God are enough, and far more than enough for human need. The resources of God are enough, and they are far more than enough.

The divine table has no limits. It will never run out of food. It can never run out of open seats. Those who approach God will find this at work.

[11 : 55] Jesus satisfies those who seek him. This is a staggering teaching of the Bible. In a world where we fear scarcity and lack, the Bible presents to us a king that rules a kingdom out of surplus and supply and plenty.

Our limited world is founded on this principle of need. Our needs always exceed our resources. However, in Jesus' hands, the resources will always exceed the need. If you're an economist, I remember, I took one business class in high school, and that graph, supply, demand, and there's a sweet spot where those two come and intersect and you go, that's the perfect business model when supply meets demand.

That's when you're optimizing gain, financial gain. The graph in heaven is this. The supply is infinite. The demand will never touch it.

They will never intersect. Your sins are never so horrific that God's grace is not enough. Your pain is never so dark or grim that God's kindness and love is not enough.

[13 : 12] There is never a shortage at the hands of the Lord. Therefore, Jesus satisfies those who seek Him. The sign is so outlandish that those who witnessed what had happened acknowledge that what had occurred is out of this world.

This prophet is alien, so to say, who has come into the world. He's not human. He's almost not right. And they are saying something true.

For the prophet Moses did foretell that one day God would raise up a prophet just like Him. And as a result of Jesus' miraculous and substantial miracle, the crowd expresses this desire to make Jesus King in verse 15.

However, perceiving this, Jesus withdraws Himself away from the crowd. Jesus does not want to be hastily crowned by an enthusiastic crowd. And though in our day, in our culture, and probably in most cultures, popularity often leads to power.

But for Jesus, popularity is not His objective. We would be mistaken to think that Jesus travels around Jerusalem and the surrounding regions of Judea and even into Galilee as if He were trying to campaign.

[14 : 31] He's not on a political tour, moving town to town to secure votes. Jesus would not be made King via democratic election or nomination. He was not going to submit to the earthly expectations for He had a heavenly commission to fulfill.

The truth of the matter is actually this. Jesus did not need to be made King. He was already the King. He was King by divine appointment.

in the words of the psalmist, God had already set His King on His hill and His name is Jesus. And this King not only satisfies those who seek Him, but secondly, He secures those battered by the storm.

Jesus secures those battered by the storm. Jesus has withdrawn and from the hints of the text, it seemed like there was an explanation to the disciples that He would return. Almost as if to say, Hey guys, I'm out.

You take care of the 5,000, 20,000. You got 12 basketfuls left over. Take care of it. I'm out. And He leaves. It was now dark and Jesus had yet to return.

[15 : 50] The disciples didn't know what to do, so they do what anyone would do. They set out to return home to Capernaum. The narrative is so short and brief.

A storm settles on the sea and it rages against the disciples. They're being battered and overwhelmed by the wind and the waters. They're about three to four miles in.

They're traveling from the northeast of Galilee to the northwest of the Sea of Galilee. Survival was their aim, but it wasn't guaranteed.

One can only imagine low visibility, uncontrollable water surging at all sides and wind driving against them, even against their best efforts.

And in their midst of the struggle against the elements, they are approached by a figure who walks on water. Other Gospels tell us that they thought Jesus was a ghost.

[16:49] Their response is naturally fear. They are frightened and afraid. If the water being heaped upon them wasn't enough, now someone is coming toward them and is not a fish.

And Jesus speaks and identifies himself. He says, it is I. And whether he used the divine name is unclear, but what is certain is that Jesus is exercising a divine attribute.

Only God himself, according to Job, tramples on the waves of the sea. Matthew told us that they knew immediately that this is the Son of God.

In Mark's account, Jesus calms the storm. But for John, he records this miraculous landing. The storm isn't calmed.

There's no engagement where, in Matthew's account, Peter actually walks on the water for a little bit. In John's account, they mysteriously and even miraculously just arrive at shore once Jesus entered the boat.

[18:05] And it's noteworthy that this miracle only involves the disciples. In contrast to the feeding of the 5,000 that was performed with the disciples and the crowd, this is just for the disciples.

And Jesus wanted the disciples to know something. He wanted to leave an impression on them. And I've thought about this for a long time and I've read a lot about this.

Why put these two miracles together? How are they even related? It's possible that this is how it unfolds chronologically.

Matthew, Mark, both include this, the feeding, and then they're at sea. And John records the same. Possibly it's just because it was sequential. But I would add this.

The impression that the disciples got is that Jesus not only from witnessing the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus not only receives all who approach him, but here is the equally staggering truth.

[19:13] Jesus will approach those in dire circumstances and bring them to safety. Jesus not only receives, but Jesus pursues.

And the disciples needed to know this because they were a bunch of humans just like you and I. feeble, often failing.

In other words, the Lord will receive all who come to him and the Lord will go to all who are his.

John wants to tell us that Jesus is more than capable of finding and securing his very own.

The darkness was not, you have to imagine this, pitch black at sea. Storm, raging. certainly the moon was invisible because the clouds were hidden.

The darkness was not too dark. The rough sea was not too rough. The strong wind was not strong enough for Jesus to find them at sea.

[20:23] Three to four miles in. No darkness was too deep. No waves too high. No sea too wide for him to find them and to be with them in the midst of the storm.

I mean, preparing this, I couldn't help but hum the tune. Hum the tune. Ain't no mountain high enough.

Ain't no valley low enough. Ain't no river wide enough. Why? The reality is, oh yeah, this is perhaps a love song.

But in human terms, there are valleys that are too low. There are rivers that are too high. There are mountains that are unscalable.

But for the Lord Jesus, there is no obstacle. He will not only scale the mountain, he will move the mountain. He will not only descend into the valley, but in the new creation, he will level the valley.

[21:29] Why? Because he will go to great lengths to secure those who are his. Wow.

His divine nature is revealed. Creation is subservient to her creator. I'm sure there's a physics equation for it.

What does it take to move a man across water? Do the calculation, let me know. Jesus approaches his people to secure them in the storm.

Jesus both satisfies and secures. And emerging from these two miracles, my final point I want us to see is this. Jesus speaks to the confused.

Jesus satisfies those who seek him. Jesus secures those who are his. and lastly, Jesus speaks honestly to the confused.

[22:33] Verses 22-34. There's a bit of confusion in the text, beginning in verse 22. You sense it literally speaking. The disciples, the crowd has said, wait, only one boat has left the shore, and Jesus wasn't in the boat, so where is he?

Where did he go? More boats arrive on the scene, possibly blown in by the storm, and the crowd on the east shore of the Sea of Galilee jumps in these boats and moves west in search of Jesus.

And they find him, you'll find later on, in a synagogue in Capernaum. When they find Jesus, the first question they ask him is, when?

When did you arrive? it's alluding to, they're certainly trying to figure out, wait, wait, not only when, Jesus, how did you arrive?

You weren't on the boat with the disciples. The crowd is confused. Moreover, it's seen in the following set of verses, because it's a dialogue.

[23 : 39] The crowd has all these questions. Jesus, what about this? What about, I'm not sure how, I'm confused, help me understand, and Jesus engages kindly with them. In dialogue, you see the questions.

When did you get here? What must we do? What sign do you do? What work do you perform?

They're curious. They're curiously confused. The crowd is in search of clarity in the midst of their confusion.

Jesus has demonstrated signs. Unless the people misunderstand, Jesus now engages them. For John the writer, signs are meant to be revelatory, giving the reader an accurate depiction of who Jesus is.

But they can often be misread, misinterpreted. And you see that in this passage. With the remaining time, I want us to unfold Jesus' statements in these verses.

And this is really, we could be astounded by the fact that he could possibly launch elephants into space and walk on water. water. But it won't make any sense unless you understand how Jesus discloses himself.

[24 : 49] The crowd wanted to make him king out of misunderstanding. And Jesus in these verses, verses 25 through 34, corrects a few misunderstandings.

More specifically, if you're wondering what encapsulates the Christian life, you'll want to follow along closely. firstly, Jesus corrects this misunderstanding.

The Christian life is eternal, not temporal. Jesus challenges the crowd's values. They were seeking the temporal and the physical.

They wanted possibly more bread or more fish. They wanted the material. The crowd followed Jesus out of the materialism and the satisfaction of their stomachs.

And here Jesus has to recalibrate their vision. They're focused on the loaves and temporal satisfaction. And Jesus says, no, no, no, no, no. Don't solely work and strive for what you see.

[25 : 50] Instead, work and strive for the eternal. Seek the food that endures and exceeds the material. The Christian faith is one that doesn't just grasp and cling to what is perishing, but rather the Christian faith is one that invests in what is permanent.

commitment. That's important. Because we are people that live by faith, not by sight. And here Jesus begins to disclose, you want to know what it's going to look like to follow me.

Live by faith, not by sight. Seek the eternal. Pass on the temporal. Secondly, he wants, he discloses this.

The Christian life is a gift. Is a gift. Verse 28. The crowd says to him, what must we do to be doing the works of God?

And Jesus answers them, this is the work of God that you believe in whom he has sent. The crowd wants Jesus to tell them what they must do to earn God's favor.

[27 : 03] How do I achieve this life that you're talking about, Jesus? How do I earn this life? What is the work I'm supposed to be up to? And in response, Jesus actually corrects their mistaken subject in the question.

In a world that measures individuals by achievement, we operate under the presupposition. What must I do? How do I accomplish? How do I achieve?

How do I advance? How do I progress? What must I do? Well, Jesus transforms the subject in their answer to their question. Did you catch it?

The people say, what must I do? And Jesus says, this is the work of God. You see it, right? In verse 28, Jesus answers them, this is the work of God.

Wait, wait, wait, Jesus, I asked, what must I do? Jesus replied, this is what God does. You see, it is to say that the work of God, what you need, you and I need to do is let God do his work.

[28 : 15] Understand that this is a divine work, that God is doing a work. God works it and you do it. Believe in him whom he has sent. as Christians we're champions of grace because we are recipients of this undeserved salvation.

We receive the gift. The gift of God is eternal life. It's not a Pauline argument from Ephesians. It's a I can never get pronounced it. It's John's argument.

Here, verse 27, the food that endures to eternal life, which the son of man will, it doesn't say sell to you.

It doesn't say trade you. What does it say? Give you. Give you. I'm going to give you this life.

The same life is offered in verses 32 and 33. The eternal life that is being offered to you is a gift that's being readily dispensed to all who receive it. These are foundational to the Christian life that we are people who are not focused on the temporal but the eternal, that we are recipients of a divine gift that we are receivers not achievers.

[29 : 31] And thirdly, and I'll close with this, Jesus wanted them to know this, the Christian life is actually all about Christ. It is Christocentric verses 30 to 33.

It is a life centered on Jesus for Jesus' work exceeds any other human figure. In this instance, John shows that Christ eclipses one of Israel's greats, namely Moses.

The crowd clung to Moses. He was their highest standard. He was the great one in the Jewish mind. And John the writer esteems him rightly beginning all the way back in chapter 1, verse 17.

But in our section, Moses is being surpassed. He is being eclipsed. And the crowd wants to naturally compare Jesus to Moses.

Are you greater than Moses? He gave our ancestors bread in the desert. Can you do that? And Jesus corrects them. As a matter of fact, Moses didn't give them the bread.

[30 : 38] My father gave them the bread. it's actually my father who is giving you true bread. True bread for the world.

John is showing us that Jesus is the central figure. Because it's Passover again, according to the text. On the occasion that Jews commemorate deliverance from oppression of slavery and foreign rule.

On an occasion where they recount God's mighty acts against Pharaoh. On an occasion where they are being reminded of God's mercy that passed over them and spared their firstborn sons.

On an occasion that's embedded into Israel's national identity. They are being reminded of deliverance. And what the people are doing are saying, Jesus, are you better than Moses?

And John the writer says, hey, I'm going to slip it in there. Remember Moses? Moses, he led the people out, got to the banks of the Nile, and all of Pharaoh's armies coming after me, and there beseeches God to make a way, and God makes a way so that all of Israel through the leading of Moses walks through on dry land, and John the writer says, you know what?

[32 : 06] Let me show you another. Another that can walk through water, walk on water. Is Jesus possibly better than Moses, who fed our ancestors in the wilderness?

Let me show you a story of a whole crowd coming to him and producing bread out of nothing. Is he better?

Yes. You want to know why? Because what Moses did in history, God, Moses, gave bread to Israel. Jesus, presently, now, eternally, gives in the present tense, true bread to all the world.

Israel received the bread in the wilderness. The world receives the bread eternally. And that's what makes that last sentence so fascinating.

[33 : 18] The crowd says, I want that bread, not only for a meal, I want it always. And little do they know that they're speaking to a man who has an infinite bread supply.

Oh, you want more? I can give you more. More? More? How many? How large is the crowd? How big is the group? Who's hungry?

Who's unsatisfied? Because the text shows you and I this, that Jesus not only satisfies and secures, but he speaks in such a way so that you and I can receive true bread.

And I know there are individuals in this room who are trying to figure out, is Jesus worth following? How do I even know this is taking hold in my heart?

And I've mentioned it. If you're beginning to get this inkling that there's more than this temporal world, you're starting to sense that there's an eternal world.

[34 : 28] That you're starting to understand that you are grasping your inability to save yourself. You are starting to even like this Jesus figure.

Then I want to say to you, I think you're close to becoming a follower of Jesus. Watch out. He may be walking toward your storm tossed boat. He's doing so now. He's actively giving life to the world continually in a never ending way. He's able to do so for He can move the mountains and He can even move elephants for that matter. Let us pray together.

Father, we look at these two miracles miracles. And we would be amiss if we just think this is power.

[35 : 42] It goes beyond power. It demonstrates to the reader that Jesus is not only about providing physical sustenance and calming alleviating fears and anxieties.

But He's here to grasp, to seize our minds, to understand that He is doing something even greater, that He is seeking and saving and redeeming and rescuing.

And Father, I pray for all of us that this would catapult us toward worship, toward greater allegiance, to wholehearted obedience.

us. And I pray for those of us who are wrestling. Is Jesus worth following? I pray, Lord, that You would approach their boat, terrify them until they receive You in their boat.

And in doing so, as the text says, they would be glad and be brought safely to shore. I pray that all for Jesus' sake.

[36 : 52] Amen.