

# God's Promise of Provision

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[ 0 : 00 ] And I think this is the first time I've been to the church during the summer months. And boy, in Wisconsin, it's just beautiful here in the summer. No reason to go anywhere else. I also bring you greetings from Oosberg CRC, where my family and I attend.

Let's open this time together with a blessing from the Lord. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. Let's pray together. Father, it's so good to be gathered together as your people in your house. We thank you for your holy word that you will accomplish what you purpose for it.

And so we pray that you would give us ears to hear, that you would soften the soil of our hearts. And Lord, that you would transform us by the power of your Holy Spirit. We pray that all that we say and do would be glorifying to you.

And we give you this time in Christ's name. Amen. We will be in the Gospel of John this morning. Chapter 6, the first 15 verses.

[ 1 : 05 ] John 6 is a pivotal chapter in a lot of ways because it hones in, it reveals Jesus' identity as the Son of God. In fact, that is the primary reason John gives for writing his Gospel.

He even states it. These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. What a beautiful Gospel purpose to testify to Jesus.

That he is Lord, he is the Son of God. So that we might believe in him and our lives would be transformed. And so this morning, John chapter 6, beginning with verse 1.

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee, that is the Sea of Tiberias. And a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick.

Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover festival was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?

[ 2 : 19 ] He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite.

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish. But how far will they go among so many?

Jesus said, Have the people sit down. There was plenty of grass in that place and they sat down. About 5,000 men were there. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted.

He did the same with the fish. When they all had had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted. So they gathered them and filled 12 baskets with the pieces of five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world. Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

[ 3 : 35 ] The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So I would imagine a very familiar story to most of us. Probably many of us learned it as Sunday school children, in fact.

One interesting note, this is Jesus' only miracle that's recorded in all four Gospels. And that's helpful to us because knowing some of the details that we find in Matthew, Mark, and Luke help add some context to the story here in John.

For example, we learn from Matthew's Gospel that this miracle of provision takes place immediately after John the Baptist's death. Jesus and his disciples had spent the better part of the day ministering to this huge crowd when they get the news of John the Baptist's passing.

And wanting some space to grieve and to breathe, they board a boat and sail to a remote area across the Sea of Galilee. But the crowds aren't ready to say goodbye.

In fact, they actually run around the lake and are there waiting as Jesus and his disciples pull up into the shore. What was Jesus' response to this change of plans?

[ 4 : 46 ] Angry? Frustrated? Both Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus had compassion on the people. For they were sheep without a shepherd. He recognizes their heart to be with him, their need for a savior.

And I find that compassion of Jesus to be encouraging in the midst of our busy, chaotic lives that we live. That Jesus is our good shepherd.

He's with us in the mess. And he cares for us. The Gospel of Luke gives us one additional detail that adds context to our story. That this remote area where they travel was Bethsaida, which just happens to be where Philip is from.

So here in John's Gospel, Jesus and his disciples cross over the lake. And it says, A great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick.

So John here not only mentions this great crowd following Jesus, but also the why. They were following because of the signs he was performing.

[ 5 : 54 ] I think of the crowd's response to an earlier miracle of Jesus. We have never seen anything like this. The people are drawn. They're awestruck by these miracles.

Maybe some need healing for themselves. Some, I believe, were drawn to the man behind the miracles. Who is this Jesus? And Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. Mountains, obviously, common in Scripture. Moses receives the law on Mount Sinai. Elijah had the big showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

There's the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' transfiguration happens on the mountain where his glory is manifest. Mountaintop events revealing to God's power, God's people, the power, the glory, the holiness of the Lord.

Well, this mountain in Bethsaida is known today as the Golan Heights. It's this steep mountain rising up rapidly from the sea. And for Jesus and the disciples, it marked a remote area, an opportunity to get away.

[ 7 : 06 ] To breathe. To look out over that whole area of Galilee where they had been ministering. It's the bird's eye view from above. The perspective from above.

It's also here that John includes an interesting detail. The Jewish Passover festival was near. Only John gives us this little bit of information.

And it helps explain the size of the crowd. Probably a lot of the multitude were Galilean pilgrims from all over the region on their way to Jerusalem for the festival.

But then they got waylaid by this Jesus. The trajectory of their journey was changed. Well, that's what Jesus does for all of us. But what does the Passover festival celebrate?

God's deliverance of his people from captivity in Egypt, followed by his provision for them in the wilderness. In Exodus 16, in the heart of the desert, the people's stomachs are grumbling.

[ 8 : 08 ] Why did the Lord bring us out into the middle of nowhere just so we'll die from lack of food? It sounds like they're hangry. I'm familiar with that word because I have two teenagers.

Well, the Lord's answer to his people, In the morning, you will see the glory of the Lord. And sure enough, the next day as the people wake up and come out of their tents, What's waiting for them on the ground?

Manna, bread from heaven, Miraculous provision from the Lord in the middle of the wilderness. It's God shepherding and providing for his people.

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, He said to Philip, Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? I love that these people are not an annoyance or a burden to Jesus.

They're his flock, and he's the compassionate good shepherd. Remember, this is a remote area. Most of the crowd far from home, probably very little food.

[ 9 : 18 ] And according to the other disciples, the other gospels, you remember that the day is drawing to a close rapidly. And so Jesus turns to Philip. Remember, he's from this area.

Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? But then John adds an interesting twist. He asks this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Make a note that whenever Jesus asks a question in scripture, pay attention. It's not because he doesn't know the answer. He's God. But Jesus' questions do have a way of getting to the heart of the matter.

Specifically, what's the condition of our faith? Are we trusting in our own resources, or are we looking to the Lord? Consider some of Jesus' questions.

In scripture, what do you want me to do for you? Do you want to get well? When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?

[10:23] When Jesus asks a question in scripture, I encourage you to sit with that question and ask it of yourself. How would you answer that? Philip, where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?

How do we meet the needs of all these people? Philip, of course, was one of the 12 disciples, had been with Jesus from the beginning, and had witnessed not only Jesus' heart and his compassion, but also his power.

There should have been no doubt whatsoever in Philip's mind as to the divine authority and resources that Jesus had. Even given this daunting situation of feeding 5,000-plus people in the wilderness, Philip could have answered honestly, and yet with faith.

Lord, I don't know where to find food enough to feed this crowd, but you do, because just as God provided for his people in the wilderness for 40 years, I have faith that you can provide for these people.

Is that kind of honesty okay? To confess our weakness, our limitations, but still trust that God has it covered? Lord, we don't know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

[11:42] This guy is Charles Spurgeon. He once said, Isn't that an interesting description of faith? that when we are presented with an impossible task or burden, the most faithful response is not to bear it ourselves, but to offer it to the one who can.

That takes trust. That takes humility. That means fixing our eyes on Jesus and believing he is who he says he is. What burden are you carrying in your life that you need to offer wholeheartedly to Jesus?

Well, if this is a test from Jesus, how would you grade Philip's response? Any teachers in the house? Anyone give Philip an A for his answer?

Lord, more than half a year's wages would only be enough for each person to get a little bite. Right? Philip's solution is very much human, worldly wisdom. He's basically saying, Mission impossible.

[13:02] Even with a pile of money, which we don't have, even if we can find a supermarket nearby, which we can't, the results are going to be underwhelming. Everyone gets a nibble.

And it's true. Man's wisdom leads to very poor outcomes. Well, enter Andrew. You know, Andrew, just a great guy.

That was a joke. Thank you for the courtesy laugh. I'm a chaplain at an assisted living facility, and the residents have gotten used to my humor, and they're rarely impressed, but they give me a courtesy laugh, so bless them.

Scripture doesn't give us a lot of information or details about Andrew. He's Peter's brother. He used to be John the Baptist's disciple, but whenever we see Andrew in the Gospels, he's introducing people to Jesus.

What a great legacy. And so here comes Andrew to Jesus. Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?

[14:08] What I hear in Andrew's words is faith and doubt intermingled. Lord, this isn't much. But it's all we have.

I don't know how this is going to meet our needs, but I'm offering it to you. Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. Barley in this day was considered simple food, more often fit for animals than for people. And these two small fish, John uses the Greek word *asparia*, which indicates a small salted fish, almost like a relish for the bread, sort of like sardines. It's a humble offering.

But truth be told, what other kind of offering is there to the king of kings? What could we ever give him from our own resources that would be worthy? But I believe Jesus is pleased with humble offerings given in faith and trust.

In fact, he tells us faith the size of what kind of seed? Mustard seed. It can move mountains. How so? Because it's not about the size of our faith.

[15:12] It's about the greatness of our God. So here, Jesus receives this gift of loaves and fish, and he commands the people to sit down on the green grass.

He gives thanks to his father, and then the food is distributed to every person there. Let me ask, in Jesus' hands, what was the end result of that humble little boy's lunch?

Did the people only get a small morsel to eat? No. Everyone ate until they were satisfied. And it brings to mind the beautiful words of Psalm 23.

The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. And then that picture of the Lord as our host serving a meal to us.

You prepare a table for me. It's the good shepherd providing for his flock. And keep in mind, the text says 5,000 men, not including women and children.

[16:12] That's a massive crowd. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.

So they gathered them and filled 12 baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. God's supply. God's provision.

It's extravagant. There's even leftovers. And the people are completely satisfied. By the way, including that little boy who offered up his meager lunch.

You can't out give God. And I bet he had quite the story to tell his family the next day. A couple of applications from our passes before we get to our final two verses.

There's something called the scarcity mindset. A lot of us can struggle with this, even as believers. And I see it here among the disciples, where we become so fixated on our own human limitations.

[17:13] All the reasons we can't do something, as opposed to trusting in God's abundance and provision. Often this mindset shows up as, I don't have enough to say yes to God.

And we can all list the ways, whether it's, I don't have enough energy, or resources, or talent, or time. Well, Philip struggled with this mindset, didn't he?

He saw the enormity of the task, thousands of people to feed, but he looked only to the scarcity of his own resources. It's impossible, Lord.

And in a very human sense, Philip was right. Our resources are often not enough to meet every challenge in life. But God, what does he say?

The world is mine, and all that is in it. That doesn't sound like scarcity to me. God owns it all, and his storehouse never runs out.

[18:13] But there's an even more insidious version of the scarcity mindset. He said, I'm not enough. Not just I don't have enough, but I'm not enough to serve God. And there's all kinds of variations of this.

I'm not gifted enough. I'm not wise enough. I'm too old. I'm too young. I'm too fearful. I've failed too many times. God could never use me.

And sure enough, all through Scripture, we see exactly that. We see people who don't measure up according to the world standards. Abraham and Sarah passed their prime. Moses stuttered.

King David, just a little shepherd boy. Gideon was the very least of his family. And most of us could add our own names and reasons to the list of not being enough for whatever reason.

But the heart of our faith is that God is enough. And he delights in calling and using all kinds of people who don't measure up. Because then it's his strength.

[19:14] It's his grace. And he receives the glory. John Calvin once wrote, For men have no taste for God's power till they are convinced of their need of it, and they immediately forget its value, unless they're continually reminded by awareness of their own weakness.

For Philip, for all the disciples, for all of us, how are we most convinced of our need for God's power and provision when ours is not sufficient?

And we learn to trust and put our faith completely in the Lord, because he is able. Finishing up with our final two verses.

After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world. Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

And who remembers what Jesus is going to do there on the mountain? Pray. Pray. The crowd here recognizes Jesus as the fulfillment of Moses' prophecy in Deuteronomy 18, which says, The Lord

your God will raise up for you a prophet, like me from among you.

[ 20 : 36 ] From your fellow Israelites, you must listen to him. The Israelites believed that the coming Messiah, this prophet, would restore the kingdom to the glory days of King David.

And for this huge crowd who had witnessed Jesus' miracles and just now been fed as part of the multitude, all of this clinched it in their mind.

Surely this is the one. And they were ready to take him by force. All the better that the coronation would happen during the Passover festival. But what did Jesus do?

Interesting that the Greek word by force also appears elsewhere in Scripture, but in a very different context. It's a familiar passage.

It's Philippians 2.6. That Jesus, who though he was in the very form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. Same Greek word.

[ 21 : 34 ] Jesus, fully God, did not cling on to his heavenly rights by force. What did he do? What's the gospel?

He emptied himself to become one of us and even submit himself to death on the cross. The will of the crowd in all their fervor would not pull Jesus away from the reason he came, to go to the cross for our sake.

And I think of what that centurion proclaimed as he watched Jesus die. Truly this man was the son of God. In a moment, we're going to go to the Lord in prayer.

But first, this beautiful name for God in the Old Testament, of course, revealed first in Genesis with Abraham and Isaac. It's Jehovah Jireh, which means the Lord will provide.

And that continues to be his name and his identity. He is still the God who provides for his people. He's the good shepherd who protects us, who cares for us, who guides his flock.

[ 22 : 45 ] God provides not always what we think we want, but what we truly need. All I have needed thy hand hath provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

And so as we go to the Lord in prayer, consider in your life, as you look back over your life, the ways that God has steadfastly and faithfully provided for you.

And then even in this time of prayer together, where do you most need the Lord's provision in your life? Right now. As our passage today reminds us, the world's solutions are not enough.

Our own resources and wisdom are not enough. But when we fix our eyes on Jesus, we are reminded he is more than enough. Let's pray.

Father, how we thank you for your word, which speaks life and truth and hope into our hearts. We recognize ourselves in those disciples sometimes whose eyes were dim that they serve the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

[ 23 : 51 ] How easily we look at our own problems and challenges from a horizontal perspective, with human wisdom, with fear that we don't have enough or we are simply not enough to meet the challenge.

But then we remember your promise that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

So, Father, whatever fears, anxieties, questions, and doubts are keeping us from saying yes to your deeper calling on our lives, Lord, give us the courage to drop those things at the foot of the cross.

We ask that you would fill us with courage and strength and the grace to follow after you. Thank you, God, for the peace that fills our hearts, the peace that passes all understanding when we put you first in everything.

And so we ask that you would continue to transform us, shape us more into the image and character of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.