

# The Power of Littles in the Hands of Jesus

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] church. We're going to read the first 15 verses. We're going to consider the well-known passage in scripture that tells us of Jesus feeding the 5,000 men plus of course the many other thousands of women and children who were there on the mountainside.

After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee which is the Sea of Tiberias. The large crowd was following him because they saw the signs that he was doing on the Sea.

Jesus went up on the mountain and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews was at hand. Lifting up his eyes then and seeing that a large crowd was coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, there are we to buy bread so that these people may eat. He sent this to test him for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, 200 denarii wouldn't buy enough bread for each of them to get a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, there's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.

What are they for so many? Jesus said, make the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place so the men sat down about 5,000 in number.

Jesus then took the loaves and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost. So they gathered them up and filled 12 baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. And the people saw the sign that he had done. They said, this is indeed the prophet who's come into the world. Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain.

[ 2 : 1 2 ] By himself. John 6, 1 to 13, the parable, well, there is a parable in the story with the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

And of course, we know it is one of the most well-known stories of the Bible. Each of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, each of these gospels contains the story.

Although it's only in this gospel, the gospel of John, that we see here mentioned a boy, a boy who brings these five loaves and two fish before Jesus.

John's gospel, John never included his name as the author of the gospel. And he includes this unnamed boy in the story of the feeding of the 5,000.

And of course, this miracle, we have to see this miracle that centers on the Lord Jesus. Because this miracle tells us again who Jesus is.

[ 3 : 1 6 ] It's a miracle that focuses on what Jesus has done to reveal who he is, to show who he truly is, the promised Messiah, the promised Christ, the one who came into the world to save sinners.

And even the signs that Jesus performed to point to the reality of who Jesus is. We can also see in this parable, hope. This is a parable that I pray that you'll see gives you hope in relation to who you are before God.

Because in the eyes of the world, so many, in fact, even all of the Lord's people are seen to be so inconsequential, so insignificant. But in the eyes of Jesus, you're precious.

I pray that we'll see this brought forth in this story. And it's a miracle then that gives us hope, not just at this present time as we continue through lockdown, but it's a miracle to give you hope, hope in the Lord who provides and who provides abundantly.

So three things then to see in this miracle of the feeding of these thousands of people. So three things. First of all, who Jesus is.

[ 4 : 3 7 ] Secondly, to see that whom others see as weak are chosen by God. And then thirdly, what God provides. What God provides is abundant.

Abundant love, abundant grace, abundant mercy, abundant provision. First of all, who Jesus is. Jesus had come from heaven to earth on a mission.

Jesus had come to save his people from their sins. And Jesus was making himself known as Messiah, as the promised Christ. He was making himself known to others and doing that in different ways.

He showed that he was truly the promised Messiah by what he taught. What he taught of himself as the one who'd come to deliver his people from sin.

He taught with authority. He taught with authority. The authority that Jesus showed pointed to his being truly the Son of God. And then in his sinless life of obedience, his sinless life of obedience to the law, he showed that, yes, he is the sinless Son of God.

[ 5 : 47 ] And, of course, he showed that even ultimately by his death on the cross. That by his suffering there on the cross, dying for sinners, showing that he is the one to come promised who would save his people through his suffering, through his bearing the sins of many.

And he came to show who he is, as the sinless Son of God, as the promised Messiah, by the miracles that he performed.

The many miracles, the miracles of healing, the miracles of provision. All these miracles that pointed to the one who provides and provides ultimately.

The one who heals and above all heals of the sickness of sin. And so these miracles that Jesus performed, these miracles that pointed to the truth of who Jesus is, the one who came to heal sinners, the one who came to make sinners whole, the one who came to give new life to sinners.

The miracles showed that. They pointed. These were signs that pointed to the Lord Jesus.

Remember the first miracle that Jesus performed, the miracle of the changing of the water into wine.

[ 7 : 06 ] That sign that Jesus performed to show that he'd come to bring in a new covenant between God and man. And as we said, the miracles of provision, such as the feeding of the 5,000.

And again, we'll see the purpose in this miracle. You see, Jesus didn't just expect people to believe in him without the evidence.

Without the evidence that showed who Jesus is. And so Jesus showed that who he is by the words that he spoke, by the actions that he performed that revealed that truth.

That Jesus is the one who's come from heaven to earth to redeem his people, to save his people.

And it's for you and for me to trust in him, to believe in him, to give her lives to him.

So what about this miracle that we read? The miracle of the multiplying of the loaves and the fish.

This proof, again, another proof, another piece of evidence that Jesus is who he claimed to be.

[ 8 : 12 ] The promised saviour, the promised Christ. And as we look at this miracle, to realize that Jesus is the one who provides for all your needs.

In every circumstance, he's fully in control. Absolutely sovereign. We saw that in verse 5, where we read that Jesus lifting up his eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming towards him.

Jesus said to Philip, where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat? He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Jesus is sovereign. Jesus knew what was going to happen with that large crowd and their need of food.

The thousands of people that had been listening to him, that had been following him, who were expecting him to perform more miracles of healing. That large crowd of men, women and children. Well, of course, they'd be hungry. They were so far from homes, so far from their regular places of living and getting food.

[ 9 : 20 ] They were so far from the place that they normally would find food. But Jesus knew that it wasn't the miracle of healing that the people were going to see there and then.

Jesus knew another miracle was going to happen, the miracle of the multiplying of the bread and the fish. Of course, the children have their worksheets with them, I pray.

And so you'll be able, boys and girls, to listen and to do the worksheets at the same time. And you'll see in the worksheets, as we see in the passage, that the thousands of people are going to be fed and they're going to be fed by a miracle.

But first of all, Jesus is going to test the faith of his disciples. And he speaks to Philip, one of the disciples. And Jesus wants his disciples to grow in faith, grow in faith in him.

And after all they'd already seen Jesus perform miracles. They'd seen him change water into wine. They'd seen him perform miracles of healing on the sick.

[ 10 : 24 ] They'd heard Jesus speak with authority as the son of God. And so when Jesus asked Philip, where are they going to buy food? Jesus knows, of course, what's going to happen.

Jesus is testing Philip's faith. Jesus is probing Philip's heart. What's Philip going to say? Is Philip going to say, Lord, we know that you can provide food.

We've already seen you perform miracles. Is Philip going to say, we know that you're the son of God. You have all authority in heaven and on earth. We know that you're going to provide for these thousands of people.

Is Philip going to say, yes, Lord, you can provide the food you know. We trust in you. Is that what Philip said to Jesus? Did Philip trust Jesus to provide for all these people?

What do we say? No. He doesn't exercise that faith in Jesus. What do we find? We read in verse 7, Philip answered him, 200 denarii.

[ 11 : 26 ] He wouldn't buy enough bread for each of them to get a little. 200 denarii, that's something like, what, eight months wages. A lot of money. Philip said, even if we had all that money, who wouldn't be able to get enough for the people to eat?

Philip had been calculating how much would be needed to feed the people on that mountainside. But he hadn't calculated in Jesus to provide.

He'd calculated without Jesus. Isn't that so true of each one of us on so many occasions? When Jesus asks you to trust in him.

When Jesus asks you to trust that he'll provide for you and all of your needs. When Jesus asks you to believe in him. That he is sovereign. That he's in control of every situation.

But then when it comes to the bit and you're asked to trust him to meet every need that you have.

And we can so often be like Philip. And fail to believe that yes, the Lord can and does provide for us in everything.

[ 12 : 36 ] So often we fail to grasp the truth that with God all things are possible. And that nothing is impossible. What about your faith?

Do you truly believe in the Lord Jesus who died for you? Do you truly know that you have given your life to him? That you're saved for all eternity? That you're saved by his grace?

By his love? That the one who saved you? The one who provides for you? Even has provided for your great salvation? That he'll provide for you in every aspect of your life?

Even when appearances might seem to suggest the opposite? What about your faith? Even in these months that we've been enduring of lockdown? Have these times actually drawn you the more to put your faith and trust in the Lord and Savior?

Or have you calculated without Jesus? Well, trust in him. Lean in him. Lean in him to supply all your needs. Grow in grace.

[ 13 : 41 ] Grow in grace. Grow in grace in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Because he denies nothing to you of his love and his grace. Who Jesus is as we see him.

Even in his sovereignty and his power. As we'll see again in his provision for the people's needs. But what about the second point that we certainly can glean from verse 8 to verse 11?

Whom others see as weak are chosen by God. We read from verse 8, one of his disciples, Andrew, Simon, Peter's brother, said to him, There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.

But what are they for so many? Jesus said, Have the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. Jesus then took the loaves and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated.

So also the fish, as much as they wanted. We come to another one of Jesus' disciples, this time Andrew, Simon, Peter's brother.

[ 14 : 45 ] And really Andrew's no better than Philip when it comes to trusting in Jesus to provide for the needs of the people. But what Andrew does, he brings this boy, this young boy who's got some food to show to Jesus.

But Andrew reckons that even that small amount of food is going to be absolutely useless for all these thousands of people around. But it's the same so-called useless amount of food that Jesus uses, that Jesus multiplies, that Jesus provides to reveal who he is in his great power, in his love, and in his authority.

And that so-called useless amount of food that this unnamed boy presents, this food that seems so weak, this child that seems so weak, and yet will be used for the glory of God.

What we're going to see here is that something that's considered useless is far from useless in the hands of the Lord Jesus. And it's not just, of course, the physical feeding of these thousands of people that we're going to consider, but of course the provision, the true provision for your soul's great need of salvation through the abundant grace of God.

Again, we'll come back to that in a moment. But what do we see here? We see even Jesus exercising faith in his Father that the provision will be given to the people.

[16:20] Jesus prays Jesus as God's blessing upon the food that's given to him. And yet notice, Philip, Andrew, they've shown such a lack of faith in Jesus.

But Jesus isn't going to condemn Philip or Andrew. He's not going to condemn them for the lack of faith. What does he do? He takes what the boy has. He takes the five small barley loaves, very, very small items of food.

In fact, we read elsewhere that this kind of food was traditionally the food that the poor people ate. And then he takes the two small fish, probably no bigger than the size of two little sardines, and he calls the disciples to get the people to sit down.

And as we said, he prays, gives thanks for the, well, for the food before him. And then he gives the food to the people. The food is multiplied miraculously.

And the verdict is given that the people ate as much as they wanted. What are we seeing here?

Again, we're seeing that nothing is impossible for the one through whom the world was created.

[17:32] The one through whose word the world was, and all that is, was formed, the Lord Jesus. There was nothing impossible with him. Can't he not provide for your needs, my needs, whatever these needs are, for his glory, to reveal his grace, his greatness, his power?

I remember when I left Sky to go to the then Free Church College. This was back in 2002.

I have to say that I left a good job in the high school and a good salary. And then I'd be living on a very meagre student loan for three years.

How are we going to survive? Well, one of my colleagues obviously realized my lack of faith in many ways at this time.

He gave me the promise of the word of God found in Psalm 50. He said this to me, something I've never forgotten. He said this, the cattle on a thousand hills are mine. I'm quoting from the Lord's word to his people that the Lord who has the cattle on a thousand hills is the same Lord who'll provide for each one of his people.

[18:50] God who created the heavens and the earth. God who owns the universe. God who has the whole world in his hands. He's not going to leave destitute those who are called to service.

I pray that's a word of encouragement to any of you for who maybe even these days of lockdown and restriction, maybe they're causing you at some point to stumble in your faith, even in the promises of God that God has promised to provide for you in every aspect of your need.

See, Jesus isn't restricted. Jesus isn't restricted by circumstances. Jesus' power isn't limited. Jesus' power is limited. The Savior, by a miracle, multiply these five little barley loaves and two tiny fish. He'll provide for you, O you of little faith. But there's also the encouragement that we have here in the very mention of the boy. The very mention, as I say, is the only gospel that actually mentions the boy with the five loaves and two fish.

And it would seem, anyway, from what we read of what he had, that this boy was from a poor background. He really couldn't offer much, obviously. Certainly the disciples reckoned he couldn't offer very much to satisfy the needs of the people around.

[20:13] But Jesus used the resources that that boy had to feed thousands. He can and he will use you who might appear poor in the eyes of the world.

Who might appear of just no consequence before the eyes of so many. See, as we hear elsewhere in God's word and the parables, the Lord will use the one, the person who has two talents, two gifts, as it were, as much as the Lord will use the one who has five talents, five gifts.

You see, there's a place for every one of you in the kingdom of God. There's a place for every one of you to offer the service that God requires of you to build his kingdom, to show forth the love of the Lord Jesus.

Even in the way that God gets you to exercise these gifts that you have, those that you can offer to him all that you are and offer to him what you have.

And of course, it's not just those who are in leadership that God uses for his kingdom. It's all who are his, all who love the Lord, all who are willing to serve him in commitment to the truth of the

gospel.

[ 21 : 36 ] There's a place for every one of you in his service to give to him what God has given to you. Of course, we can also say this. God will use even the small portions that we offer to him to further his cause.

Of course, Jesus at this time, Jesus could simply have called down upon heaven to provide for the people. In the Old Testament, when every morning, six mornings out of seven, God provided the manna in the wilderness, in the desert.

Jesus could have called down on the provision of food there and then without having to perform the miracle, the miracle of the five loaves and two fish. No, Jesus accepted what was given to him.

He accepted these small portions to show and reveal his power and to show too that God will use even the little that we give to him for his service and for his glory.

And you know, in the work of the kingdom of God, God uses even what might appear so little, so small in the eyes of many to do great works, great things in his name.

[ 22 : 50 ] Back in 1843, when the Free Church was formed and it came to where out of the Church of Scotland, well, churches had to be built. Manses had to be built.

Ministers had to have salaries. Ministers had to be built.

Ministers had to be built. He referred to this as the power of littles. The pennies. I suppose we're a penny nowadays, but at that time, the pennies that added up.

Many, of course, were wealthy in the Free Church at that time. Many wealthy Free Church people gave much, gave sacrificially. But many poorer people as well, many poor people gave what they could and gave sacrificially.

And the results were astonishing. In the space of a few years, churches were built, mansions were built, salaries that were paid to ministers. This happening through the power of littles.

[ 24 : 18 ] Many congregations are at crossroads at this time in so many different ways. Just give one example, an example of Livingston Free Church. The work that's needed to move the congregation on, certainly for phase three and beyond of the current lockdown.

Because we have to address what life is going to be like in phase three and beyond. As you know, we're raising money to provide for the technology to enable people still to worship from home when we are back into the church building again.

And God will bless the power of littles in this example. There are many, many examples of so many different congregations where the power of littles is seen in the glorifying of God.

And so we pray that God will bless the littles that the Lord's people give for the cause of the kingdom. That God will bless the widow's mite.

That God will bless even the gifts that you give to him for his glory, for his name's sake. Just as Jesus multiplied the power of littles and the few barley loaves and the few fish that were given to him.

[ 25 : 31 ] So the Lord can increase even what's given to him, even the small amounts given to him for the furtherance of his kingdom. But there's something else.

Something else I think we do have to look at too. In many ways is the climax of the story. And that's this, what God provides is abundant. Is abundant.

Verse 12, And when they'd eaten their fill, he told his disciples, Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost. So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

We're told that the people had eaten their fill. Another way of translating that is that the people were satisfied.

Jesus had completely satisfied their need to be fed. And as we saw, there were leftovers. Leftovers gathered in the baskets. The food was collected.

[ 26 : 29 ] Food that hadn't been eaten gathered in the baskets. And we're told that twelve baskets were used to be the receptacles for that extra food, as it were.

Now, of course, this is amazing. This is the amazing aftermath of the feeding. And of course, we know that from what we see in this miracle that, yes, the Lord will provide for all our needs.

That we lack nothing. God cares for each one of us. He feeds us. He clothes you. He provides for you in every need that you have. Every, as it were, temporal need.

But let's never deny that that's here in the passage. Let's give thanks each time we eat. To give thanks to the Lord who's given to us even our daily bread.

But of course, there's much, much more in this parable to take from it. We're told that the people had eaten their fill, that they were satisfied. And surely the language that John's using here tells and shows the sign pointing to the greatness of Jesus.

[ 27 : 37 ] The one who changes people's lives fully and completely so that you are truly satisfied in him. Less cannot satisfy.

More is not desired. You know, if we were to read on in the passage, we're told that the next day after the feeding of the thousands that Jesus said to his disciples, I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. Whoever believes in me shall not thirst. And you who are in Christ, you who feed on the Lord Jesus, you're feeding him by his word, you who are nourished by that word, you know that that word truly satisfies.

Yes, we eat to get strength, to get physical strength, to get mental strength. When we feed in Christ, the bread of life, we find our strength in him.

And yes, to face whatever God provides for us, whatever God gives to us in his providence, that strength to run and not to be weary, to walk and not to faint.

[ 28 : 46 ] You can only be satisfied, truly satisfied in Christ. You know, so many in the world around, even in our own selves, so many times we think that we're truly and fully satisfied with things that don't provide that true soul satisfaction.

But you who are in Christ know that your only satisfaction, your only true satisfaction is in Christ. But then one more thing, I think we have to say this.

Jesus provided that food there on that mountainside that fed the people for a time. He showed that he's the one who provides and provides absolutely and abundantly.

And you have that promise, you who are in Christ, have that promise that you'll feast with him eternally, even in the glory of heaven. In one of the Psalms we read, and I, that in righteousness I shall see your face.

When I awake, I shall be satisfied with seeing your likeness. Now, of course, the crowds in the hill, they were satisfied for that short time. They're going to be hungry again.

[ 29 : 59 ] But the one who's in Christ, you know that you'll never hunger. You'll never hunger and lacking that satisfaction in the Lord Jesus.

And I hope that you are and know that true satisfaction in Christ. That you'll know and are knowing abundant blessings in your life. That you'll know the one who's able to do more than you can even ask or think.

Just as, well, David sang in Psalm 23, you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

That's true satisfaction in the Lord. Paul in Ephesians 3 verse 20 said these words. To him who's able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think according to the power that's at work within us.

The 12 basket pools of fruit that were left over point to the abundance of God's grace. That grace that truly and fully satisfies. I pray that you know that grace in your life.

[ 31 : 10 ] And that you're following the Lord Jesus. That your faith in him is true faith, full faith. That you look to him who provides. Who provides, yes, for your daily needs.

Who provides for all your needs in the Lord Jesus. Won't you follow him today? And won't you find that abundant grace in him that's found in him alone for your sake.

For the sake of your soul and for the glory of God's name. Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we confess before you the many times that we have lacked faith in your full provision for us.

And we ask, Lord, that you will enable your people, even gathered here this morning, to put their faith and trust in you, to provide for all their needs, so that they will truly say that their cup overflows with your goodness.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue before you now. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Now, before we sing our final psalm, normally at this time we would have Chris come up to the front to present prizes to the children in the Sunday School.

[ 32 : 33 ] so we can't do that this time. I just want to say thank you to Sandra and Cat for going round to the homes to give the prizes, the books to all the children.

So thank you, Sandra. Thank you, Cat, for doing that. And I want to just say a few words in closing, a few words of thanks, a few words not just to the Sunday school teachers and parents, but also to the children.

Parents, you have been so wonderful in these days of lockdown and providing the homeschooling for your children, and you're encouraging the children even to do the Sunday school worksheets, to keep on their Sunday school lessons.

So a great word of thanks to you for what you've been doing and are doing with the children at this time. I'm not just thinking of lockdown itself, because pre-lockdown as well, you've been a great encouragement to your children and to Sunday school teachers.

I just want to say a great thank you to what you've been doing over the past year and pre-lockdown and lockdown. You've kept us at where the wheels of the Sunday school running.

[ 33 : 56 ] And again, I emphasise the thanks to Sandra, Sandra Campbell, for your work as Sunday school superintendent. Thank you to all the teachers, the Sunday school teachers over the year.

We miss Chris giving out the prizes this year, but God willing, next year that will happen. And to the children, well, you know, I've seen what you've been doing online.

You've shown all the various things that you've been doing in lockdown and your baking, your music, your sport, and the arts and crafts, as well as your lessons.

And as far as the Sunday school works concerned, you've been doing the worksheets. And keep on learning. And keep on learning.

How about Jesus? Jesus, who asks you to be, excuse me, your saviour. Well done. And there were many of you, some of you anyway, who were going to go to camp this year.

[ 34 : 58 ] It can't happen this year. I pray you'll look forward to next year when we pray that camp will happen again. So thank you to all of you in any way who have contributed to the work of the Sunday school, the creche this year.

I know it's greatly appreciated by everyone in the congregation. So thank you. Well, now we're going to close in Psalm 107.

Maybe a portion we don't often sing. Psalm 107 from verse 33 to 43. The psalm that really praises God for his provision for his people, his hungry people.

Psalm 107, 33 to 43, to God's praise. He changed the streets to wilderness, fresh streams to desert land, and fruitful land to island waste, for sins of sinners there.

He changed the streets to floating streets, the hungry there he led.

[ 36 : 30 ] To found the city safe and strong, fresh shame and deterred.

They reached a fruitful harvest from the neighbor and the field.

He blessed and gave them all, the whole thousand lives, and the birds of new people, But hands of new people, They reached the top six gates of hours, The rich ■■■■■ hvader he Grace Craig ■s,

But a heart in line, The depths of anca■ They score, Their horizon, They sign the same necks of Israel, They shall find the great distress, When Neitzvam, They have called the earth, They shall find the earth in their Fußball.

against the heaven and earth, You are hadi claimed the earth in its country, Their garden demoted together. They can find them alive, They can find the earth and timereal yield, They can find their gears, They sag together, Their fortune to build them in writing. And thunder their doom, But he did not abandon well, he brought the needy hope.

From their affliction and in Greece their families I can follow.

[ 37 : 58 ] The upright seed is standard man, the wicked hold their peace.

Let all the wise take note and learn the lords of God's not cease.

We bless you Lord that your love does not cease. Now may grace, mercy and peace from God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest upon and remain with you both now and forevermore. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.