**Jesus, Our Provider**

John 6:1-15

Key Verse 6:11 – *“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.”*

In the New Testament, there are only two of Jesus’ miracles that are recorded in all four Gospels; namely His resurrection and the feeding of the 5000. Obviously, Jesus’ resurrection is His most significant miracle for it is the greatest demonstration of His divinity as God’s Chosen Messiah and His final victory over the powers of both sin & death. Through His death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, Jesus expressed the unimaginable depths of God’s love and genuine care for each and every one of us by giving us life through Jesus Christ. But as deep and meaningful as His resurrection is, all these themes are also found (to a lesser extent) within the miracle which are studying today. Despite the desperate situation the disciples faced, Jesus sought to teach them compassion and stewardship for God’s flock. However, the most important lesson of all is how Jesus is our Provider who pours out His abundant blessings on those who come to Him in faith. I pray this message may serve as a reminder for us to depend on Him for everything we need in life no matter how difficult the circumstances we may be in.

**Part 1 – The People Flock to See Jesus**

May we read verses 1 and 2 together; ***“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.”*** In the previous chapter, Jesus was in Jerusalem participating in an unnamed “feast of the Jews.” If this feast was the Feast of Tabernacles as many Biblical scholars believe, then five to six months had passed since Jesus healed the man who had been invalid for 38 years and declared His authority before the Jewish leaders. The other gospels inform us that during this time, Jesus had sent out the disciples on a ministry tour. They had come back full of joy and reported their experiences to Him of preaching the Gospel, healing the sick and cast out impure spirits (Mark 6:30-31). Sadly, that joy was short-lived as they also received word that Herod had beheaded John the Baptist (Matthew 14:12; Mark 6:29). One can only imagine how painful it must have been to receive such news at a time when Jesus’ ministry was beginning to blossom. So Jesus decided to take His disciples on a trip north to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee in hopes that they could rest, re-energize and have some well-earned fellowship time together. But as they would soon find out, they were not the only ones making that same journey.

May we read verse 2 again; ***“… and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick.”*** Word of Jesus had spread through the region like wildfire to the point where large crowds were following Him from place to place like a 1st Century celebrity! Some came to hear His teachings. Others came to receive healing. But the majority probably came in hopes of witnessing the miracles for themselves. As verse 4 informs us, Passover was near so maybe some people wanted to see if he really was the long-awaited Messiah who would deliver them from the Romans in the same way that God rescued the Israelites from Egypt. But most probably came because they saw everyone else going there and did not want to be left out of later conversations. They were far more interested in the spectacle of the whole thing than what Jesus actually had to offer… let alone have any interest in knowing Him. Their attitude is regrettably reminiscent of us modern-day churchgoers who view church primarily as a social get-together rather than an opportunity to come into God’s presence so we may know Him and worship Him. Instead of giving ourselves to God, we are far more interested in what we can get out of Him (e.g. good grades, networking opportunities, spouses, etc). We expect to be dazzled by some awesome message or mesmerized by the latest trendy Christian songs instead of being humbled by all that God has done for us and fulfilled simply by being in a place where we can freely praise and thank God!

It would have made more sense to turn the people away. The whole point of Jesus coming to this remote mountainside was so that He could be left alone with His disciples and rest. However, Jesus knew what the real issue at hand was. As the tides of people continued to draw near, Jesus saw them not as needy sign-seekers but as sheep in need of the love, care and guidance that only the Good Shepherd can provide (Matthew 14:14, Mark 6:34). Jesus knew that what the people really needed was someone who could meet both their spiritual and, later on, their physical needs.

**Part 2 – Jesus Challenges His Disciples**

May we read verse 5 together; ***“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?””*** As more and more people kept coming, Jesus turned to Philip and asked him where they could buy some bread for all these hungry people. It is interesting that Jesus asked Philip instead of Peter, James or John. It is worth remembering that Philip was one of the earliest disciples who accepted Jesus invitation to follow Him (John 1:43) and that his home town of Bethsaida was in the very same part of the country they were in. Philip might have even known where all the best bakeries and fisheries in the area were but as verse 6 tells us, Jesus had another reason for asking this question. Jesus already had something else in mind. Please note some very key words in the question: “**where**”, “**shall**”, “**we**”, “**buy**” and “**for the people**”. “**Where**” speaks to the origin of this bread. “**Shall**” is used instead of “can” and is a clear indicator that the action would be done, so it is matter of “when” rather than “if”. “**We**” illustrates that Jesus was including Philip and the rest of His disciples to be involved and “**buy**” implies a cost that they would have to bear i.e. something they would be willing to give up. This is not simply in terms of money but also in terms of their time, energy and attention they would have to devote in serving. And finally, putting all those words together with “**for the people**” meant that Jesus definitely wanted their primary concern to be for the starving crowd. Jesus asked Philip this seemingly absurd question not to find out where the nearest bakery was located but to test if Philip’s faith was strong enough to bear the personal cost of serving these people. So, did Philip pass?

May we read verse 7 together; ***“Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!””*** You have to give Philip some credit for his intelligence and his honesty. Without much of a delay, he calculated how much it would have cost to feed these people and protested how they simply could not afford to do so. Moreover, they were no places in the immediate vicinity for them to obtain the food. It would have been great if Philip had responded like, *“Lord, I’ve seen You turn water into wine. I watched You heal the royal official’s son from a distance. I saw you heal the man who had been unable to walk for 38 years. I’ve watched You perform dozens of miracles. Surely, You can provide bread for this hungry multitude, even as God provided manna in the wilderness!”* But Jesus’ request was completely unrealistic and beyond the realm of possibility for Philip because Philip only thought of what it would cost to him. Philip had calculated that serving these people was beyond what he was willing to sacrifice for them.

We can all identify and sympathize with Philip on some level. Everyone makes their own calculations on what they are prepared to give up for someone and keep for ourselves. This is true even when it comes to serving Christ. We liberally use our time, money and energy on things that only benefit ourselves and our futures while only giving Jesus the scraps left over if not anything… even though our time, money and energy are blessings given by Him in the first place! We feel that if we give too much, we won’t have anything left for ourselves and our lives will become insecure. But even if we do have little, God can still do something great and wondrous through them as illustrated by Andrew and the little boy.

May we read verses 8 and 9 together; ***“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?””*** Andrew is a very interesting person on many levels. Although he was originally a disciple of John the Baptist, he listened to John as he directed his followers towards Jesus. He even brought his own brother Peter to Jesus (John 1:40-41) but from that point onwards, he always seems to be in the background. However, this does not mean he had nothing worth offering. Just as he brought Peter to Jesus’ attention, Andrew brought to Jesus’ attention a small boy with an even smaller lunchbox. Somehow, among a crowd of over 5000 people, this was all the food that was available and even its contents were laughable. Barley was a type of grain only eaten by the poor and animals. The loaves weren’t the loaves we think of these days but more like the size of small pancakes or dinner rolls and the fish were most likely no bigger than small sardines. It seems like a paltry offering not worthy of even being brought forward. Even Andrew himself seems a bit embarrassed and questions if it will be of any use. However, where Philip’s doubts caused him to see the situation as impossible, Andrew’s faith allowed him to bring even the precious little that he could before Jesus. Often times, we find ourselves saying “I cannot do anything for God. I’m not rich, so I cannot give millions to charity. I’m not very bright, so I wouldn’t make a great Christian scholar and I’m not good at public speaking, so I can never be a great preacher.” But God is overjoyed when we bring even our weaknesses and shortcomings to Him for He works best through them. As Zechariah 4:10 states, ***“Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin…”*** (New Living Translation). And it is with this in mind that Jesus proceeds to meet both the physical and spiritual needs of thousands through this one small offering.

**Part 3 – God’s Abundant Blessings through Jesus Christ**

May we read verses 10 and 11 together; ***“Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand 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.”*** Jesus had the disciples go to the crowd and have them settle down on the grass for what was about to be the biggest and most scenic picnic they ever had! He then proceeded to give thanks to God for the five loaves and two fish. Think back to Jesus’ earlier question to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread…” Jesus’ answer what not a “where” but a “whom.” Jesus never despises anything brought to him in faith, even small things, for they all come from our Heavenly Father. Jesus gave thanks to God. It is good to thank God for even the seemingly small things that we have been given. When we thank God, His power and glory are revealed all the more. Jesus then distributed the loaves to the people through the help of his disciples. The people took as much as they wanted, first of bread, then of fish until everyone ate to their hearts’ (and stomachs’) content. It was a miracle of provision. By God grace, all who came were nourished and completely satisfied.

But wait, there’s more! May we read verses 12 and 13 together; ***“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 twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.”*** Being able to feed 5000+ alone was impossible but with God all things are possible, even blessing us far beyond our wildest expectations. The symbolism of 12 baskets full should not have been lost on the disciples as it showed how each of them experienced God’s abundant blessing through obedience and faith. However, the point was lost on the people as they foolishly thought to make Jesus their king by force as a means of solving their bread problem but Jesus swiftly withdrew (14-15). They failed to understand the meaning of the miracle. Just as God provided manna for the Israelites in the wilderness, Jesus provided bread on a desolate mountainside but the results were maddeningly the same; only rebellion and discontent arose from the crowd instead of devotion and faith. It would take an even greater lesson in the second half of Chapter 6 for everyone to come to know the true significance of this miracle; that Jesus is the Bread of Life.

When we encounter impossible situations in life, we become fatalistic and give up, thinking there is no way God can help us for in the back of our minds, we place the same limitations on God as we do on ourselves. But God is the very Creator of our universe and everything in it. There is nothing He cannot do! As our Heavenly Father, he asks us to ask to bring whatever we ask for through prayer in Jesus’ name… and pray as if we have already received it as Jesus exclaims in Mark 11:24 – ***“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*** Someone once asked Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to China, “Do you really expect to make an impact on that great land?” “No, sir,” Morrison replied, “but I expect God to.” Hudson Taylor, who followed in Morrison’s footsteps, said, “All God’s giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them.” For these two men, their five loaves and two fish was to give their lives to serving the Gospel in an impossible land for they believed God would do great works there.

In conclusion, through today’s passage we witnessed Jesus miraculously feeding over 5000 hungering souls both spiritually and physically. Jesus worked with the meager faith of one disciple and the small offering of one boy to be a blessing for all who gathered to see Him. Rather than be fixated on the enormity of the problem, I pray we may place our trust in God and look to Him as the Solution, the one who works miracles with the things we already have and provides us with everything we really need in life. And no matter what situation we are faced with in life, I pray we always remember His providence through Jesus for He is all we need in life.