

Message #20

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John

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JESUS' SUFFICIENCY

AND THE FEEDING OF THE 5000+

JOHN 6:1-14

I.

I have been involved in planning many funeral and memorial services. I have seen how overwhelming situations of death can be. Besides dealing with grief, family members closest to the deceased are called upon to make many decisions in a short period of time. People have to decide about the disposition of the body, notification of friends and relatives, payment of bills and debts and planning of a service.

This all became personal to me in the recent death of my mother. Fortunately I have three brothers and their extended families, and we all get along well. An additional practical issue that arose was figuring out how to feed people. With a large family showing up in my hometown, there were numerous relatives who needed to eat. A couple of people outside of the family, and friends of one of my brothers, showed up with a lot of food. That was a blessing.

But then we had to figure out how to plan food for a funeral reception. It is often difficult to estimate how many people will show up for that. We made an estimate and had a couple of church congregations help us with the preparation of the food. Things worked out pretty well.

If you have ever been involved in planning for that kind of situation, imagine what it would be like if you had 15,000 people show up unexpectedly. That is what Jesus and His disciples faced in the story before us this morning. It was a potentially overwhelming situation. The broader issue is dealing with overwhelming situations in general. We are going to look at our passage today to see if there are lessons here about dealing with overwhelming situations that come from health problems, financial difficulties, relationship issues, addictions or other challenges in life.

We have been working our way through the Gospel According to John on Sunday mornings. We have seen that the Apostle John has organized his biography of the life of Jesus around seven sign-miracles. His purpose is to show that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We have looked at three of these miracles so far. In #2 Jesus turned water into wine. In #4 Jesus healed a royal official's son. At the beginning of #5 Jesus healed a lame man on the Sabbath in Jerusalem. This led to criticism from the religious leaders. Jesus, in turn, described evidence that supports His contention that He is the Son of God. Now in #6 we come to the fourth sign miracle.

II.

In vv. 1-4 of #6, which is found on p. 891 of the black Bibles under many of the chairs, we learn about THE SETTING FOR THE MIRACLE. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE SETTING FOR THE MIRACLE) According to vv. 1-4, **"After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. 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."**

The initial time reference "after this" is indefinite. But v. 4 notes that the Passover was at hand. The Apostle John makes reference to three different Passovers in the public ministry of Jesus. This is the second one. The first was described in #3, when Jesus cleaned the money changers and merchants out of the temple in Jerusalem. So this is a little over a year after Jesus began His public ministry. It is perhaps a year before His crucifixion at the third Passover.

The place of this incident is the region of Galilee. (GALILEE JUDEA MAP) After the death of Herod the Great, Galilee was given into the control of Herod's son, Herod Antipas. We are told here that Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which would be on the northeast side. The territory to the north and east of the Sea of Galilee was entrusted to the charge of Herod Philip, another son of Herod the Great. (CANA CAPERNAUM MAP)

The Sea of Galilee is actually a fresh water lake. Although it is about 650 feet below sea level, it empties into the Jordan River, which empties into the Dead Sea. On the western side of the Sea of Galilee Herod Antipas began to build a new city in 20 AD that he named Tiberias, after the name of the Roman Emperor Tiberius. By the time that the Apostle John was writing this Gospel later in the century, the lake was becoming known as the Sea of Tiberias.

(GALILEE GOLAN) It was somewhere here on the northeastern side of the lake that our story took place. It is still a largely uninhabited area.

This is the only miracle, except for the Resurrection, that is described in all four Gospels. The other Gospels indicate that the incident happened after Jesus had sent the twelve apostles out in pairs to perform miracles. They had just returned with reports about their activities. They also received news of the death of John the Baptist. All of this prompts Jesus to call for a men's retreat. It is a good thing for Christian workers to have these retreats occasionally. So they headed off for Galilee Pines.

They went together in the church boat, but it turns out that the Galileans got wind of this and followed them by land. Many of them had witnessed the miracles of Jesus and His disciples, and they wanted to get in on more of the action. So an unexpected crowd showed up at Galilee Pines. This happened right before the Passover feast.

We come then to LESSON ONE, which is JESUS IS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PASSOVER FEAST. (LESSON 1: JESUS IS THE FULFILLMENT...) Last week, I pointed out that Jesus in His sacrificial role was the fulfillment of the picture in the Passover feast of the unblemished lamb who was killed so that the children of Israel might have life.

But in the miracle that happens at this time and in this place by the Sea of Galilee there are indications that Jesus fulfills other circumstances that are pictured in events that surround the Passover feast. First and foremost, this miracle happens at the time of the Passover feast, as John the Apostle notes in our text, and in the evening. Second, this happens in a wilderness place. After the first Passover, the children of Israel entered the wilderness of the Sinai, Third, Israel in the Book of Exodus entered the wilderness after passing through the Red Sea. John the Apostle notes that this miracle happened on the far side of another sea. Fourth, there is a situation in both cases where the children of Israel find themselves without food in the wilderness. Fifth, there is a miraculous provision of bread in both cases. In the time of Moses, manna was provided from heaven. In our story today, Jesus provides bread. It seems to me that these are divinely intended parallels that are intended to prompt the people of God to pay attention. Something divine is at work here. This Jesus is acting like a second Moses. He is doing things that are remarkably similar to what happened at the first Passover.

III.

In vv. 5-7 we come to THE SITUATION OF NEED. (III. THE SITUATION OF NEED) Verses 5 & 6 tell us, **"Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward 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."**

This had to happen somewhat earlier in the day, as the crowd was gathering. According to Mark #6, Jesus and the disciples arrived at this place by boat. Crowds of Galileans followed them on the seashore. According to Mark 6:34, Jesus felt compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. They needed to be fed. So Jesus proceeded to feed them spiritually. That was their greatest need. But Jesus also pointed out at the beginning that there was going to be a practical problem by the end of the day. These people were going to be physically hungry. How were they to be fed?

Philip was from the town that was closest to them--- Bethsaida. Jesus asked him about where they could get bread for these people. But he was doing this to test him. In the course of their coming ministry, these disciples are often going to face overwhelming situations. How will they respond? Have they been with Jesus long enough to realize that He has access to amazing resources?

Philip gives an initial response in v. 7: **"Philip answered him, 'Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.'"** One denarius was the typical pay of a common laborer in the first century. Two hundred denarii would be roughly eight months' pay for someone like this. If we were to take a blue collar worker today who has an annual salary of \$40,000, then eight months' salary would be roughly \$27 or 28,000. Philip says that this would not even scratch the surface for what would be needed to hire a catering service to come in on quick notice.

In dealing with any kind of overwhelming situation, **one** possible solution may involve money. This may certainly be a concern in situations of debt, with medical expenses, with church budget challenges and with housing problems. But as is the case in our story, there may not be enough money available to solve the problem.

According to Mark's account of the situation in his Gospel, it is at the end of the day that the problem of hungry people becomes acute. We are told there that at least some of the disciples suggest a **second** possible solution to the overwhelming problem. That is to send the people away. People are often the source of overwhelming situations that we face. The temptation is to get rid of them. Divorce that mate who is the source of my overwhelming difficulty. Don't get involved with the situation that another

person is bringing to me. Avoid that person who hurt me. Sometimes we may need to send people away. Sometimes that is not the best solution.

The **third** possible solution to an overwhelming situation is to bring in other people to help. At some point the twelve disciples canvassed the crowd to find out if people had extra food. It appears that little planning went into the effort of the Galileans to see more of Jesus. He was the best show around, and everyone wanted to see what Jesus was going to do next. It was like a Las Vegas who suddenly got tickets to attend a Golden Knights playoff game. Suddenly food would be of secondary importance.

The best that the disciples could come up with was the lunch of the young boy. In overwhelming situations we often look for help from other people. Sometimes that is appropriate. In some situations, as was true here, that is not enough. The lesson that Jesus was trying to drive home to His disciples, and that He is often seeking to drive home to us, is this...

LESSON TWO is: JESUS WANTS US TO TRUST HIM IN SITUATIONS OF OVERWHELMING NEED. (LESSON TWO: JESUS WANTS US TO...) In the recent demise of my mother, the initial situation was somewhat overwhelming. The initial diagnosis was that she had terminal cancer. Then an oncologist said that she might have a year or two to live if she took certain treatment. The effect of that was uncertain. My mother was negative toward that treatment. But it was still uncertain how much time that she had left.

So we had to figure out when to come out and for how long. What kind of plane reservations should we make? Son Scott wanted to come out, but he was not wanting to stay for a long time. He wanted to be present for a funeral. But it was unclear initially how much time my mom had left. So we had to trust the Lord, and in the end everything worked out OK.

The disciples in our story had the God-man right in their presence. But they seemed to be trying to work out solutions without His input. Yet He was the one who had unlimited resources at His disposal. He should be the first one to which we turn in situations that might appear to be overwhelming.

IV.

We come then to vv. 8-10 and THE PREPARATION FOR THE MIRACLE. (IV. THE PREPARATION FOR THE MIRACLE) The other Gospel accounts make it clear that it was in the evening after an afternoon of teaching from Jesus that a decision had to be made about what to do in regard to the physical hunger of

the crowd. According to vv. 8 & 9, **"One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?'"**

The Greek word for the one with loaves and fishes means a boy, or sometimes a young, male slave. This lad is said to be offering his lunch of five loaves and two fish. The loaves are not what we think of as loaves of bread. (BARLEY LOAVES 2) They were more like slices of bread. Perhaps they were the size of pancakes. There were also a couple of small fish, which were probably pickled or salted. It was a lunch appropriate for a kid, but this young man in his sincerity apparently offered what he had.

Barley was the cheapest of the grains. It was also the first crop to be harvested in the spring. It was a chief staple of common people. It was also used to feed farm animals. So it was common food, but nothing special. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Clearly this lunch was inadequate to provide much help for this situation. Andrew did not have much hope that it would prove useful. But he offered it to Jesus anyway.

But v. 10 tells us, **"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 takes charge of the situation and gets things organized. In Mark's gospel we are told that He had them sit down in groups of fifties and hundreds. The note is added that there was a lot of grass around, which was consistent with the circumstances in April when Passover took place. That was the case when I was there in April. Bill and Doris will be there next week. They can tell us when they get back if they find green grass by the Sea of Galilee.

We are also told that there were about five thousand men who were present. The specific original word that is used refers to male adults. A crowd was typically counted in this place and era in terms of the number of adult men. But there were probably women and children who were also present. Certainly we have this young boy who was mentioned. So the scholars guess that there were somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 people who were there in all. This would be between 300 and 400 groups of fifty. This would be roughly the total population of Boulder City gathered together in one place. I suspect that they were all wondering what was going to happen next. Why were they being organized like this?

This brings us to LESSON THREE. LESSON THREE is that JESUS CAN USE OUR INADEQUATE RESOURCES TO DO GREAT THINGS. (PROJECTOR ON--- LESSON 3: JESUS CAN USE OUT...) Jesus uses the small lunch

of this young lad to accomplish a miracle. This was a person of no social or economic status. But apparently he offered what he had, and the Lord used it to do something great.

With the recent death of Billy Graham the career of this famous evangelist has been reviewed in a number of places. One of the things that stands out to me is that he had nothing outstanding about his early resume. He was a farm boy. He didn't come from money. He had a limited education. He attended several Bible colleges, but he never acquired a seminary education. He had some success with baseball in high school. But he was not a great athlete. He had no special music ability. He did not come from wealth. He had no military experience. He was not a war hero. He had no business accomplishments. Yet he was available and faithful, and God used him greatly. Ultimately that is what Jesus is looking for in us. Are we available and faithful? If we are, the Lord can use us to do great things.

Watchman Nee (PROJECTOR ON--- WATCHMAN NEE QUOTE) once wrote, **"The meeting of need is not dependent on the supply in hand, but on the blessing of the Lord resting on the supply."** What is needed in seemingly overwhelming situations is the offering of whatever resources we have and the expectation that God can use them to accomplish the purposes that He desires.

V.

We come then to THE MIRACLE (V. THE MIRACLE), which is described in v. 11. **"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."** Mark's Gospel describes what happened in these words (MARK 6:41): **"And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all."**

Notice that Jesus keeps His disciples involved in what takes place. He promotes their leadership and involvement. That is a good reminder to all of us to always be looking out for opportunities to get others involved in ministry.

The primary thing to notice is that a miracle takes place in the hands of Jesus. He just keeps breaking this bread and these fish and somehow there continues to be more. I wonder what the people in the crowd were thinking. I can imagine that people in the back were craning their necks to see what was happening up front. Did they realize that a miracle was taking place? Perhaps the people up front were wondering, "How is He doing this?" (PROJECTOR OFF)

Notice also that v. 11 in our text says that the people got as much as they wanted. Nobody went away hungry. They all got full. It was not steak and lobster. But it was sufficient to fully meet the need of the moment.

Different interpretations have been offered about what happened, especially from the skeptics. Some have suggested that the miracle was that selfish hearts were transformed and that people shared what they brought, which proved to be more than what was needed. The assessment of Jesus and the apostles, however, was that there was not much for food in this crowd.

A commentator by the name of William Barclay suggests another possibility. He says, **"It may be that this was really a sacramental meal. In the rest of the chapter the language of Jesus is exactly that of the Last Supper, when he speaks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. It could be that at this meal it was but a morsel, like the sacrament, that each person received; and that the thrill and wonder of the presence of Jesus and the reality of God turned the sacramental crumb into something which richly nourished their hearts and souls--- as happens at every Communion Table to this day."** Nice try, but this hardly fits with the description that we have in our text. These people were hungry, and they were fed to the point that they were all satisfied.

So the third option, which is the most consistent with the text, is that this was a supernatural miracle. This was a creative act in which the Son of God created bread and fish for this hungry crowd of 15,000+.

LESSON 4 then is that JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD. (PROJECTOR ON--- LESSON 4: JESUS IS...) In #20 vv. 30 & 31 the Apostle John indicates that he has written about these sign miracles so that his audience would come to the conclusion that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that they might have life in His name.

Such is the point of this miracle. In Psalm 23 (PSALM 23:1) King David wrote, **"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."** The Gospel writers indicate that Jesus responded to the gathering of these Galileans by declaring that they were like sheep without a shepherd. In this incident Jesus feeds them spiritually and physically. The Apostle John is careful to indicate in v. 11 in our text that as a result of this miracle, everyone had as much as they wanted. It is the Lord who has done this.

This miracle also pointed the audience of Jesus back to the time of Moses when God provided manna for the children of Israel in the wilderness. In Exodus #16 v. 18 (EXODUS 16:18) we are told, **"But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat."** The God of Israel was at work in both miracles.

The application that the Apostle Paul made from his understanding of the sufficiency of this miracle working God is described in Philippians #4 v. 19 (PHILIPPIANS 4:19) There he writes, **"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."** He may not supply all of our wants, but the promise is that He will supply all of our deepest needs.

In the time of the Apostle John there was a Jewish tradition that the coming Messiah would act in this way. In a Jewish document called 2 Baruch in the twenty-ninth chapter the author is speaking about the revelation of the Messiah. (2 BARUCH 29:8) In v. 8 the author writes, **"And it shall come to pass at that self-same time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years, because these are they who have come at the consummation of time."** This miracle pointed to the fulfillment of these hopes. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

VI.

In vv. 12-14 we come to THE RESULTS OF THE MIRACLE. (IV. THE RESULTS OF THE MIRACLE) According to v. 12, **"And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.'"** The need has been met--- not just partially, but fully. No one went away hungry.

The disciples are told to gather up the leftovers. On one hand we might think the One who creates food like this out of thin air has an unlimited supply. So why care about the leftovers? Why not just leave them on the ground and let the birds and wild animals eat them? But Jesus seems to be concerned about preserving what has been created. The resources that are provided are not to be wasted. They are to be conserved.

Verse 13: **"So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten."** Mark #6 v. 43 says that they also gathered up the leftover fish. They ended up with twelve full baskets. The little boy who offered what he had didn't lose anything in the end. They all had leftovers.

Again, Jesus gets the twelve involved in collecting the leftovers. Is there any significance to the number of baskets that are collected? The number twelve does have significance to the nation of Israel. There are twelve tribes in Israel. But then also there is just the practical situation that each of the twelve apostles was probably involved in collecting a full basket of leftovers.

Finally, in v. 14 we read, "**When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world.'**" The Apostle John calls this miracle, along with the others "signs." A sign is intended to point the observer to the significance behind the external event. John connects these "signs" with evidence of the deity of Jesus.

Jeremiah #31 in the Old Testament describes the coming of the Messianic kingdom. (JEREMIAH 31:14) In v. 14 we read, "**...and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, declares the Lord.**" As a result of this miracle, the Jewish people are satisfied with God's goodness. This is indeed the Messiah.

The Galileans did indeed recognize that this miracle was a sign. They did not, however, realize its full significance. They associated what they saw with Moses' statements about a coming prophet. In Deuteronomy #18 v. 15 (DEUTERONOMY 18:15) Moses told the children of Israel in the wilderness, "**The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers--- it is to him you shall listen...**" Like Moses, this Jesus was involved in providing bread for his people in the wilderness. So they were developing the conviction that this Jesus was that prophesied Old Testament prophet. They were just limited in their understanding of what that meant.

LESSON FIVE, the basic lesson here, is that JESUS IS SUFFICIENT TO MEET OUR DEEPEST NEEDS. (LESSON FIVE: JESUS IS SUFFICIENT...) Physical needs are real. This crowd had genuine physical hunger. Jesus was sufficient to meet this need. But this miracle, and the others, were designed to point to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God and is sufficient not just to meet our physical needs, but also our other needs.

The deepest needs of us humans are spiritual. When your mother is drawing her last breaths, you want to know that she has a positive future beyond the grave. When your kid is dealing with a drug addiction, you want hope that this guy, or gal's, life can be transformed. When your loved one is sent off to prison, you want hope that there is someone who can help this person. When you are struggling with depression, you want to know if there is someone who can meet that deep, spiritual need.

Is there hope? Is there a God who can do something about sin, about personal transformation, who can provide a purpose and reason for living. The ultimate purpose of this miracle, and the others, is to show that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that by believing in His name we can have life--- that He can meet not just our physical needs, but our deepest spiritual needs, as a result of our trust in Him.