

The Creator Provides

Scripture: Mark 6:30–44

Code: 41-30

For this morning, as we come to the sixth chapter of Mark, we come to a very familiar experience in the life of our Lord, one that is known to anybody who has ever been in Sunday school or the church. It is the account of the feeding of the five thousand, as it is known, and we're going to look at that but perhaps introduce you to some unfamiliar aspects of it.

Let's begin reading at verse 30 - verse 30 - pick up the story in Mark 6. "The apostles gathered together with Jesus and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. And He said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while for there were many people coming and going and they didn't even have time to eat. They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves. The people saw them going and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities and got there ahead of them.

"When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and He began to teach them many things. When it was already late, quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, 'This place is desolate and it is already quite late. Send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.' But He answered them, 'You give them something to eat.' And they said to Him, 'Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?' And He said to them, 'How many loaves do you have, go look.' And when they found out, they said, 'Five and two fish.'

"He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass, and they sat down in groups on the green grass and they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. And He took the five loaves and the two fish and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and kept giving them to the disciples to set before them. And He divided up the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces and also of the fish. There were five thousand men who ate the loaves."

Now, obviously, this familiar story is another power display on the part of Jesus. All through His life, all through His ministry, we are used to seeing divine power coming from Him and being delegated now to the twelve and through them, power over disease, power over demons, power over death - we've talked about that. We've seen His power to still the waters of the Sea of Galilee in a storm and stop the wind dead in its tracks.

The people of Galilee, by the way, were very used to this as well. Galilee is a very small region. It is about fifty miles by twenty-five miles, that's all. A lot of it is occupied by water, the Lake of Galilee in the center, or close to the right side of the center looking at a map. This is not a large area. There are about 200 to 205 towns and villages and a few other countryside stops. It is an agrarian, it is an agricultural area, but it is somewhat densely populated. Jesus has been circulating through Galilee now for well over a year, and there are only a few months left in His ministry there.

He's going to finalize His ministry there. This is kind of the capstone miracle of His work there, at least in the public sense. After this miracle, He will go toward Tyre and Sidon, He will have a ministry there, which is on the northeast coast, and then He will come back across Galilee one more time and begin His journey down through Decapolis, which is east of Galilee, headed toward Judea, spend the last months of His life in Judea, and ultimately in Jerusalem where He will die and rise from the dead and then ascend back into glory.

So we're coming to the end of His Galilean ministry, and His Galilean ministry has been marked by several trips through that region. We would say that this is the third and sort of final canvassing of Galilee. And remember now, as we came in to chapter 6, Jesus delegated His power, power to conquer disease, death and demons to the twelve, which multiplied Himself twelve times, and told them to go preach repentance in the Kingdom of God the way He had done for all of the months up to that point. He had done it alone, now He spreads the power. They went out, they preached in His name, they healed in His name, they cast out demons in His name, they raised the dead in His name.

We don't have specifics about that journey, about the impact, but it was a blitz on that small region of Galilee by men that were known to the Galileans because they were, eleven out of twelve of them, all but Judas Iscariot, were from that very area. Jesus was well-known there as well. So everybody knows. Virtually everyone has seen these power displays. This final one, in terms of quantity, is way beyond any public miracle Jesus did, the feeding of this massive crowd.

Matthew tells us there were five thousand men. Luke tells us there were five thousand men. Mark tells us there were five thousand men. But Matthew also tells us, "Besides women and children." And the most obvious thing to say is that there were five thousand men, there were at least five thousand women, for sure, they were the wives and they were the mothers and they were the sisters, et cetera. And how many children, we don't know. There could have been ten thousand children, there could have been fifteen thousand children, there could have been more. This is a crowd that stretches between twenty to twenty-five thousand, and maybe beyond that.

It is a huge crowd, and to create food at that quantity is a massive, creative miracle that is the capstone on the display of miracles there in Galilee and is something that could obviously only be done by the Creator Himself, creating this food. So this is a very significant moment in the life of our Lord Jesus. As I said, from here, Matthew 15 says He goes to Tyre and Sidon. Mark 7 then says He goes to the east of Galilee, He does another feeding of four thousand in chapter 8 of Mark, Matthew 15 also records that, and then He heads down to Judea for the last months of His life, finally to Jerusalem.

The year is about 29 A.D., if you do the calendar calculations. The time is March, April, about this time of year, near Passover, John 6:4 identifies it as near a Passover. It is springtime in Galilee in the year 29. The apex of our Lord's display of power is about to take place. How important is this miracle? Well, it is the biggest miracle He has done yet and it is the final miracle, in a sense, in a very large and public sense, in Galilee.

From now on, the focus in Judea is on smaller crowds. They don't get the same crowds in Judea that came to see Him in Galilee. And primarily from now on, once He leaves Galilee, He focuses more on

training the twelve than on the public ministry, so it's a turning point, it's a monumental moment. There are many miracles recorded by Matthew, many recorded by Mark, many recorded by Luke, and many recorded by John, but only two miracles recorded by all four of them. Only two miracles recorded by all four of them. The two miracles are the resurrection of Jesus Christ and this feeding of these thousands and thousands of people.

So in importance, this is the ranking miracle, apart from the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And just to remind you, it is so important for us to experience all of these things with our Lord Jesus because He's putting Himself on display. As you go through a gospel, you are seeing Jesus Christ in all His glory and majesty and power, the wonder of His person.

You know, when the New Testament was laid out, it is to be read like any book is read, and so you start at the beginning, you read to the end. The beginning is about the beginning of the story, the end is about the end of the story - right? - from the gospels to the book of Revelation, and the stuff in the middle fills in the center of the story. But to read the New Testament, as you would read any book from beginning to end, you have to go through four consistent accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus before you get to the rest of the history. And the point is that you must be familiar with the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The whole reason for the Old Testament is to point to Christ. The whole reason for the New Testament is to introduce you to Christ in the fullness of His revelation. All the rest of the New Testament past the gospels tells you what His coming meant, what it accomplished, and how it will finally bring about the consummation of everything in the end. But it's so important that you spend this prolonged time with our Lord Jesus. Even in reading, you go through it and through it and through it and through it, and you see each history from different writers' perspective.

But the focus of everything is the Lord Jesus Christ. And why is this done? Because salvation comes by being drawn to Christ. What will the Holy Spirit do? He will speak of me, Jesus said. He will point you to me. And that's what He does in the revelation of these four gospels. Why is this important? Second Corinthians 3:18 says, "As you gaze at the glory of our Lord, you are changed into His image from one level of glory to the next by the Holy Spirit. Sanctification is the process of becoming more like Christ. Becoming more like Christ is the result of being more exposed to Christ, seeing the wonder of His person, being drawn by the Spirit to become more like Him.

This is directly connected to the salvation of sinners and the sanctification of saints, to be exposed to Christ, and though it would only take you hours to read these gospels, we have planned through the years that you would spend decades in these gospels so that you are literally, deeply, intimately involved in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. So this is an account that you can read four times.

The most full, sweeping record of this event is contained in the sixth chapter of John, and we'll make a reference to that. The miracle is so monumental that in John 6:14 and 15, we are told that the people tried to make Jesus the king. They tried to make Jesus the king. They would have liked nothing better than to have the ultimate welfare state where somebody creates your food for you. Talk about entitlement, that's it - that's it. Where you have a king who can heal all your diseases, free you from demons, raise your dead loved ones, and provide free food, that is ultimately it.

So there's little wonder that after He did this, they tried to make Him a king. What they would have liked was that He gather together some kind of grassroots army and head for Tiberius and overthrow Herod Antipas, who was a thorn in their sides, a very cruel ruler. They wanted - they wanted to overthrow this non-Jewish, Idumaeen, Herodian dynasty, and they might have been happy if they had gone after Philip the Tetrarch also who was in the adjacent region. And then after that, Jesus could take on the Romans and free them from Roman occupation. This - this idea that they would force Jesus to become a king came off of this miracle because it was so dramatic, so powerful.

Well, having said that, to look at the - rather than just the scene around it, to look at the person of our Lord Jesus, what I want you to focus on is that here is the picture of God the provider, Jehovah-Jireh is the Old Testament name for the Lord who provides. You see the deity of Christ in this desire to provide what men need, not only the desire to provide but the ability to provide. He is, in fact, the incarnation of Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord who provides.

The first thing we see Him providing is rest - rest. Look at verse 30 for just a moment. We've already gone over it a couple of weeks ago. The apostles gather together with Jesus, reported to Him all that they had done and taught. Remember early in the chapter before the account of the death of John the Baptist, they were sent out, they were delegated miracle power, told to preach the Kingdom, preach repentance, they did it. This lasted weeks, probably maybe just a few months. They come back. They gather with Jesus. This is reporting time, debriefing.

They probably came back to Capernaum, which was the headquarters of His ministry. They gather together to give their reports. They have gone out two by two, so there are at least six reporting teams that are coming back. We have no record of what they did. We can assume what they did. They were told to go and do exactly what Jesus did. They did miracles. They preached repentance. They preached the Kingdom.

He said to them - and they came back weary, worn out because the crowds crushed them because of their miracle power, they way they did Jesus. And He says, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." The first provision He makes is a provision for rest. We read in the book of Hebrews that He is a High Priest who understands our infirmities, who's touched with the feelings of our infirmities. He understands well that we need rest. It was our Lord Himself back in chapter 4, verse 38, that was so weary physically that He fell asleep in a boat with His head on a piece of wood in the middle of a storm, that's how tired He was. He knew what it was to be worn out, spent, exhausted and wearied.

And so He said, "Let's go to a secluded place and rest a while." Very tender, very sensitive to that, for there were many people coming and going, and they didn't even have time to eat. He knows their weakness and tenderly deals with it. So they went away in the boat. It's always the boat, definite article. May have belonged to one of the fishermen, and we know there were at least four and maybe as many as seven who were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, and it seems as though there was one boat sort of designated for their use. They went into the boat, headed to a secluded place by themselves.

Across the water, from Capernaum to the east, which was the least populated area, and that's where they were headed to get their seclusion. Luke 9, Luke 9 gives the account as well. Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 9, John 6. In Luke 9:10, it says He was taking them with Him. He was taking them with Him. He was the leader who was leading them to the place of rest. And then it says, "He took them to a

city called Bethsaida” - to a city called Bethsaida. That’s what Luke tells us. Mark doesn’t tell us where they went, but Luke fills that in.

This city is very likely Bethsaida Julias, a fishing village on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. We don’t know exactly the precise location of it. It was a small enough village that it didn’t leave any lasting ruins. But it had been built by Philip the Tetrarch, who was one of the Herodian brothers along with Herod Antipas, who inherited a section of the divided kingdom after Herod the Great’s death. Philip the Tetrarch, wanting to kowtow to Rome in order to hold his position.

Remember, these are non-Jewish, Idumaeen, Edomite descendants who had these little petty kingdoms. They really don’t rule anything, they don’t own anything. Rome rules everything and owns everything but kind of works its rule through them, and they assume to themselves the title king, although it is in the smallest and insignificant sense. They go to this place called Bethsaida, which was a village apparently named by Philip the Tetrarch for the daughter of Augustus Caesar. Because they held their position at the request of Rome and by the benefit of Rome, they did everything they could to kowtow to Rome, and frequently they named villages and towns in honor of Romans to sort of secure their places.

They didn’t actually go to that village but they went near that village. The crowd couldn’t have fit in that village. They would find a rather isolated place somewhere near the village of Bethsaida. Now, Bethsaida is an important village in the New Testament because it is the village where Peter and Andrew and Philip and Nathaniel, four of the apostles, the first four called to the Lord - John 1:43 and 44 - grew up. It was their town. It was where they learned their fishing trade. Everybody in town knew them, and everybody in that little village who knew them perhaps had just recently experienced their return.

It’s very likely that when the disciples were sent out, some of them went back to their hometowns, and eleven out of twelve were from Galilee, all but Judas Iscariot, and perhaps it was one of those four with another member of the twelve, they went out two by two, they went back to Bethsaida, did some miracles there, healed some people, cast out some demons, maybe even raised a dead person - we don’t have the record of that - but they had experienced gospel ministry. There’s little doubt that Jesus Himself had been there. He had literally traversed Galilee twice over the more than a year that He had already ministered there in Galilee.

So that little village had high exposure to the Lord Jesus, but nothing like they were going to have on this day - on this day - because it was near that little village that our Lord arrives on this day, heals many people - we’ll see that in a moment - and then does this massive miracle. One would expect that whatever the population of that little village, a few hundred, most of that village was there that day and was fed along with the rest of the crowd, as it tells us, who had come from cities and areas all over that part of Galilee. So they had a very intimate experience with the power of Christ.

Now, why is that important? It is important because of the words of our Lord in Luke 10 and also in Matthew 11:21, the same thing. But I’ll have you look at Luke 10. Luke 10:13, our Lord pronounces a judgment on Bethsaida. “Woe to you, Bethsaida.” Damnation, cursing, condemnation, judgment pronounced on you. “Woe” is actually an onomatopoeic word. An onomatopoeia is a word that sounds like its meaning. “Ouai,” that’s the Greek. “Ouai,” that’s a woe to you, Bethsaida, for if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. It’ll be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment

than for you.

When the great white throne judgment comes at the end of the world and universe as we know it, and all sinners are brought before the throne of God for their final sentencing into hell, the people who lived in Bethsaida are going to be sent to a hotter hell than the people who lived in Tyre and Sidon. That's a pretty severe judgment. Tyre and Sidon were two gentile cities on the north coast of Israel. The people there had descended from the Phoenicians. They had roots with the Philistines. Both cities were notoriously wicked seaports.

Seaports can be very wicked places because people arrive there who have been at sea for a very long time, and that can turn into a very sinful experience when they arrive. It was a town, both towns really, Tyre and Sidon, were noted for immorality, vice, Baal-worshiping idolatry, violence, crime, profanity, pride, greed, injustice, all imaginable iniquities and vices. In fact, it was such a wretched place that God pronounced through the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 25, Jeremiah 47, that He was going to destroy Tyre and Sidon, and He did. There was one other thing that they were guilty of, according to Amos 1:9, they were guilty of selling Jewish people as slaves.

So when Tyre and Sidon perished hundreds of years ago, they perished under the severe judgment of God. But as deserving as Tyre and Sidon were of the judgment of God, those cities would have repented in sackcloth and ashes if they had experienced the miracles that Bethsaida experienced. Bethsaida would have prided itself on being a loyal, devoted, ceremonially faithful synagogue city of Judaism.

But their hell will be worse than that of Tyre and Sidon. Those self-righteous, legalistic, traditional, thrill-seeking Jews will find it worse in judgment than idolatrous pagans. To whom much is given - what? - much is required.

Now, this miracle here is certainly the big reason for that judgment - for that judgment. If Tyre and Sidon, our Lord said, had seen anything like this, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes.

So they headed in the direction of Bethsaida Julias for rest and food. The Lord knew this was going to be very brief - very, very brief - in fact, almost nonexistent. The only rest they got was on the boat. They probably were able to eat while they were trudging across the north end of the Sea of Galilee, about four miles if you go from Capernaum to the point on the northeast shore where this village is believed to have been. It was eight miles if you went around by foot. The crowds were aggressive. The crowds were huge. They numbered in the multiples of thousands. Hard to get away from them.

So we move from the Lord's provision of rest, if ever so brief, He does understand the need for rest, to the provision of truth. The provision of rest takes a backseat to the truth, doesn't it? Rest is important but truth is more important, so in verse 33, the people saw them going, saw them leaving Capernaum, getting in the boat. Many recognized them, ran there together on foot from all the cities and got there ahead of them. The physically fit, the fastest of the bunch, the youngest of the bunch were already there waiting. They had run the eight miles before they could sail the four miles.

Matthew 14:13 says they came on foot, and that's what it says here. The idea would be you'd almost have to run the entire way to get there before our Lord arrived with His disciples in the boat. Why did they go? Why did they run to the other side? John 6:2 says, "Because they were seeing the signs He

was performing on those who were sick.” Always the thrill-seekers, always fascinated by the power of our Lord. They not only wanted themselves to be healed and delivered from demons but they loved to see this happen to other people. It was the best theater that had ever come to Galilee or anywhere else on the planet. So they ran to beat the boat, thrill-seekers wanting more.

You would think this would irritate our Lord, right? He’s looking for more rest. They’ve had a little while, not long on the boat, but the Lord surely knew they needed more rest. Enough time on the boat to eat their meal, they get to the other side, you would think Jesus would be irritated by the materialism and selfishness and superficiality, disturbed, He might reject their shallowness, but not so. This is an intrusion, and yet in Luke 9:11, it says He was welcoming them - He was welcoming them. Beautiful word, a full rich word, this is the heart of God to welcome people and their complex spiritual needs, to meet them with the truth.

This is what He came to do, wasn’t it? Preach the truth. This is a critical moment. So Luke 9:11 says, “He welcomed them and began speaking to them about the Kingdom of God.” Immediately He begins to speak to them. At the end of verse 34 it says, “He began to teach them many things.” So this is a long lesson. He literally begins Kingdom instruction. What would that be? He would explain the Kingdom of God and that it’s entered by the meek and the humble. He might have repeated the Beatitudes, which He gave earlier. Called them to repent, to believe in Him as the Son of God, the Messiah. He called them to come into the Kingdom by faith in Him, to receive the forgiveness of sins, eternal life.

Why did He do this? Verse 34. “Because when He went ashore and saw a large crowd, He felt compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” That is a very, very dramatic picture. Sheep without a shepherd will die. If you know anything about that, I learned most of what I know about sheep from my trips to New Zealand - and from a book written by a man named Bowen, who was a shepherd all his life, one of the leading shepherds of New Zealand and wrote an incredibly interesting book on sheep - from spending hours in sheep pens with shepherds, from watching how they deal with those sheep in most amazing ways and some unspeakable ways in New Zealand.

But I will tell you, they understood it full well. This was an agrarian culture, sheep were a very main element in their agricultural life, and sheep without a shepherd will die. They can’t feed themselves. They can’t protect themselves. If they get on their backs, they can’t even put themselves back on their feet. Somebody has to clean them. Somebody has to feed them. Somebody has to peck out of their lanolin-filled wool the bugs and the thorns that bother them and irritate them. Someone has to care for them, lead them to a safe place. Someone has to provide the place for them to drink. All of that.

One of the most graphic Old Testament pictures that God paints of Israel is this picture in Numbers 27:17, they are pictured like sheep without a shepherd. In 1 Kings 22:17, they’re like sheep without a shepherd. Second Chronicles 18:16, they’re like sheep without a shepherd. Ezekiel 34:5, they’re like sheep without a shepherd. That’s a very graphic and well-understood image. He realized they had no teacher. They had no one to feed them, no one to lead them to water, no one to clean them, no one to protect them and shelter them, no one to care for them.

And so, He, of course, the great Shepherd, the only true Shepherd, began to teach them many things, teaching that would cleanse them, teaching that would feed them, teaching that would protect

them, teaching that would lead them to eternal safety in the fold that He Himself cared for. So you see, then, that here is our Lord's provision for rest on a physical level, His provision for truth on a spiritual level. The third thing that happened on that day was a provision for healing.

You don't read that in Mark, but you do in Matthew. Matthew 14:14 says He went ashore and saw great multitude, felt compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And then it says He healed their sick - He healed their sick. Human suffering hurt Him, He felt the pain even if only temporal. People's suffering made Him suffer. People's sorrow made Him sad. He is merciful because God is merciful. In fact, when Matthew says He felt compassion, it uses a verb *splagchnizomai*. That speaks of *splanchnon*, which is the word for your internal organs. He felt it in his gut. He felt the pain where you feel pain and anxiety.

The message is: I have compassion on your pain and I also have compassion on your soul. I have compassion on your need for rest, but I am more concerned about your spiritual rest. I'm concerned that you get physical rest, but more that you get spiritual rest. I'm concerned that you have physical pain, but more important, I'm concerned about your spiritual suffering. I can not only heal your body, if you come to me, I'll heal your soul. I can not only give you physical rest, I can be the source of your everlasting rest.

So now we get to the main story in verse 35, the provision for food - for food. First for rest and then for truth and then for healing, and now the provision for food. "When it was already quite late, the day has gone on." He's been teaching all day. He's been healing many sick. "His disciples came to Him and said, 'The place is desolate and it is already quite late.'" The twelve said this to Him, sort of in unison, I guess. Maybe they had a spokesman to say it. They were all agreed on this. As they watched this thing going on, they collectively decided that it was getting late in the day and these people needed to eat.

Now, underlying that was the fact that they were all very hungry. I don't think the one meal on the boat across the north end of the sea had managed to fully satisfy the accumulated hunger that they had experienced over the weeks and months of being trampled by these crowds and their mission, so there was a little bit of selfishness in here. We're starting to feel our own stomachs gnawing. Food was a big issue in those days. There wasn't any fast food, you had to prepare it, you had to find a place to prepare it. The crowd was massive, as I said, as much as twenty-five thousand people, maybe even more than that.

Now, is the Lord going to respond to this? Well, you know He does because He fed them all. And I would suggest to you that this is the most exceptional testimony to common grace in the gospel record. When we talk about common grace, we're talking about the goodness of God without discrimination. You know, the Lord loves His enemies and He makes the sun to shine on the just and the unjust, and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust, and He allows the crops of the believers and the nonbelievers to grow.

And you know what common grace is, right? Even people who hate God, who reject God, who reject Christ, fall in love, have the joy of a new birth, a baby, love a baby, enjoy a sunset, enjoy a wonderful meal, take a vacation, wonder at the mountains and the rivers of this earth, enjoy the sweetness of life, the pleasures of life, all the things that God has built into life, all that common grace comes without discrimination. Nobody has to fill out an application to see a sunset. Nobody has to qualify to eat a delicious meal. Nobody has to pass some test to fall in love.

All of that is part of the fabric of common grace, which tells us that God is a God of goodness and grace and compassion and wants us to delight in His provisions. So He didn't ask for character references before people could eat. He didn't evaluate their motives. He took the best and the worst of them and acted in pity on everybody. He healed everybody. He fed everybody. He taught everybody. Those are the elements of common grace. The whole world enjoys the benefits of common grace. God, as it were, feeds everybody in the world every meal they eat because it all comes from His hand. It's not all instantaneously created, but it's all the result of His original creation.

All healing that takes place is a gift of God without discrimination. The body is the most marvelous healing machine in existence, it heals itself. That's part of common grace. He heals all, feeds all, and gives the wondrous gospel to all, teaching all His pity, His kindness. His benevolence extends to all people - that's what common grace is - no matter what their attitude toward Him. But He will only be the king now to those who believe in Him, He'll become their spiritual king. He didn't come the first time to be a king, He came to die. He will come the second time to be a King. But He is the king now of all those who believe in Him in a spiritual sense.

And, of course, again, He will feed them physical food, but this is simply a way for Him to demonstrate that He can also give them spiritual food. And if you read John's account, after this miracle of feeding, He goes to speak to them the next day and He is unwilling to feed them breakfast. What He does tell them is, "I am the bread of life if you take me, and you'll never hunger again."

His willingness to give physical rest was a symbol of His ability to give spiritual rest. His willingness to feed was evidence of His willingness to give spiritual food. His willingness to heal was symbolic of His willingness and His power to give spiritual healing. These are all symbols. He is, after all, the bread of life, and if you eat of that bread, you will never hunger.

So when it's already quite late, His disciples come and said to Him, "This place is desolate," it's *erēmon topon*, it means a lonely place. Doesn't mean that it's a desert. Some translations say a desert place. It's not a desert, they're sitting on grass. Grass doesn't grow in the desert. This is springtime on a beautiful Galilean hillside, hard to imagine a more beautiful place in the spring than that. A lovely place but a lonely place in the sense that it's isolated. It's near this village, and that's just one village, and it's less populated on that side of the lake.

It is not a desert, but it is an isolated place. What that means is, we already read they came from all the cities, and they're coming from all over the place. There is no way that there's an capability to feed this huge crowd.

His response is very surprising, in verse 37. "He answered them, 'You give them something to eat.'" What? That's also in Matthew 14:16, "You give them something to eat." Why did He say that? Well, what had they just been able to do? Cast out demons, heal the sick, raise the dead. He had told them He had delegated His power to them. He told them to tell men to repent and He preach the Kingdom. Preach my message, preach my sermon, and do my signs in my power.

Was He kidding? Well, they couldn't make the transition. They couldn't process that. Why? They'd never seen Him do this. Could it have been that they could have actually created the food? Well, if He had delegated that power to them and maybe if they had believed, maybe if one of them had said

to Him, "You know, I think we - we could spread out and if you would empower us, we could do that." But they don't have the faith to make that transition. That's just way beyond where they are. They've been doing individual type miracles, and so has He. This is just way too massive.

So they're now in a dilemma. According to John chapter 6, verses 5 to 7, Philip gets involved in the dilemma, and he's the bean counter in the group, so he comes up and says, "Well, we've got two hundred denarii." That would be totally about eight months wages for one person, that is not enough money to feed twenty-five thousand people, especially if you're going to stuff them all. And this is not hors d'oeuvres. That's not enough money. Plus, where are you going to go to buy that amount of food? There isn't anywhere to get that amount of food.

So Philip processes all of that, comes up with a cynical response, "We've got 200 denarii, that's it. What are we going to do with that? And besides, there's nowhere to go to get that kind of food if we had the money to buy it." And so cynically they said to Him, "Shall we go and spend 200 denarii on bread and give them something to eat?" And you can just hear them going, "Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha, funny joke," you know. Just laughing at the incredulity of that. And nobody seemed to think of 2 Kings 4 where the widow had the little cruse of oil and it just kept coming and coming and coming and coming and coming and coming.

They are sarcastic in their response. "We have no" - Luke 9:13 says, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." Funny joke. They're - instead of believing, they're sarcastic. In John, his account, verses 8 and 9 of chapter 6, "One of the disciples, Andrew" - Simon Peter's brother - "said to Him, 'There's a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish. What are these for so many people?'" He's not cynical, he's more gracious and he says, "Look, we - this is all we could find." Verse 38, He said to him, "How many loaves do you have? Go look."

So when they went to look, this is what they discovered. Andrew comes back and says, "Five loaves and two fish." I remember when I was a little kid hearing that story and thinking, "What mother in her right mind would give one kid five loaves of bread? That is absolutely nuts. What are you going to do with five loaves of bread?" Because all I ever saw in my house was Wonder Bread and all of them were about that long. I mean, that'd be enough to feed the neighborhood. But you have to understand that the word "loaves" is the word for a biscuit.

This is five kind of cracker-like things with some pickled fish. The fish could be very small and they could be caught and pickled and eaten with crackers. That was pretty much the standard diet around there. They grew grain, they turned grain into various forms of flat bread, and they caught fish out of the Sea of Galilee, very much like the fish they still catch there. So here's a little kid, this must be a standard boy lunch, five crackers and two pickled fish. You take the pickled fish, you put it on the cracker, that's lunch.

That's what they came up with - which is a good indication that out of this whole crowd, there was at least one mother who had her head screwed on right. Sending this little kid running off to go see Jesus, she at least had the foresight to give him something to eat. And this idea is just way too big for the disciples. This is so incredulous that we found this one kid and we're going to take his lunch away from him and all it is is five crackers and two fish.

Now, at this point, Luke injects what Mark waits to give you in verse 44 as kind of the capstone. There were five thousand men, about five thousand men. The word “men” is andres. It’s not the generic word for mankind, it’s the distinct word for males. And Matthew 14:21 adds, “Beside women and children,” so that’s how you get this thing up to twenty-five thousand people, and they’re looking at five crackers and two pickled fish and twenty-five thousand people. They just cannot process any solution to this.

Verse 39, “He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties.” This is one of those kind of commands that didn’t leave an option. This is a sovereign divine command. You’ve got a - you’ve got a mass of tens of thousands of people, crushing crowd, jammed together, clamoring to get nearer to see the actual miracles going on, and in one moment, He commands them all to separate, sort out, get into groups of hundreds and fifties, and sit in those separated groups quietly with aisles so that lunch can be served.

They don’t ask, “Why should we do that?” This is one of those commands that has only one possible response. Quietly, submissively, and amazingly they just get into their groups. They all sit down, the aisles are all ready, and they’ve got to be scratching their heads. And the apostles have to be doing the same. What is this about? But instantaneously, that mass of people go from a milling crowd to very ordered people, and they’re all sitting in a lovely place on the green grass - how nice - and waiting to see what’s going to happen. Well, it happens quickly.

Verse 41, “He took the five loaves and the two fish, looking up toward heaven” - to acknowledge where all food comes from, does it not? All of it. That’s why 1 Timothy 4 tells us, “All things are to be received with thanksgiving.” And the language here is a little bit misleading, it says, “He blessed the food.” We do that, don’t we? We follow that pattern, thanking the Lord for our daily food. This does not infuse the food with special blessing or special grace, this is just thanks. Thank you for providing for the food. Well, you can hear him saying, “Thank you, Lord,” and everybody looking and saying, “What in the world? Is He thanking the Lord for His own lunch that He took from a little kid?”

Then He begins to break up the loaves and kept giving them, kept giving them, kept giving them to the disciples who are the waiters to serve this massive crowd. This is late afternoon on this particular spring day. We don’t know how long that process took, but for whatever period of time it took, He just kept giving them food. Now understand, this is crackers made from barley that never was planted, and these are fish who never swam. These are fresh, dead fish who never were alive. This is the only uncursed banquet that any of those people would have ever gone to.

Was the food good? Ha! This is like eating in the Garden of Eden. These are uncursed crackers and uncursed fish. This is just an incredible thing to think about. And there was nobody who said, “I’m sorry, I don’t eat fish.” Ho-ho, I don’t think so. Every time I go out with people, there is somebody who says that. “I don’t like fish.” You’d like these fish. You know, just plain fish, cursed fish is good. Uncursed fish? Who could imagine what that would taste like?

So they all ate. They all ate. Everybody ate the crackers that came from the grain that was never planted and the fish that came from - the fish that never swam because they never lived. Nobody thinks about ceremonial washing and nobody thinks about tithing a portion of the fish and the crackers, nobody thinks about kosher preparation, they just eat. And it says they were satisfied. This is the best meal anybody ever had and they maxed out. The word “satisfied,” chortazō, means to fodder up an animal, like stuffing a bag on an animal’s nose until he eats it to the bottom. In fact, it’s

translated in Revelation 19:21 by the word in English “gorged.”

Now, you don't like to think that you went out to dinner tonight and gorged yourself, but you understand what that means. They gorged themselves on this. They'd never tasted anything like it, which means that the volume of food produced was just beyond comprehension. If a boy ate five crackers and two fish, did an adult eat ten crackers and four fish? Do the math. Twenty-five thousand times all of that? You've got hundreds of thousands of crackers broken up and scattered and hundreds of thousands of fish just coming out of His hands like that. And everybody eats until they're gorged and they can't eat any more.

And then a most interesting thing. They picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces and also of the fish. Now, Jesus did not have them pick this up because He was an anti-litter, pro-environmental clean-up advocate. He had them pick them up because when they picked it all up, it was twelve basketsful. The basket here is a Greek word that refers to a little traveling food bag or basket. It's kophinos, it's just a little travel bag like you'd carry your lunch or a meal in.

When it was all done, the precision of this thing is so staggering. Why are there twelve baskets left? Because there are how many apostles? Twelve. The precision is literally shocking. How can you process that? He knows how much to create so that everybody is gorged on the best fish and crackers they've ever had and there's twelve baskets exactly. The precision of it, the complexity of it is consistent with God's providence, how He uses an infinite number of contingent things and always achieves His perfect, precise end. This is our Lord, who orders the whole universe with perfect precision.

Well, as generous as He was, as much as He provided and showed Himself to be Jehovah-Jireh, what were they really seeing? They were seeing divine power, creation power, divine compassion demonstrated in the physical world as a symbol of what He wanted to do in the spiritual world. They were seeing divine control, no waste, meeting every need. No wonder in John 6:14 people said, “This is truly the prophet who is to come into the world,” echoing the language of Deuteronomy 18:15, which was Messianic. This is the Messiah.

Was it a real spiritual awakening? Hard to imagine that it wouldn't have been, right? No. No, after they'd eaten, they all dispersed. Jesus and the disciples got back in their little boat and went across, John tells us this, back to Capernaum. In the morning, guess what? Crowd's there again. What do they want? Breakfast - breakfast - and the same fish and crackers will be just fine. Jesus said no, you must eat and drink of me, I am the bread of life. It's time to get past just fulfilling your physical needs and get to the spiritual dimension.

Jesus would not be the permanent source of free food, but He would be the permanent source of spiritual food. They weren't interested in that. So the crowd began to dissipate. And even some of His own disciples, John 6:66 says, walked no more with Him. They left. They were like Judas, they were in it for what they could gain materially out of it. Jesus turned to the other disciples, His apostles, and said, “Will you also go away?” You remember Peter's great statement? “To whom shall we go? You and you alone have the words of eternal life. You give us the spiritual food.”

It did not create a great spiritual awakening in Galilee, and that's why the judgment of Bethsaida, the judgment of Chorazin, a nearby village, and the judgment of Capernaum will be greater in the day of

great judgment than the judgment that falls on Tyre and Sidon and even on Sodom and Gomorrah. The display of deity was unmistakable. This is just creation by the Creator. The faith of His own was strengthened. I'm sure there were some folks who because of this came to believe in Him. But for most, they were fickle.

They were the same kind of people that join the positive confession, Word-Faith, name-it-and-claim-it-health-wealth-and-prosperity gospel, for what they can get out of it in this life, and have no interest in the life to come. And with that triumphant miracle, Galilee's opportunity was over. How sad. How sad. Judgment is greater on those who have received more. It's a warning - isn't it? - to anyone who knows the story of Christ and rejects Him. Severer judgment than those who never heard. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you again for your Word. We thank you for its power, its clarity, its precision - just consistent with your nature. We thank you that you have brought us, as it were, to the table. Not to eat the fish and the crackers but to embrace Christ, to eat of His flesh and blood, to embrace Him, crucified and risen. Thank you that you provide for us salvation rest and spiritual healing and spiritual nourishment and spiritual life eternally.

I pray, Lord, that there would not be those who have experienced this today, who vicariously have been there, seen the power display, and then would walk away and turn their backs on Christ. May every heart here embrace the Redeemer, the Savior, Jehovah-Jireh, the One who provides all that we need. We know, Lord, as well that once we have embraced your spiritual provision, once we have entered into spiritual rest and spiritual wholeness, and once we have eaten the spiritual food, the bread that never leaves us hungry again, then you do promise to meet all our physical needs. You are the God who supplies all our needs according to your riches in Christ.

We thank you that you care for your own, you provide for your own. We give you praise for that, and we pray with the hope in our hearts that some who have been in the crowd today, like those around the little village of Bethsaida, will see the reality of this event, the Christ of this event, embrace Him as Lord. We pray in His name. Amen.

END

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