

The Lord Who Provides (John 6:1-15)

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We don't often think of arguments as good things. They are what we hope does not happen when our family or friends get together over the holidays. Some of us are probably already gearing up mentally to serve as peacemakers! May the Lord protect us from conflict and division this week and from being more concerned about defending ourselves than walking in love. Those are the sorts of arguments we don't want.

But sometimes arguments are a very good thing. The entire Gospel of John, in fact, is an argument. The author, most likely the Apostle John, is contending for something. He's presenting a catalogue of evidence to make a case for something. In 20:30-31, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

What does John want? What is the Holy Spirit who inspired him to write these words seeking? He wants us to believe Jesus, to trust Jesus, to stop looking to ourselves or other people to give us life and turn to Jesus. For then and only then will we discover true joy and life. And to push us in that direction John makes an argument.

The first 12 chapters of the gospel present 7 signs demonstrating the deity and life-giving power of Jesus. Changing water into wine in Ch. 2, healing the officials' dying son in Ch. 4, and healing man who had been lame for 38 years in Ch. 5 convincingly argue that Jesus is the Savior of the world who came to make right all that our sin has made wrong, starting with our broken relationship with God. Each of the signs shout, "Jesus is worthy of your obedient trust."

By the time we get to Ch. 6, however, there's a growing problem. No matter how many signs Jesus performs, no matter how many witnesses he summons, people continue to either completely misunderstand him or refuse to believe in him. Large crowds follow him, but not because they believe Jesus is the Son of God. He's a spiritual spectacle. They're simply enamored with all the miraculous signs he's doing.

It's not genuine faith. It's signs faith, a false faith that runs no deeper than the material gifts he's given us lately. In 6:2, "And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick." Both a pretense of faith and explicit unbelief increase over the next 6 chapters until they culminate in widespread, outright rejection of Jesus on the part of the people and their leaders alike at the end of Ch. 12.

Yet the Savior continues to demonstrate his divine power, confronting us with sign after sign, reason after reason to trust and obey him. He doesn't mock. He doesn't scorn. He graciously reveals the depth of our insufficiency and the abundance of his provision. Why does Jesus do that? To compel us to turn from our pride and humbly confess that no need is too great for the Lord who provides. We need a Savior and Jesus is that Savior. That's what the feeding of the 5,000 in Jn 6 is all about. No need is too great for the Lord who provides.

1) JESUS REVEALS THE DEPTH OF OUR INSUFFICIENCY (vv. 3-9)

V. 4, "Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand," is significantly more than a chronological marker. It provides the biblical background, the redemptive-historical lens we need in order to recognize what Jesus is teaching us about himself and, in turn, our need for him. The festival commemorated the greatest act of deliverance in their national history – the exodus from Egypt.

For 400 years, God's people suffered the oppression of slavery. Until one night, the Lord decisively intervened. He told every Israelite family to kill a lamb and paint some of the blood over the door of their house. When the angel of death went through the land, he killed all the firstborn sons of Egypt, but he passed over every home covered in blood. It was a foreshadow of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Pharaoh immediately begged the Israelites to leave. They didn't even have time to leaven the bread they were cooking. They grabbed what possessions and ran, rescued by the strong arm of the Lord. The Passover festival represented God's faithfulness to provide for his people, not just physical food, but all that we need, beginning with salvation from sin and the judgment we deserve.

The God who delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt back then was the same God sitting with his disciples in the hill country east of the Sea of Galilee. And he was no less aware of the physical and spiritual needs around him. He lifted up his eyes and saw "a large crowd" coming toward them, about five thousand men. Assuming women and children among them, it was probably somewhere in the range of 15,000 people.

Jesus knew they had been looking for him for a long time, so he turns to one of his disciples who grew up in the area, Philip, and says, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" No impatience. No eye roll. No, "Go away and leave us alone!" He didn't see an inconvenience. He saw an opportunity to provide. Jesus sees you too,



friend, and is no less aware of your own needs, food included. Your plight is not hidden from the Almighty. Even when our motives for seeking him are just as selfish as the crowd, his attitude remains one of pronounced compassion.

But Jesus didn't just see the crowd's physical need for food. He saw a deeper spiritual need in his disciples. He asks Philip, "Where are we to buy bread?" not because he doesn't know what to do but to test him. What's he testing? Philip's answer in v. 7 tells us. "Two hundred denarii (8 months of wages for a laborer) would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."

Have you ever felt like Philip? You know God has given you a responsibility to care for another individual or maybe a large group of people. You feel duty bound to serve them, but the need staring you in the face is utterly overwhelming. You want me to love my wife like Christ loves the church? You want me to be patient with that coworker who does nothing but question my leadership and tear me down? You want me to be a mom for 3 kids under 4? You want me to talk to that friend about Jesus? You want me to preach how many sermons over the next 30 years? I just lost my job, Jesus. I've got nothing in the bank. How am I supposed to do that?

Philip was right. "Jesus, even if we could find a place that had enough bread, there's no way we could afford it. It's impossible." He admits the utter inadequacy of human means of solving the problem at hand and Andrew follows suit. "Lord, there's a kid here with five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" We have dinner for one and fifteen-thousand hungry people.

What do you assume when the Lord makes you aware of a need in your circle of relational responsibility? Do you immediately conclude you have to find a way to solve the problem, to dig deep and grind it out where lesser mortals have failed? Or despair if you feel like you can't? I do. It feels "responsible," doesn't it? The problem isn't feeling responsible. The problem is what we do with our sense of responsibility. We tend to flip between a self-pity that arrogantly concludes what God is asking of us is impossible and a self-sufficiency that arrogantly concludes we can handle the situation on our own.

Friends, when God sets an overwhelming need before you, a challenge that feels impossible, he's not trying to frustrate you or kill you. He's on a mission to satisfy and thrill your soul with himself. He loves you and is giving you an opportunity to recognize the true depth of your inability so you can learn to rest and rejoice in his ability. The path of joy isn't a path of periodic help from God. The path of joy is the path of knowing God through moment-by-moment dependence on God.

The first step down that path is acknowledging the depth of our insufficiency. When you're tempted to throw your hands up in despair or charge ahead in self-reliance, remember that. God isn't messing with you and he doesn't need you. He's loving you by showing you just how much you need him. Point #1, Jesus reveals the depth of our insufficiency.

2) JESUS DISPLAYS THE ABUNDANCE OF HIS PROVISION (vv. 10-13)

What Philip and Andrew had to offer didn't just need shorn up in a few places. It was woefully inadequate. Five little loaves and two fish. What are they for so many? In the hands of the disciple, they were nothing. But not in the hands of God.

If I were Jesus, you know what I would be tempted to say at this point? "Alright, guys, move over and let a professional take care of this." But Jesus doesn't do that, does he? He takes the loaves in his hands and gives thanks to God the Father. Why would the Son of God who fashioned the earth out of nothing bother to take the loaves and fish in his hands? Why not dismiss his disciples' paltry offering with an omnipotent wave?

It's not because he needs us. It's because he delights to use us and loves to display his power in our weakness. It's the upside-down logic of the kingdom of God. We look at our weakness and despair. Jesus takes our weakness and transforms it into a theater for the power of God.

He thanks his Father for what he has already provided, for what looked weak and foolish in the eyes of the world, and he thanks his Father for what he is about to provide. As the Son of God, Jesus already knows how he's going to feed everyone. But as the Son of Man, he's modeling something for us here, friends. He's modeling the childlike faith that knows nothing is too hard for God.

Do you? Do you thank God for what he has given you, even when it looks woefully inadequate? Or do you wring your hands in despair? One of the surest signs of unwillingness to trust God for what he has yet to give is a failure to give thanks for what he has already given. And one of the best ways to strengthen our trust in God while we wait for his provision is to diligently give thanks for what he has already given us. For you have the same Father Jesus does, Christian, a good Father who has promised to lavishly provide all we need for life and godliness.

Having given thanks, Jesus begins to distribute food to the multitude – every man, every woman, every child. He gave to them and kept on giving to them until they had (v. 11) “as much as they wanted,” and (v.12) “had eaten their fill.” In fact, his provision was so abundant that the twelve disciples each had a full basket of leftovers afterward. It was an absolute miracle. Jesus created abundance in the midst of lack, plenty in the midst of poverty, provision in the midst of their need. The meal is over, and they still have more food than when they started! How many of you cooks in the room wish that was your experience after dinner last night? It’s not an accident. It’s the entire point of the story. Jesus isn’t a miser. He’s a generous King. No need is too great for the Lord who provides.

The physical bread Jesus gave them more than satisfied their stomachs, but it also symbolized something else, something that will emerge even more clearly in the second half of Jn 6. Jesus is the true bread of life, not on account of the material blessings he gives but on account of who he is. We can trust him to provide for our physical needs in miraculous ways. But there is only one provision, one gift, that can quench the deepest longings of the soul and that’s the Lord himself.

To know him, to believe and obey him, is to experience a satisfaction and life, a fullness of joy in relationship with God, that even death itself cannot take away. And that means the ultimate measure of the Lord’s provision for you, Christian, isn’t your spouse, your kids, your friends, or your paycheck, as good as those things are. Nor is it a gift we’re waiting to receive, though you may have yet to appropriate it by faith. It’s a gift we have already been given, the unspeakable Christmas gift of the infinitely glorious God – given and revealed to us through the person and work of Jesus.

He is abundantly able to give us all we need and what those we are called to serve need. Where we are weak, Jesus is strong. Where we are poor, Jesus is rich. Where we are ignorant, Jesus is wise. Where we don’t have what it takes, Jesus does. Where our resources are inadequate, his resources are wholly sufficient. What is impossible with men is possible with God. No need is too great for the Lord who provides.

What did the Lord say to the Apostle Paul? 2 Cor 12:9, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” So what did Paul say to the Corinthians? 2 Cor 9:8, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”

CONCLUSION



Jesus reveals the depth of our insufficiency so that we might see and cling to the abundance of his provision. You might think the crowd he supernaturally fed that day would have done as much. Their initial response certainly seems to point in that direction. V. 14, "When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!'"

They got two things right. First, they recognized the miracle wasn't an end in and of itself. It was a sign. It pointed to the power and identity of Jesus. Second, they recognized Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecy Moses made thousands of years earlier in Deut 18:15, "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."

Yet the crowd got the most important thing terribly wrong. Instead of submitting to Jesus they tried to use him to fulfill their own priorities and purposes. In v. 15, Jesus perceives "they were about to come and take him by force to make him king." It's not surprising. "Moses led us out of slavery in Egypt. Surely the Prophet par excellence will lead us out of slavery to Rome. Let's make him a king and get this party started!"

If you think you can "make" Jesus a king, then you have no idea who he is. The crowd certainly didn't and nor do many people today. Jesus is the King of the Universe, seated at the right hand of the Father, whether we want him to be or not! And his kingdom isn't the kingdom of this world. It's the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. If you're a Christian, his kingdom is your kingdom, which means you're not part of the kingdom of this world either.

Sadly, we often act like the kingdom of this world is the best thing going. We try to "take back the nation for God" or pin all our hope for the future on a certain candidate elected or keeping a certain party in office. What do so many of our political fixations and anxieties reveal, friends? That we're just like the crowd in Jn 6. We're trying to build the kingdom of God on earth instead of remembering our citizenship is in heaven and that only King Jesus can give us the joy and life we desperately need.

If your hope for the future rises when your candidate wins or sinks when your candidate loses, it means you have invested your hope in the kingdom of this world instead of in King Jesus. Friend, you won't find a ballot box in the world that can make all things new. Jesus can and Jesus will. Don't hope in a political party. Hope in him!

And take care that you let Jesus define what you really need instead of trying to cajole him into providing what you think you need. The crowd wanted Jesus to deliver them



from the oppression of Rome. They tried to use Jesus instead of trusting and obeying Jesus. So often we're no different. Jesus, make my life easy. Jesus, make my life comfortable. Jesus, give me this relationship. Jesus, give me that possession. I'll gladly submit to you as my king if you give me what I want.

Friends, Jesus knows what we really need. We need deliverance from slavery to sin and the death our sins deserve. We need the smile of God's favor. We need the joy of eternal life, the hope of heaven, and the promise that we will always be with the Lord. That's exactly what Jesus came to do by laying down his life for us and exactly what you can experience through faith in him.

Praise God he doesn't take his cues from us! Try to avail yourself of his sufficiency for your aims and Jesus will lovingly disappoint you. Avail yourself of his sufficiency for his aims and watch him do what only he can do. Choose this day to trust him. Choose this day to cast your cares on him. If you do, friend, Isa 25:6-9 describes the provision Christ himself has stored up for you.

"On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.'"