



INTRO:¹

Back in high school, I had the privilege of getting to see the Sistine Chapel. I don't know if you've ever seen IT or pictures of it, but up until the point of visiting the only thing I knew of it was that it's ceiling featured THIS picture (SHOW PIC) - What's been called the "Hand of God" by Michelangelo. Now here's the thing: I love this picture. Loved it so much that BEFORE visiting the Chapel I THOUGHT it was the only picture IN the Chapel. Come to find out, THIS is ACTUALLY the chapel ceiling! (SHOW CEILING) - So you can imagine my surprise when I saw all this. I think I spent the next hour just staring at that ceiling from about every angle I possibly could - just trying to take in all the different facets and frescos of this masterpiece... In a very similar way, THAT'S what we're trying to do with the **Gospel of John**: Take a look at all the different facets and frescos John gives ABOUT Jesus... IN ORDER TO... see what God's REALLY like. Because as the Philosopher Thomas Carlyle said, "*we are like the gods we serve,*" meaning you conduct your life according to whatever concept of God you have, meaning it's essential then, that ya have the RIGHT concept!... TODAY, what you're gonna see about God, are some really important things with respect to Him being your provider/God's provision, which given this being Advent/Christmas feels incredibly relevant, since this, of course, is the time of year when provision is maybe most on our minds... SO let's **Read Our Passage** together; AFTER which I'll **Pray**, and we'll dig in!

PASSAGE READING > PRAYER:

Read with me in **John, chapter 6** beginning in **v.1**: *After this, meaning sometime after Jesus healed the invalid at the pool, we discussed last week, (He) 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 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. Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip - one of His disciples - 'Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?' He said this to TEST him, for he knew what he would do. Philip answered him, 'Two hundred denarii worth of bread wouldn't be enough for each of them to (just) get a little.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?' Jesus said, 'Have the people sit down.' Now there was much grass in the place. So the MEN sat down, about 5000 in number. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he'd given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. Also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.' So they gathered em up and filled 12 baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the Prophet who is come into the world!' Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself." ...**Let's Pray**: "Father God, there is so much wonderful news here; about*

¹ Works consulted:

- Appropriating Christ's Power & Sufficiency - John 6:1-14 - R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 184-185.
 - Channels of His Power - Gospel of John, Part 1 - March 17, 1991 - John 6:1-14 + I Am the Bread - John - On Knowing the Christ - December 13, 1998 - John 6:5-13; 32-35 + The Feeding - Seeing Jesus - February 9, 2014 - John 6:1-14, 27-35 - *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive, 2014-2015* (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2014)
 - A Coronation Escape - Sep 7, 2022 - Larkcast - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000578682478>
 - He Gave Us Provision - Dec. 19, 2021 - Doxa Church - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/doxa-church-sermons/id979187169?i=1000545464640>

what you're really like. SO MUCH good news I fear not being able to cover it all, much less adequately explain it. And so I pray, as George Whitfield used to pray before teaching: 'help me simply introduce the truth of this passage, so that WE might then work it out in our families, marriages, workplaces, for our neighbors, and the like! We pray this in Jesus' name! Amen!'

CONTEXT:

Now the astute among you, will see that from last week to today, we've skipped over **John 5 vv.19-47**. And that's NOT because it's not good. It's INCREDIBLY good/I encourage you to study it on your own, since IN it Jesus presents some incredible evidence with respect to the authority He possesses to've been able to heal the invalid we looked at last week. So not skipping it because it's not good, but because REALLY the question Jesus is facing at this point in His ministry is, "*What now?*" As the Pharisees have moved to not just persecute Jesus but actually put into motion a plot to have Him killed, Jesus is having to figure out, *what now?* Cuz of course, anytime ya come up against an obstacle in life **right**, really, the only two options are to **One**, back away and fold or **Two**, double down! And thankfully, when it came to His mission of going to the Cross to save you and I from our sins, Jesus was not one to fold. Rather, with THIS miracle of taking a little boy's Hebrew Happy Meal, and using it to feed upwards of 15,000 people, and I say 15,000 since you see in **v.10**, John just notes that there were 5000... "*men*"; so scholars agree that with women and children we're likely talking around 3-4 times that! But with THIS miracle, Jesus really is doubling down in perhaps the clearest way yet, on who HE is as the Messiah! And it IS the "clearest way yet," BECAUSE apart from the resurrection, this is the only one of Jesus' miracles recorded in all 4 Gospels. Not to mention, we're told that 500 or more people witnessed that, but with this miracle, we're again talking about 15-20 THOUSAND! It's incredibly public, BECAUSE it's incredibly paradigmatic. Not only do ALL the Gospel writers want you to see this, BUT Jesus wants you to see this, since ya notice there in **v.6**, John is very clear to tell us that Jesus set this whole thing up as a "*test*" for His disciples. And not "*test*" in terms of evaluating their success and failure AS disciples, but "*test*" in terms of giving His disciples/giving YOU and me, an opportunity to have our faith deepened. That's what God's "*tests*" in your life are all about. They're not indictments on you, but rather indicators of where your faith is, and THEN instruments for helping you go deeper IN faith. This miracle is showing us something about who Jesus really is, what God's really like, and therefore in whom we trust!

OBJECTION:

Now, before we unpack the miracle itself, I have to say, I KNOW some of you are thinking/and maybe you've been struggling with this THROUGHOUT John, but struggling with the whole idea of signs and miracles in the first place. Totally natural! But let me just give you a couple BRIEF thoughts. **First**, Scholars are almost universally agreed that **John** along with the other 3 Gospels, were being circulated around the Mediterranean/Palestine within about 40 years from the time of the events recorded in em. So ya gotta consider that if a miracle like this, in front of 15,000 people, in a small Hebrew town, was NOT done, then there'd really be no way that just a few years later a document saying it HAD been done, could've credibly circulated around. Frankly, if this miracle DIDN'T happen then there's no way the Gospel of John would've ever gotten off the ground saying it did. And THEN really no way the Christian religion would've

gotten off the ground. You gotta consider that!...**Second**, if you're the kind of person that says, *"I believe in God but not all miracles,"* very simply, I gotta ask ya to consider how really UNREASONABLE it is to rule out miracles when believing IN God. Cuz of course, a God who can't do miracles isn't really a God in the first place...And then **Third**, if you're the kind of person that says, *"I DON'T believe in God, because I DON'T believe in miracles/I just believe in natural laws, like the law of gravity and laws of thermodynamics"* for example, I gotta ask YOU to consider how also UNREASONABLE it is to believe in natural laws/laws of nature WITHOUT believing in God. Cuz you understand, if there's no God then there's nothing governing nature/there are no natural laws. There's only chaos. And yet, we know there's natural laws that've been put in place. So honestly, it feels like a BIGGER leap of faith to believe that those natural laws came out of nowhere or were the product of some random evolutionary process than to believe in a God who's governing and sustaining the world...**My point is:** Don't get hung up on the miracle. Let the miracle get you to contend with Jesus!

TEXT SUMMARY:

Cuz essentially what we HAVE with this miracle is Jesus and His disciples having become so popular that they'd begun to draw unwieldy crowds. As **v.2** there says, *"A great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he'd performed on the sick"* - like with the official's son and the invalid at the pool that we've discussed. So as Jesus is BOTH becoming increasingly popular and increasingly hated by the Pharisees, He and His disciples are lookin for a place to rest. The Gospel of Mark along with **v.1** you see there actually tells us that Jesus and His disciples took a boat ride *"to the other side of the Sea of Galilee"* SO THAT that they could have a *"quiet place and get some rest."* Only problem is, their quiet place turns out to be something akin like a Hebrew Woodstock minus the drugs and music. Cuz you see in **v.10** - that this *"crowd"* - followed Jesus to a giant field/a place where, it says, *"there was much grass."* And so with it getting late, Jesus, as **v.5** says, *"lifts up his eyes, and seeing the large crowd says to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?'"* And Mark actually tells us that *"when (Jesus) saw (the) great crowd, he had compassion on em, because they were like sheep without a shepherd."* Literally, He was overcome with love and a desire to serve them both in their spiritual and physical need! So again He turns to Philip and says, *"we gotta get food for these 15,000 people"* - UNDERSTANDING, as I mentioned already, that He already knew what He was gonna do/that He was gonna use this as an opportunity to deepen His disciples' faith.

And I love the nervous responses of the disciples: Cuz first you got Philip there in **v.7**. And Philip's your classic engineer-type. On a church staff, he's your Executive Pastor/your finance guy. Cuz he hears Jesus say, *"we gotta feed these people"* and he looks up, surveys the crowd, does a few mental calculations - add 10, carry the 1, divide by 15,000 - and HE comes to the conclusion that not even *"200 denarii - or 200 days worth of wages - would be enough for each person to even have a little food."* Philip's your realist! Looks at the facts and says "impossible!"

And then you got Andrew, there in **v.8**. And I like Andrew cuz he reminds me of a lot of church planters, in that he's the mixed bag of zeal and disappointment. Years ago, I remember a counselor telling of group of us church planters and Pastors here in the city that we needed to

understand that we are, naturally speaking: *“Psychologically predisposed...to disappointment.”* And I remember him saying that and being like, *“Yup!”* Cuz what he meant was not that we’re these grumpy people, always seeing the negative in things - I HOPE not - but rather that we see the great possibility IN things, but then no matter how those things go, it’s never enough! - *“God, I believe you wanna see a healthy expression of your family planted in South Boston, even though there hasn’t been one here in years! And now God you’ve miraculously had Hub here for over 9 years! God, I believe you can use an everyday guy like me to teach the Bible, so we’ll uproot and move to a city we’ve never known, and miraculously you’ve now you’ve given us a great reputation in our neighborhood, given us the resources to give away thousands of dollars; baptize people almost every Easter; see people come to faith and grow in their faith, and you’ve literally done it ALL from scratch!...But ah it’s not enough!”* That’s Andrew. Cuz he says, *“Jesus, there IS a boy who’s willing to give up his lunch/his 5 barley loaves and 2 fish. So I think we’ve got something here...Ah never mind, what are they for so many?”*

And real quick, cuz it’s easy to miss, but that little detail about the bread being *“barley,”* that shows you that this little boy was very likely...poor. Cuz barley was the bread OF the poor. Back when the English were waring against the Scots, they used to say in disparagement, *“Barley is grain, which in England, is fed to horses, but in Scotland fed to people.”* It was the bread of the poor. So in offering his bread and fish to Jesus, what you’re supposed to see with this child is that he’s very clearly poor, and his belongings are totally insignificant in relation to the need at hand. AND YET, he offers it anyway. Gives up his lunch/maybe the last lunch he’ll eat for a while, so that Jesus can’t just use it, but TRANSFORM it! It says, **vv.11-13**, *“Jesus took the loaves, and when he’d given thanks, distributed em to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they’d eaten their FILL, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the LEFTOVERS, that nothing may be lost.’ So they gathered em up and filled 12 baskets.”* 12 baskets of leftovers SHOWING you the just super-abounding nature of Jesus’ power AND grace! ***Cuz remember in the OT God fed Israel in the desert?*** Gave em bread called mana, as this very clear sign of His power and grace. Cuz of course the desert was this dead place where nothing could grow. And yet, here was God literally creating and sustaining life IN that dead place. ***But remember what the deal was with the mana?*** Israel was only allowed to gather by the day ***right?*** And if they tried to gather more than that, the bread would rot...So no leftovers. You got what you needed so you’d depend on God. But with Jesus, you get MORE than you need - a superabundance so that you might not just depend on Him, but rejoice IN Him!

And so it says, **v.14**, *“When the people saw the sign He’d done, they said, ‘This is indeed the Prophet who’s to come into the world!’ (But) Perceiving that they were about to take him by force to make him king - because who of us wouldn’t want what we think is a genie in charge - Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”* Because of course, Jesus isn’t interested in being your genie! Isn’t interested in having fans or even having you put Him over your life like a filter. He wants you as His follower. And to HAVE you as His follower meant, not just feeding or fixing your immediate problems, but forgiving your sin from which every problem comes!

So ya see, this isn't, as some have said, a story about "the power of sharing as caring," and how Jesus inspired a little boy to give up his lunch, so that when others saw it, they TOO were inspired to give up theirs, so that TOGETHER, everyone got fed. No! This is a story about JESUS and therefore what GOD is really like! And what ya see are **2 Things** about God: Write these down: **First, He's One who doesn't like the suffering in your life or in the world any more than you do!** Or if I could say it positively, He cares DEEPLY about the brokenness in and around you. Cuz have ya noticed yet, that every time Jesus does a miracle/including this one, it kinda makes you go, "*what's this about?*" Cuz really, none of Jesus' miracles TRULY display His power. I mean, with this one, you almost get the sense that you could've easily missed it. Cuz it's not like Jesus went all Oprah and said, "*you get a loaf, you get a loaf, EVERYBODY gets a loaf.*" No, He just blesses the food, and then after awhile, the people've had their full, and they realize there's leftovers...His miracles aren't primarily proofs of his power. **Cuz honestly, if they were, don't you think he coulda done a better job?** They're not! Jesus' miracles are assaults on suffering: Feeding someone who's hungry. Healing someone who's sick. Opening the eyes of someone who's blind. Even resurrecting the dead. EVERY one of Jesus' miracles is an assault on the injustice, brokenness, decay and ultimately death brought about by sin. And you say, "*Why doesn't God just wipe that out now? Why even allow suffering?*" And honestly, while I think there's a ton of good, Biblical answers, the ULTIMATE answer is: We don't know why in every case. Every religion and philosophy since the dawn of time has been trying to answer that question. But what we DO know - as evidenced by miracles like THIS - is that God HATES your suffering...to the point that, in the end, He didn't just break bread to feed a one-time hungry crowd, He allowed His own Son - the bread of life - to be broken in order to one-day eradicate all suffering, and in the meantime forgive the sin that's brought that suffering about in the first place. So Friend, this is a God to whom you can take your suffering/take your outrage ABOUT suffering, and KNOW that He understands it to the depths!

Second and Finally, You see in this that: **God is One who wants to use YOU to be a part of healing the suffering AROUND you.** Or said another way, He wants to use you as a conduit of HIS power IF you'll hand over YOUR power! And ya see this, not only in the sacrificial example of the little boy, but in the fact that, really, this entire episode is Jesus setting up this miracle in such a way as to, basically, show His disciples what life and ministry is gonna look like from here on out. It's Jesus literally leading His disciples into despair with respect to their resources and the problem at hand, SO THAT they'll depend on Him to provide what only He can provide! **Do you know, that's kind of a rule with God?** That He likes to you bring you to end of YOURSELF, so that it's clear where HE begins. He likes to reveal your INSufficiency, so that His SUFFiciency becomes apparent. You understand, God is not only one who can get you OUT of trouble, shockingly, He'll often lead you INTO it. And I KNOW you won't hear that from the Prosperity Gospel/cheap-grace/Instagram preachers, but it's true. Just consider that JESUS Himself, according to **Matthew 4**, was literally LEAD by the Holy Spirit, into the wilderness to be tempted for 40 days. Jesus lead His disciples here into an "impossible" situation. Because the reality is: Until you know your powerlessness, you can't be a channel of His power. That's Step 1 in every 12-step program **right?** "*Admitting, you're powerless over your problem*" And I know some of you haven't had to admit that, cuz you've really made it - professionally, relationally,

financially...spiritually - But can I tell you? Because God loves you, there WILL come a season when you realize you can't manage it all: your marriage, children, your career, your mental health, just you're ability to please God. And you'll see that you really are powerless. In that moment, you gotta realize Friend: That's God! It's Jesus, like a surgeon, not cutting you just to make a hole in you, but cutting you, ever so carefully/lovingly, to heal you of the cancer of your self-sufficiency. Because THAT'S a cancer that not only keeps you from experiencing Jesus' provision BUT keeps you from being a conduit OF that provision to those around you... ***God understands and hates suffering. And He wants to use you to be a part of healing the physical and spiritual suffering around you, IF you'll give Him your "5 loaves and 2 fish" as it were!***

So let me close by saying: If you're thinking you wanna be that kinda conduit, but ya just feel it's too hard to obey, or maybe KEEP obeying, cuz it seems like ya trust God for a minute only to find yourself distrusting Him the next. Or maybe ya just feel like your "5 loaves and 2 fish" are too insignificant - you don't have much money, much talent, much time, or you just feel too broken yourself - WHATEVER the thought - let me encourage you: The God who's asking you trust Him/give up your "power" in order to become a conduit of His...is NOT a stingy God. He's a God of SUPER-abundance! Not just cuz He can take a little boy's lunch and turn it into the biggest meal that boy's prolly ever had, but because He has been willing NOT just to die FOR YOU, but rise BEFORE you! Super-abundance! Everything released into His hands is released into the hands of a SUPER abundant God! So come to Him today. Give yourself to Him...Trust him...***Let's Pray...***