



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 6: 1-15

Spring 2022

"Loaves and Fishes"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and happy Mothers' Day to all of our mothers, and those of you who may be visiting us. We are in the Gospel of John. We have finished the first five chapters and this morning we're beginning chapter 6, a great passage; and another one of our Lord's miracles. I'm going to read through the first 15 verses, that's our text, verses 1 through 15,

6 After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). *(That was the Roman name for the sea or lake),* ² A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. *(Now that tells us something: We have a certain limited number of 'signs', (or miracles), that the Lord did, but here you have indicated that the Lord had done a number of miracles. In fact, John ends his book by saying, 'If he were to record all of them, the books of the world would not contain all that He had done.')*

³ Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. ⁵ Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?"

[Now I want to pause and say something else about that. If you're familiar with this miracle, (and I'll refer to the other Gospels, particularly Mark, as we go through this), you know that He sits down, He sees this multitude coming to Him, and then He teaches them all through the day, ("many things", Mark

says, 4:2). And at the end of the day He proposes this problem to the disciples; 'How are we going to feed these people?'

Well, John has evidently 'telescoped' all of this. He either presumes that we know the details of this day or he simply comes to the main point that he wants to make: Jesus sees the crowd at the beginning of the day and now we are at the end of the day when He proposes to Phillip the problem of 'Where are we going to buy food to feed these people?' Now we have the statement of verse six,]

⁶This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. ⁷ Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." ⁸One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, ⁹"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" ¹⁰Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. ¹¹Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost." ¹³So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. ¹⁴Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

¹⁵So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

John 6: 1-15

(Message) In an address to his students at Princeton Seminary in the early 20th century, B. B. Warfield told them, "...to keep always before them two things. First", he said, "is the immensity of the task before you. And the second is, The infinitude of the resources at your disposal." That's good counsel for seminary students and ministers of the Gospel, but it's equally good for all Christians as we seek to live the Christian life. We have infinite resources at our disposal to enable us to live that life faithfully and

profitably because our God is infinite and always willing to bless us according to our needs and according to His power. It is that Lord, it is that God, who is revealed in the miracle of the loaves and fishes, the fourth sign, or miracle, in the fourth Gospel—and one of the Lord's most remarkable.

Now every miracle is remarkable by definition but this one is particularly notable for a couple of reasons. First, it is the most public of all His miracles. Of all of the miracles recorded in the four Gospels, this one was seen by the most people, over 5000. Secondly, aside from the resurrection, it is the only miracle that is recorded in all four Gospels which suggests that the Holy Spirit considered it especially important. It demonstrated the reason Christ came into this world, which is to give life. Without food we die; but He gave a banquet, signifying the joyful life He gives. And doing it for a multitude showed He is sufficient for all of our needs.

John began the chapter, "After these things," meaning after the events of chapter 5. But not immediately after: Chapter 6 actually occurred some six months to a year later. In the meantime, between the two chapters, John the Baptist was beheaded by King Herod and Jesus expanded His ministry in Galilee—and had done many more miracles.

Mark explains that Herod was very alarmed by what was going on in the Lord's expanded ministry and was afraid that John the Baptist had come back to life. He was haunted by that fact—and that meant there was unrest and possible trouble brewing.

It was a sad time and it was a tense time. So Jesus took His 12 disciples to the east side of the Sea of Galilee, out of Herod's territory and away from danger, to have some time of quiet—and maybe time to mourn the loss of His friend.

He'd gone up into a mountain in the area we know today as the Golan Heights, a place that overlooks the whole region. That's where He looked for some quiet—but it didn't last long. After He sat down, John said, 'He saw a large crowd coming around the northern rim of the sea.' (vs5). They had followed Him from the western side because

John wrote, "They saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick."
(vs2).

It disrupted His schedule but He wasn't annoyed by it; just the opposite. Mark wrote that when He saw the multitude He had "compassion" on them, because they were "like sheep without a shepherd". (Mar 6:34). So like a shepherd, He cared for them. 'He taught them many things,' Mark said, 'until it was evening and the people were very hungry.'

John wrote that all of this happened around the time of the Passover. Now he included that time note not so much for chronology, as theology. This was a significant time of the year for the Jews. Passover was the Jewish 'Independence Day'. It marked the time of Israel's deliverance from slavery when God brought the nation out of Egypt by a strong hand, and into the wilderness; a howling wasteland where they were entirely dependent upon Him. And the LORD faithfully provided for their every need, daily—so that every day for 40 years they witnessed His absolute sufficiency.

Now that was the situation in Galilee: Passover had come, a time when the Jewish nation would recall God's great deliverance of it and His constant, miraculous provision. In that context, and in a similar circumstance, Jesus would do that for these people, and show Himself to be the all-sufficient Lord God, the all-sufficient LORD of the Exodus, and the all-sufficient LORD of the wanderings. He was there, centuries earlier, providing for them, providing for the nation—and He would do it again.

He was at the end of the day. It was late. The multitude was hungry and He was not willing to let them leave unfed. And so He asked Phillip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?" The Lord, of course, knew the answer to that and had a plan. John tells us in verse 6 that Jesus was testing him to prepare him and the others for the great work that He would do.

He was in effect, throwing the problem into their laps by asking, "How are we going to feed of all these people?' Where will we get bread to do that?—to fix their minds, in other words, on the problem that was being faced there.

So He wants that problem fixed well in their mind; and Phillip was a natural person to ask this question to since he was from the nearby town of Bethesda—for he would know the shops that were there and where food could be bought. So, Phillip surveyed the crowd; he did the math and he said, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." (vs7). In other words, 'There's no way to feed these people; we don't have the resources!'

And of course, they didn't. But they had the Prince of Heaven and Phillip had seen Him work miracles. Phillip had seen Him turn water into wine; seen the Lord do many miracles, as was just stated. So why didn't he say, "Lord, we need a miracle to feed this crowd and I can't wait to see what you're going to do."

Well, I suppose he didn't because Phillip, like most of us, was a slow learner in spiritual lessons. He didn't realize the infinitude of the resources that were at his disposal. Years ago, (I bet it's, I don't know, 60 years now), J. B. Phillips, a very popular British churchman, theologian, and writer wrote a book titled, *Your God Is Too Small*. The title is worth the price of the book. That's the problem with most of us; our God is too small.

It's not really a problem of overwhelming circumstances or numbers that are too big; the problem is we leave Christ out. We consider the problems to be our problems and the solutions to be our solutions alone. We fail to consider Christ's greatness, His sufficiency for our every need and our own insufficiency, our own poverty...and that we can look to Him. And as we look to Him by faith, we can see His hand and will see His hand in our lives. That was the real purpose of the test that the Lord put to Phillip and the disciples; to cause them to see their own poverty, cause them to see their own helplessness to solve the problem.

Well then Andrew, Peter's brother, came forward and said that, 'There was a lad in the crowd who had five barley loaves and two fish', but then asked, "What are these for so many?" (vs9). Well, what are they? How are you going to feed a multitude with that? It was a small, meager lunch; it was really a poor man's meal. Barley is the

cheapest grain and the fish were small, probably pickled fish, so the suggestion seemed ridiculous, even to Andrew. How could they possibly feed such a multitude with what amounted to a few crackers and a couple of sardines? It was hopeless. They had no choice but to send them away hungry.

The Lord wasn't going to do that. And having prepared the disciples for what He would do, He took action that revealed who He was, God's Son, and showed His wisdom, His power, and His compassion. He told the disciples to, "Have the people sit down." (vs10). Mark recorded that they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties, so the Lord proceeded about His work with perfect orderliness. One of the things we see in Him, and one of the things that we see about His wisdom is He was orderly. His life was orderly.

It was a large crowd of people and they numbered 5000. Now that didn't count the women and children, so the total may have exceeded 20,000 people. But the Lord managed all of that—He is equal to every emergency. And He proved that here when He took this boy's lunch and made a banquet out of it in the wilderness. Verse 11, "Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted."

Phillip tried to calculate how much would have to be spent in order to provide for each person just a little bit—but the Lord spent nothing and He gave them as much as they wanted. That's grace. That's Isaiah 55, verse 1, "Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost." 'Buy without cost'—that's God's grace: Receive great blessing, at His expense, without cost and with great abundance.

F. F. Bruce observed how much He gives; observed, "That as much as He gives, always has enough—and to spare for others." He is never impoverished by the generosity of His giving. His treasury can never be drained, His storeroom never empty. He gives with an open hand. He gives gladly, He gives cheerfully—and He loves us to be cheerful givers as well. And of course, when we understand who is our Lord, and the resources we have, we can do that by faith, and joyfully.

Well, the abundance of His gift here is seen not only in the number of people that were there, but in the leftovers. We read, "When they were filled, He said to His disciples, 'Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost.' So they gathered them up, and filled 12 baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten." (Verses 12-13).

It's been pointed out by a number of writers that, while there was abundance, there was no waste. An application of that is, 'We're not to waste the abundance of what the Lord has given to us materially. We are to show social responsibility. We are to use our resources generously and wisely.' And I think that's all here.

Still, later this miracle becomes an illustration of the spiritual life that the Lord gives and who the Lord Himself is. He speaks of Himself as, "The bread which comes down out of heaven." (Jn 6:50). This is about spiritual life, joyful life. It's about Christ's compassion for the spiritually hungry, the lost; God's grace and salvation that is given in abundance and never wasted. It's for us freely.

Sadly, the people would miss that. But they did recognize it was a miracle and significant, so much so that they took it as a proof that Jesus was the expected prophet who was to come into the world. Now that's a reference to Deuteronomy 18, (vs15), where Moses prophesied and promised that, 'God would raise up a prophet among them like himself.' Moses had given the people manna in the wilderness and now Jesus had given them the miraculous bread in this barren wilderness place, where they were. So making those connections, they concluded that 'He was the prophet like Moses.'

Passover was near, the Jewish 'Fourth of July, Independence Day'. They were thinking of freedom; they were thinking of deliverance from under the heel of Rome. And the prophets had prophesied a militant Messiah: a Messiah who would come and establish His kingdom on the earth that was promised to Israel with the throne of David in Jerusalem; a kingdom that will include Gentiles; a kingdom that will cover the earth.

What they failed to do was take account of the Passover lambs that were slain and whose blood was applied to their doors. Before the exodus occurred, before they were delivered from that land of Egypt and the slavery there, there was first sacrifice for sin. The Messiah would not only be a conquering king, He would be a suffering servant: 'His hands would be pierced; by His stripes, His people would be healed.' (Is 53). The shepherd would be struck down. It's in the Psalms, it's in the prophets. The cross had to come before the crown. Atonement for sin came first so that the people would be fit for the kingdom. No kingdom without a journey to Calvary.

They were right to identify Jesus as the promised prophet—but they were drawn to Him only for material benefit. When He explains later His spiritual mission, they took offense. Jesus knew all of this. He is the prophet; and He knew what was in man. And He saw in their enthusiasm a dangerous situation taking shape, so He quickly moved to defuse it. He put His disciples in a boat. He sent them back to the other side of the lake while He withdrew again to the mountain by Himself, alone.

This was the high-water mark of His popularity—and the moment of its decline. When He refused to be their political liberator the crowds began to turn away from Him. That's how the chapter ends.

But there are a number of lessons we learn from this great miracle. First, it shows our Lord's almighty power and demonstrates the theme of this book; that He is the Christ, the Son of God. When someone dismisses this event as impossible—as just the kind of myth you find in religion—well, they're failing to take account of who did it. The eternal Son of God did it; nothing's impossible for Him. It was a miracle and the lesson, in part is, it's a miracle of creation.

Food was called into existence that did not exist before. It shows that He is the creator, just as John said that He was, and that He is, in chapter 1, in his prologue to the Gospel, "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." (vs3). And because He is the creator, God, the Son of God the Father, the miracle shows His complete sufficiency for every situation in every

need of life. So we should have confidence in the providence of God. He will always make provision for us—for our physical needs and safety; and our spiritual needs. We simply need to trust Him.

We see that clearly here. The Lord put the question to the disciples, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?" (vs5b). 'How are we going to feed them?' They had a child's lunch but no one seriously believed that could be of any use—until the Lord took it in His hands and made it more than useful, so useful that there were 12 baskets full left over.

The lesson is: Wait on the Lord; trust Him for every need. 'He feeds the birds of the air. He clothes the grass of the field' (Mat 6:27,30). Every day, He feeds and clothes us: Don't worry; don't be anxious; He is God almighty. He can do anything. He used a boy's lunch for a miracle—but didn't need to—didn't need that lunch. In Romans chapter 4, verse 17(b), Paul wrote that God, "gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist." 'Ex nihilo', "out of nothing." Nothing is too hard for Him.

And nothing is more important to Him than you. 'So walk by faith: Meaning know His word and His will, know that He is a great God, the almighty God. Follow Him. Follow His word, follow His will. Do it, and as you do, you will see His will and His blessing.'

That's so in our daily lives regarding our material needs—and in our spiritual lives. In Ephesians chapter 2, verse 10, Paul calls believers God's "workmanship." Everything you are, everything you have, is God's gift to you. He's made you who you are. He has equipped you for life, and He's equipped you for ministry. Warfield told his students to always be aware of two truths: First, 'The immensity of the task before them', and second, 'The infinitude of the resources at their disposal.' Every Christian has been given a huge task. It's more than we can do in our own strength. But we're not left to our own devices. The Lord has equipped us and is in all that we do.

Notice how the multitude was fed. The miracle took place first: The Lord multiplied loaves and fishes. It wasn't the disciples hands that increased the bread.

God's power did it. But having done that, He then put the bread in their hands. Their work was to receive what the Lord gave them and faithfully distribute it; to be His agents, His ministers.

What they did was important. What we do is important. We have real responsibilities in the Christian life. Our actions have eternal consequences and they are very important. We need to carry them out with grace and power: His power; His grace.

J. C. Ryle, the evangelical Anglican bishop of Liverpool, had some good words on that. Writing 150 years ago he commented on the minister's responsibility: "He has no power to put away sin, or impart grace. His whole business is to receive the bread of life, which his Master provides, and to distribute it among the souls, among whom he labors. He cannot make men value the bread or receive it. He cannot make it 'soul saving' or 'life giving' to anyone. —This is not his work; for this he is not responsible. His whole business is to be a faithful distributor of the food which his divine Master has provided. And that done, his office is discharged." That's true. It is God's work to make the Gospel and His Word effective.

But He uses us in that work, not because He needs us, (He does not need us), but because He wants us to share in the blessing. And the *us* in that, is *all of us*. Every believer in Jesus Christ is a minister of the Gospel because every believer in Jesus Christ is a priest; male and female. We all have gifts to be used in the ministry to others.

Every day we all go out into different parts of the world and carry *the bread of life* with us that God has given to us. We have opportunities to distribute it to people, who by God's grace, may be hungry. That is, they may have a desire for the Gospel. Some go to their jobs in the law firm, or in the real estate office, or to the school or classroom as a teacher or student. But by God's design, we all go somewhere every day to be His 'lights in the darkness'. He raises up all kinds of people from all walks of life so that in every walk of life there'll be light that shines, through those of us who've been entrusted with His Gospel.

This clergy/laity, minister/parishioner distinction that we're so familiar with is false. It's not biblical. We are all equally part of the body of Christ, His church, and we

are to function as His ambassadors wherever we are. It's one of Satan's ploys to persuade us that we cannot serve God. His desire, (the devil's desire), his scheme, really, is to keep the church inactive. And so he plays upon our sense of inadequacy.

Well, we are inadequate. We can consider the immensity of the task and as we do that we will feel inadequate. And I think that's Warfield's point. But in feeling our inadequacy, we're to remember that Christ is not inadequate—just the opposite. He proved that here with this miracle in which He fed a multitude with a boy's peasant lunch. With that, what?, five loaves and two small fish, He fed over 5000 people.

In Phillip's hands, that was completely inadequate. In Andrew's hands, that was completely inadequate. They couldn't have even fed, with that lunch, the 12 disciples, much less 5000 people—plus 20,000 more likely. But in the Lord 's hands, that lunch was more than sufficient. And what you have to offer in Christ's hands, is more than sufficient. He has proved that time and again. We see that down through the pages of the Bible.

Just consider some of the things that He used to do His work: With some dust He made the crown of His creation when He formed Adam; and with one rib He made Eve. Moses had a shepherd's rod, a stick, and God made it a tool of mighty miracles. The jawbone of an ass seems woefully inadequate as a weapon of war, but God used it in the hand of Sampson to kill a thousand enemies of Israel. David had a slingshot, which in itself is a rather insignificant thing, but he used it to slay a giant and deliver God's people.

It is a mistake to think that what we can offer the Lord is so small and unimportant that it can be of no use to Him. The disciples judged the boy's lunch unimportant and unhelpful. But the Lord took it; He accepted it from this boy; blessed it; and then used it. And He will do the same for us as we offer ourselves to Him, as we walk by faith, trusting in a God who is not small.

Mike Black has told this story that I remember: I remember Mike Black's father, 50 years ago, maybe more, passing out bulletins in the church, back there in the foyer.

I didn't know it then, but he had recently been brought to faith and he wanted to do something to serve Christ. He probably thought what he was doing was a small thing. But the Lord didn't. We can offer Him nothing that is meager in His eyes. The poor widow's mite was not small to Him. She gave two; it was all that she had. And she gave it and in His eyes it was more than all the silver that the rich poured into the temple treasury that day.

Not everyone of us is a world leader. We're not an apostle Paul, or a St. Augustin, or John Calvin. —Most Christians are just regular people. That's a simple way of putting how Paul describes us in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 26, "...not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble..." No, but every believer...every believer has been chosen sovereignly by God and called by God almighty—and gifted for a purpose. And *our* resources are infinite. We're to use them for other's benefit, and chiefly for God's glory. The results are not ours to produce. God does that.

And they're not always what we would hope for. In fact, they are sometimes disappointing—and that too, is one of the lessons here. Jesus filled hungry stomachs with loaves and fishes so that the people were all sated and satisfied. But instead of getting spiritual insight, they got political ideas.

He was the man of the hour. They'd already seen how He banished sickness from Galilee—now He banished hunger. He could banish the Romans from the land! He could liberate them! Excitement spread through the crowd like wildfire. It was, to borrow a book title, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions And The Madness Of Crowds*. Jesus knew that madness would affect His disciples so He sent them to the boat and to the other side of the lake while He retired to a mountain in solitude. He had not come to be a king, but to be a sacrifice. Only in that way could there be a kingdom.

Freedom is a great blessing: political and economic freedom and self-determination. There are theologians today who make that, 'The Gospel' —about liberation from oppressors. That is the very thing Jesus rejected here. It was the

temptation that He rejected when Satan offered Him the kingdoms of the world. And even if a person could have that: could have the liberty that he or she desires; have the money and the wealth that people desire—he or she really would have nothing. Nothing! "What shall it profit a man," Jesus asked, "if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Mar 8:36).

We all die. Then what? We need our souls saved. That happened at the cross, where our sin, our debts were paid up. Later in chapter 10, Jesus said, "I am the door." (vs9). All who enter through Him are saved. But He is a door like those doors in ancient Egypt at the time of the first Passover, smeared with the lamb's blood. That's how we enter the kingdom. That's how we enter into new life. It's through faith in Christ's death. It's through faith in Him as God's Son and our sacrifice, who suffered our punishment when He died in our place.

If you want the kingdom, if you want life, come to Christ; come to Him through faith. The moment you believe in Him, you own His death and payment of your debts. You have forgiveness and everlasting life. You are an heir of the kingdom to come, of the world to come, "world without end."

Then having that, live for Him. That is a great challenge in this dark and confused world. But keep always before you the infinitude of the resources at your disposal. Walk by faith. And as you walk by faith, you and I will see the Lord's hand of blessing in our lives. May God help us to do that. He's always with us. Let's pray.

It's a remarkable thought, Father, that we could be precious in Your sight, in the sight of the Triune God. So much so that you would offer Your Son up for us, and He would willingly come and die for us, when we were ungodly, when we were rebels, captured, as it were, with weapons in our hands. And yet we're precious in Your sight.

And so, we're important to You, and You will always provide for us. We confess our God is 'too small' in our hearts, in our minds. LORD, expand us in our minds that we

would know You to be the God that You are, almighty and all sufficient, and we would walk by faith and live for You.

So LORD, bless us today as we celebrate Mothers' day. May it be a joyful day for everyone.

And now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

(End of Audio)