



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 6: 30-44

Mark

"The Banquet in the Wilderness"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Howard. Good morning. We're going to return to the gospel of Mark with Mark chapter 6. And this morning, we will look at verses 30 through 44. Since we took a break in our study last week, let me remind you of where we are in the gospel of Mark. The Lord has sent out His 12 disciples on a mission. He has invested them with His authority and with His power to preach, to heal, to cast out demons. Then, Mark interrupted that account and recorded the execution of John the Baptist, and records how Herod had a great feast for himself. It was his birthday, and they were celebrating that. And, under the influence of the party and some other things, he granted a request to have John's head removed. And so, John was put to death, and Mark reminds us of that.

Something of an interruption of the account, but now we return to this mission of the 12, and they return in verse 30, and we read of this. The apostles gathered together with Jesus. I'd like to make a comment on that word, "apostles," because this is the only place where Mark uses that word in his gospel, of the disciples. And, most likely, he's not using it in the technical sense in which that word will be used later in the epistles, but speaking of them in their function, they were sent out, which is what, strictly speaking, the word apostle means. So, he's describing them in their function, not so much in their office, though most of those men would become the apostles later.

They come 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 did not 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 disembarking, 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 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." And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. That detail that Mark gives us indicates that it was in the springtime that this event occurred; perhaps in the month of April when the grass was very green in Galilee. They reclined in companies 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 He 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.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious heavenly Father, we thank You for the opportunity that we have to come together as a church, as a people who have been redeemed from the foundation of the world, a people who have been purchased by the precious blood of Christ, and we recognize in that Your work, and Your grace, and no merit of our own. So, we have much to be thankful for, Father. We are the recipients of Your good pleasure, of Your electing grace, and the redeeming work of Your Son. And, we thank You that not only we can come together as a people who are bought and purchased by Your Son and brought into Your family, enjoying eternal life an

inheritance to come, but we can also come together and open the Scriptures. And together, we can study Your word. We can learn more of You and learn more of our responsibilities, and learn about the way of life. We pray that You would bless us as we do that this morning, that You would equip us for the week to come. This might be a time of refreshment for us, a time of preparation. Instruct us in Your truth. May we see Your Son more clearly and appreciate Him, and understand Your grace more fully, and understand the marvelous provision You have made for us in Him. Great power that is ours in Christ, and enable us in light of that to live lives of faith, lives of obedience, lives that are pleasing to You and profitable to those around us. We commit that to You and pray Your blessing upon us, thanking You for the privilege to study together, and thanking You also that we have the great privilege to also act as priests and intercede for one another. We can approach boldly, the throne of grace, and make petitions for ourselves. We are people with many needs. We are in constant need of drawing close to You and seeking Your assistance, and seeking Your blessing. We can pray that for others. We remember others, those who are sick, we have them listed on our prayer list, and we think of them. Also of others whose names are not there but who are in need of Your mercy, and we pray that You would extend it; we pray that You'd give healing. We pray that You'd give encouragement. We pray You'd give blessing, Father, in the ways in which You know best to do.

We pray for those who are in physical need financially, and we pray that You'd provide employment for those who are unemployed, and make provisions for their daily needs. Give encouragement and blessing. Father, we thank You for all that You have given us. We can go on and on making requests, and that's proper, as we are dependent on You for everything that we have, even of every breath that we breathe. And yet, we should not forget that You have given us much more than we realize. We thank You for that and thank You that you've blessed us so greatly. We pray Your blessings not only on us and this church; praying that You'll bless us as a witness in this community and throughout the nation. Wherever we go, may we be a good testimony, and may the time together be profitable to that end. But we also pray for our nation. We pray for our leaders. We pray for our national leaders, our state and local leaders, and pray that You'd give them wisdom as they govern this land, and pray that they'd govern it well. We pray for our country, and we pray that You'd bless it with a movement of the Spirit that He might quicken many who are dead and bring

them to faith, and to the saving knowledge of Your Son. May our time together be very profitable to that end. May we see Him more clearly. May all that we do be glorified to You and honoring to Him and edifying to each of us. Bless us now as we sing our final hymn. Prepare our hearts for our study together. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] I'd like to begin our lesson this morning with a question, one of a theological nature, and so one that's foundational to all practical living. The question is: what can't God do? You'd say, well, there's nothing that God can't do. He's sovereign. He's omniscient. He's omnipotent. He's all-knowing. He's all-powerful. He's God. True enough, but there are some things that God cannot do. That's what the Scriptures teach us. He cannot sin. He cannot deny Himself. He cannot lie. The author of Hebrews states that explicitly in chapter 6 when he writes: "It is impossible for God to lie." In Titus chapter 1 and verse 2, Paul writes the same thing. He writes that God cannot lie.

James puts it in positive terms when he writes of God as the father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. In other words, He doesn't change from day to day. He doesn't experience mood shifts like we do. The God of today is the God of yesterday is the God of tomorrow. He doesn't change.

In other words, He's absolutely trustworthy. Everything that God promises to do, He must do. So, to answer the question: what can't God do? Well, He cannot break His word, cannot go back on His promises, and He has made some big promises. But He's God. He is all-powerful. He is all-knowing, and so He is completely sufficient for all of our needs at every moment in our life. He's demonstrated that in many ways and at many times. I suppose that the greatest demonstration of that, at least in the Old Testament is found in the Book of Exodus with Israel's exodus from Egypt. And there, we see His great display of power and His great sufficiency for His people. He brings them out of Egypt by a mighty hand with great signs and wonders. And in so doing, He destroys the enemy as they pursued the nation, the greatest nation on earth was Egypt at that time, and God crushed them in the Red Sea, which He had miraculously divided.

And then, having led Israel into the wilderness, he provided for them, provided them with manna, food from heaven, miraculous food. And He fed them for 40 years,

every day, providing for them. And He did that in keeping with a promise that He had made some 500 years earlier to Abraham. So, God is sufficient, and we see that in the Old Testament. We see His power, and we see the way He meets our needs, and we worship that same God. The God that we see displaying His power and His sufficiency with Israel and the wilderness is the same God that we worship: the sovereign God cannot lie.

So, why is it that when difficulties come, financial difficulties for example, or concerns about health, why is it that we forget our Lord's instruction, which we find in a variety of ways and places in the Bible? But instruction, such as that found in Matthew chapter 6 in the sermon on the mount: do not be anxious then, saying "What shall we eat?" Or, "What shall we drink?" Or, "With what shall we clothe ourselves?" He provides everything.

And as our Lord goes on to point out in that text, He provides for the birds of heaven and the lilies of the field, and you are much more important to God than they are. He knows your needs. He's omniscient. He is able to provide for those needs. He is omnipotent. So, we should look to Him. We should trust in Him, and we can do that with great confidence. The Lord is sufficient. He has made great promises and He cannot lie.

Well, that lesson was given to Israel every day in the wilderness for some 40 years. And yet, they still failed to trust the Lord. It was a lesson that was difficult for them to learn, which is a reminder to us of just how slow we are to learn in matters of faith and practice. And so, the Lord repeats the same lesson at a different time for a different generation. This time around, the Sea of Galilee, in a place that Mark calls in verse 35, a "desolate" place. In a place without food, at a place where He supplies a feast for 5,000. Actually, more than 5,000, because Matthew adds in his account, that that was the number of men who ate, aside from women and children. So, taken all together, they were probably something like 15,000 people that were fed on that day.

It is a miracle that is described with simplicity. But it is one of the most significant miracles that our Lord performed. No miracle was as public as this. None was performed before as many people. And other than the resurrection, this is the only miracle that is recorded in all four gospels, which indicates the great impression that it made on the early church, and more significantly, the importance given to it by

the Holy Spirit. And so, it's a miracle that's received a lot of attention, and some unusual interpretations.

Some who deny the supernatural explain it as a miracle that took place in the hearts of men. One such suggestion is that what actually occurred was that the disciples shared what little food they had with the crowd, and the people who witnessed this, some of whom had food and were reluctant to share it, saw the example that they set and they began to share with others who did not have food, so that in the end, there was enough food for everyone. The miracle then was not a physical one, but one that changed selfish people into generous people. Others explained it as a celebration of the Eucharist, a celebration of the Lord's supper. Jesus broke off little pieces of bread and fish and there was enough fragments for the 5,000 plus people who all had a little bit.

But, that fails as an explanation, since the significance of that ceremony, of the Lord's supper, would've been meaningless to the crowd at this time. It wasn't until later in our Lord's ministry that He established that and explained its meaning. And the first explanation of making men generous fails to explain how the event could have had such a profound impact and made such a significant impression upon the early church if it was not a true miracle.

Neither explanation does justice to the text, which sets forth this event as a miracle of multiplying a few loaves and fishes into an abundance of food. And while that might be unbelievable in the hands of mortals, it is not unbelievable in the hands of the Son of God. He provided a banquet in the wilderness. In a place where there was no food, the Lord fed a multitude.

Now, this feast that our Lord provided may be intended to be seen against the backdrop of the feast that Herod gave when he beheaded John the Baptist. What a contrast that makes between what he did, and what our Lord did, between the man who wanted to be king, but who was hardly a king at all, and the Lord Jesus Christ who was the true king of Israel, the king of kings. The one who does everything for himself, and he produces only sadness, as it's said of Herod himself. He was very sorry for what was to occur due to that feast. The other, does everything for others, and produces satisfaction.

That's one of the key words I think of this passage, which we'll come to. After this event unfolds and the people have eaten the food that our Lord provides, they

were satisfied. And it's a reminder of what people get who, on the one hand, seek the world. They get sadness. And those who seek Christ, they get satisfaction.

Let's flash back to Herod's party, and the death of John interrupted the account of the mission of the 12. The Lord had sent His disciples out in His authority and in His power to preach and do miracles. And in verse 30, they return to the Lord, and report to Him all that they had done and taught. And it's clear from verse 31 that they had great success in their mission because the people continued to come and go. So even after they had returned from Galilee, word has spread thorough the region, and people are following the disciples, and they come back, most likely to Capernaum, and report these things to the Lord, and people keep coming.

In fact, so many kept coming and they occupied so much of the disciples' time, that they did not even have time to eat. And so, the Lord told them that it was time to take a break and get a rest. And verse 32 states: "They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves." Luke records that the place was located near Bethsaida, which is on the northeastern rim of the Sea of Galilee, and it was a place outside of that village some ways away that was chosen because of the privacy that it provided. It was a lonely place, a place that was not inhabited, a place that they needed to be for vacation, to get away from the people. There's virtue in vacations, we can see from this.

Unfortunately, their vacation was cut short before it began. We read in verse 33 that the people saw where they were going, and ran around the northern shore of the lake to meet them. The boat that the Lord and His disciples were in evidently traveled slowly, perhaps due to strong headwind that they met. At any rate, when they arrived at this place where they were going to rest, where they were going to enjoy something of a vacation, there was a great multitude waiting for them.

Now, the Lord could've become very annoyed at this. The crowd had given no thought to His or to His disciples' wellbeing. They were preventing them from enjoying a much-needed rest. And so, He could've stepped out of that boat, and with some validity, could've rebuked them and dismissed the crowd, and told them to come back at another time. But, instead of that, we read that when He disembarked and saw the multitude, Mark writes: " He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things."

Some have heard an echo of Moses in that, because in Numbers chapter 27, Moses prayed that after he died, the Lord would not leave Israel like sheep which have no shepherd. Moses recognized the importance of a leader for Israel, and God answered his prayer by raising up Joshua to lead the people into Canaan. And both Moses and Joshua, as men who led Israel out of slavery in Egypt and through the wilderness, and then into the promised land, both of those men serve as types of our Lord, who is the ultimate deliverer and leader of His people. It is only in Him that we find deliverance from sin, guidance in life. Only in Him, that we find entrance into eternal rest. So, this may be something of a reflection back on those men and their missions as foreshadowing and an illustration of what our Lord was doing.

But the concern of Moses and the observation of the Lord, about sheep without a shepherd, is also a reminder of the constant need God's people have of being spiritually led and fed. We are like sheep in many ways. You know that if you've read the Scriptures very much. You know how often God's people are compared to sheep. Sheep are dependent animals. They need to be constantly shepherded. Otherwise, they will wander off, they will get lost, they will become food for wolves. They need someone to protect and guide them, as do God's people.

And while God provided the nation with shepherds like Moses and Joshua and the judges, and the prophets and priests, Israel's history was often one of delinquent leaders. As a result, the people went without instruction in the things of God. So that Hosea said in his day, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." That verse says a great deal. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. And if we can learn some lessons from Israel, and from the history of God's people, one of the main lessons that we should learn is the danger of drifting away from instruction in the Scriptures.

The study of the Bible is essential to a stable Christian life. A life of growth, a life of peace. Without it, we wander away and we are destroyed. Second Timothy 3:16 and 17 brings out the importance, the necessity of the study of Scripture, the value of Scripture. Paul states that studying the Scriptures, teaching the Scriptures is profitable for correction, for training and righteousness that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. There's really nothing more practical in our life than devoting our time to the study of Scripture. I know that varies from person to person, as to the time that you have available to doing that, but how can we live an



orderly life if we don't give attention to God's instruction on life? How can we have peace in this life, in the midst of difficulties that we face, if we don't study the promises of God and learn of the character of God? If we don't know about God, and we can't know about Him apart from studying the Scriptures, how can we have confidence in Him, and be confident that in the midst of strife and difficulties, His hand is upon us, He's with us, he's guiding us? No, we need to be men and women of the Scriptures.

Now, we're approaching the time of New Year's resolutions, and I think that a very good resolution for each of us would be that we read through the Bible in 1993. It may sound like a challenging goal. I know some of you have done it. It'd be good to do it again. And those of you who haven't, you just consider for a moment how it's done. It's really not all that great a task. If you can read two to three chapters a day, maybe a chapter in the morning, a chapter or two in the evening, you can easily finish the whole Bible within a year's time. And if you do that, it'll be not only a great accomplishment but a very profitable one for you, assuming that you read it conscientiously and you reflect upon the pages that you read. I would encourage that very much, because we need to be people who are in the Scriptures, being instructed by our reading, being instructed as we sit under the teaching ministry of the word.

In our Lord's day, the people lacked instruction because they had no leaders. Well, they had leaders, at least, with the title of that. They had Herod, but he was hardly a leader in spiritual things, barely a leader of any kind of material value. They had so-called religious leaders, but they had become preoccupied with legalistic matters, preoccupied with Sabbath restrictions, fasts, phylacteries, tassels, details of their traditions at the expense of instructing the people in the Word of God.

And so, seeing a multitude as sheep without a shepherd, the Lord, we read, began to teach them. Now, that seems to me to underscore the importance that our Lord saw in the instruction of Scripture. What does He do for these people who are like sheep without a shepherd? He teaches them the Word of God. He gives them the very thing that they needed.

And evidently, it went on for some time. It was not some little vignette that He gave them or a sermonette. He must've taught them for some time. We're not told when all of this began, but it evidently went on throughout the day, and the crowd was so captured by His teaching that they didn't leave to go home. Even as the sun

began to sink on the horizon, they stayed there, enthralled by His teaching, and it was the disciples, as afternoon wore on, that became concerned about the crowd, evidently more concerned about the crowd than the crowd was itself. The place was desolate, Mark writes in verse 35. There was no place to obtain food.

And so, they came to the Lord. And in verse 26, suggested that He dismiss the people so that they could go into the surrounding towns and villages and buy food. It seemed like a reasonable suggestion. But the Lord answered them with a command: "You give them something to eat!" Well, they weren't expecting to hear that, and I suppose they stood there a little stunned for a while. They knew they didn't have the resources to accommodate the appetites of 5,000 hungry men, not to mention their women and children. And so, after they collected their thoughts, they asked: "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?" They weren't serious in that question. They were making the point that there was no way that they could feed all those people. Two hundred denarii was roughly the equivalent to the entire year's wage of a laborer.

They didn't have that much money. Plus, the logistics of an operation such as this, finding the food, transporting it before sunset to feed some 15,000 people. They were impossible. So, in this rhetorical way, they said they couldn't do that. They didn't have the means to do it. So, the Lord asks them what they did have. "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" So they did, and they reported back, "Five, and two fish."

Now, in John's account, it's Andrew who brings the information that there was a lad who had the loaves and the fish. And evidently, the disciples had made a quick search to see what they had to work with, and Andrew produced this boy and his lunch, but then he concluded: what are these for so many people? And the point becomes all the more significant when you realize that this was a very small meal. The loaves are not large loaves, and the fish weren't large fish. The loaves were barley loaves, which were small and flat, almost like a cracker. More like a meal of hors d'oeuvres. It was a child's lunch.

So, the disciples were at a complete loss. He'd asked them to do the impossible. Of course, the Lord knew that He had asked them to do the impossible. That was the very point. In John's account in chapter 6 of his gospel, verse 6, he states that this was a test. They had just returned from a successful mission, for which

they had been invested with the Lord's authority and with the Lord's power. And so now, He was testing them to see just how much they had learned, how strong their faith had grown, how much their knowledge of Him had expanded. He had sent them without food, without money, as you'll remember, without anything but the clothes on their back and with the implied instruction that they were to trust God to supply their needs.

And every day, they saw God do just that. He supplied them with the food and the lodging that they needed, and He gave them the ability every day to perform the miracles that He had commanded them to do. Now, the Lord was asking them to do another miracle. Well, as I said, this was a test of their faith. And while they recognized the impossibility of their doing it, they failed to recognize the possibility of God doing it. So, they concluded that the situation was hopeless.

An inexcusable failure, we might think. After all, they just performed many miracles. Why couldn't they see their way to doing one more miracle? Well, I suppose for the same reason that we fail to see and to recognize God's power in our lives at various times. We're all pretty shortsighted spiritually.

Why do we worry and become anxious about situations in life? Because we face some very serious situations in life. Well one reason, situations that are beyond us. Sometimes they're heartbreaking situations. And yet, has not the Lord said: do not be anxious? But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you. Really, we're no different than these disciples. Their weakness of faith is something that we all struggle with. But as Paul told the Philippians, be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. Let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God. And in this context, he means that subjective peace, that inner peace, calmness of spirit, which surpasses all comprehension, something that the world can't give, something that we can't conjure up in our own minds. The peace of God which surpasses all comprehension shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Now, that's a promise for the Christian, for the man, and the woman, and the child who believes in Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior. That's a promise from God. It's given through the apostle, but it's not Paul's promise. Paul assures the truth of it, but it is the promise that God has given to His people through the apostle,

and God keeps His promises. He's sovereign. He's omniscient. He's omnipotent, and He cannot fail His people.

Now, we need to keep in mind that the things that we are to trust the Lord for are those matters in which He has given us instruction. The things concerning which He has commanded us. The lesson here is not: if you have enough faith, you can feed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fishes. It's not that you can do miracles if you just pray enough and just have enough faith. Christ instructed these disciples to do this miracle. And when He commands us to do something, He promises to supply us with the ability to do it.

And so, their faith was to be exercised in accordance with the command of God. And likewise for us. We are to do what God commands us and know that as we step out in faith and obedience, He will supply. But that doesn't give us any right to presume upon the goodness of God and assume that He will give us the power to do our desires, of which He has not commanded us.

So, this is to be understood as power and ability that is given to accomplish His will and His instruction and His command. But having commanded them to do this miracle, He was sufficient to enable them to do it. So, the problem was not in the situation as difficult as it appeared, but it is in the way that they looked at the situation. And whenever we consider our circumstances without Christ, without seeing them in the context of seeing our Lord and His promises, and His ability, we'll conclude that our situations are hopeless, just like the disciples did.

And yet, they're never hopeless. William Carey was a man who acted in faith on God's command to go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. Now, he experienced some resistance to that. He lived in England. He looked out upon the world scene and he saw the need to go to the nations, to the four corners of the earth with the gospel. And yet, he experienced some resistance to that from his colleagues and home, and then when he got out on the field in India, he met with some resistance there. And yet, through his efforts, he opened up India for the gospel. His motto was: "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." You say, okay, but William Carey was a great man, the kind of man that you read about in history books.

I'm just a businessman. Or, I'm just a housewife. I'm just a school teacher. Perhaps, but William Carey was a cobbler. He fixed shoes for a living. The greatness of William Carey is not to be found in William Carey; it's to be found in the fact that

he trusted God to keep his word, and God honored that. We're not all William Careys, and we can multiply the names of men like him who have done great things. But, we can all do more than we think we can do, in our Lord's strength, not in our own strength, if we trust in Him. Because in Christ, we have infinite resources. We have the infinite resources of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

What does Paul pray for the Ephesians? You remember that? In Ephesians chapter 1? He prays that they might be enlightened to know the surpassing greatness of His power toward all who believe. The surpassing greatness of His power is what each of you and I possess in Jesus Christ. Infinite power of God.

Well, the disciples were looking too much at the problem to consider the infinite resources that they had in Christ, which they'd experienced in their mission just the days before that, and witnessed every day. But they soon forgot about that, and that's easy to do. That was Israel's problem. They witnessed the powerful hand of God in Egypt. They saw the plagues that fell upon their enemies, and yet did not touch them. They witnessed the deliverance to the Red Sea. All of that. And yet, when they got out into the wilderness, Asaph, the writer of the 78th psalm writes, "they tested God."

In spite of all that they'd witnessed, all the provision that they had seen from God's hand, when they got out in the desert where there was no food, no water, they asked in unbelief, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?" Well, the failure of the 12 tribes in the wilderness of Sinai is the failure of the 12 disciples in that desert place in Galilee. They were asking the same thing. Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? They had forgotten the Lord's past blessings.

And so, they failed to consider His present sufficiency to provide the very things that He had commanded them to do. Fortunately, the Lord is a patient instructor and He answers their failures with kindness. He doesn't rebuke them. He simply provides the solution. In verse 39, He commands the people to recline by groups on the green grass, and they reclined in companies of hundreds and fifties. He grouped them in a way that would make it easy to distribute the bread. And yet, this scene of the shepherdless people being directed by the Lord, the Good Shepherd, to recline on the green grass, is reminiscent of Psalm 23. "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul." He's the Good Shepherd, and He's acting as the shepherd of the sheep in this case not only to

provide their material needs, and He promises to do that for us. But more importantly, to instruct them and teach them spiritually.

Then, with everyone in place, the Lord took the bread and the fish in His hand, and looking up to heaven, he blessed the food and broke it. Mark doesn't explain how this miracle occurred. He probably didn't understand how it occurred. He just states that the Lord broke the bread and divided up the fish and kept doing that, and gave it to the disciples to distribute among this great crowd of people.

For Mark and the other gospel writers, the Lord's action is a miracle. They don't explain it; they simply state it simply as that. They suggest no other explanation. It was a creative act. But we might ask: how can we believe in such a thing in this age of science and reason in which we live? How can we believe such a story? We can dismiss it as some kind of myth, perhaps. But in this day and age, how do you believe in something like that? Well, the only way this can be credible, as we suggested at the beginning, is if Christ is the Son of God. God incarnate. And that's the testimony of the writers of Scripture. That's the whole purpose of setting out these gospel accounts, to show Him as He is. He is a true man, but He is the Godman. He is God incarnate. And that being so, there's really nothing incredible about this.

The real issue here is not: can Christ do a miracle? The issue is: who is Christ? For Jesus Christ, the word through whom all things came into being, as John says, who made everything out of nothing, making bread out of bread was not difficult at all. Now, those who can't believe that God became man, they can't believe that Jesus Christ multiplied the bread and the fish the way He did and fed the multitude, they can't believe that any more than they could believe or you could believe that I could do that. So, if He's not the Son of God, if He's not the Godman, then of course they shouldn't believe that. But for those who believe the testimony of Scripture, who believe the deity of Jesus Christ, it's easy to believe that He performed a miracle, that the multiplication of bread and fish took place in the hands of the Son of God.

And what's significant here, I think, is that the disciples participated in this. They added nothing to the miracle itself. The Lord invited them to perform the miracle. They abdicated that to the Lord, and so the Lord performs the miracle, but they participated in it. That is, they brought to the people the blessings that the Lord had created. It was His work. Not theirs. It was His work, but He allowed them to

participate in this great blessing, which is what He invites each of us to do. And each of us should be asking ourselves what we can do in the Lord's service, how we can participate in this ongoing process of bringing the blessings of God to other people.

Are you doing that? Do you have a desire to serve Him, to carry His blessings to others? Are you seeking guidance from the Lord as to how you might do that? Yielding up yourself everyday as an offering to Him, that you might be used in His service? Seeking to serve Him in this church, seeking to serve Him elsewhere, at work, or wherever? Well, we're to be doing that. We can only do that as we trust in Him, and we can only trust in Him as we know Him. But as we study the Scriptures and we come to know Him, we learn that He is sufficient for everything that He calls us to do. We're simply to walk by faith, to walk by obedience, and watch His blessings.

Well, the result of the Lord's supply is recorded in the rest of the passage. We read in verses 24 and following: "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." The key word there is that word "satisfied." In a place where there was nothing, the Lord satisfied the people's hunger with not just enough, but with an abundance. Twelve full baskets were left over. And it's a reminder, an illustration that all who come to Christ in faith are more than satisfied. This is a miracle that reveals a great deal about our Lord, not only about His compassion for the lost, but about His person, about His work. It contains a clear echo of the miracle in the wilderness when God fed Israel with manna. And it points to Christ as the source of that blessing. He's really doing the same thing in a different location and a different time to a different generation.

But, the one who shepherded Israel at the beginning of its history, who fed and protected and guided the people through that desert, was the same one who was feeding Israel and Galilee. He's the true shepherd. Contrast to a man like Herod, who may have been something of a king, but he was no shepherd. No real king at all. He could provide himself and his close circle of friends with a sumptuous meal, but he couldn't provide food for the people. He couldn't provide material food, really. He certainly couldn't provide spiritual food. He consumed. He didn't create. He was a destroyer. And really, that's a good picture, I think, of the world's system. That's what it does. That's what all who were drawn into the world's system will obtain. Not

satisfaction, but emptiness and sadness. That's what Herod brought. It's what he brought to himself. That's what he brought to many others. He brought sadness.

But Christ is the one who satisfies. Because only He is qualified to meet the vast needs of mankind. He is the creator. He is the provider. He is the sustainer. He's the Savior of men. That's the message of this miracle. We see that by implication, but it's left to John and his account of this in John chapter 6 to make that truth explicit.

Following this miracle of providing the people with bread, John records our Lord identifying Himself as the bread of life, the bread that comes down out of heaven. And those who eat the bread, He says, will not die. He gives eternal life to all those who take Him in, so to speak, that feed upon Him spiritually, who believe in Him. Because, just as He broke the bread in His hands, His body was broken on the cross. He endured the eternal judgment of His Father's wrath in the place of sinners so that all who believe in Him will certainly have eternal life and not die.

That being so, that He's actually obtained eternal life for all who believe. What does that say about us who have believed in our present situation? What does that say about us in the rest of our life? Well, Paul answers that in Romans chapter 8 and verse 32 where he writes: "He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" In other words, if He's done the greatest thing that He can do, if He's given the greatest gift in the giving of His son, and not for friends, by the way, He gave His son for His enemies. And if He did that, now that we are His friends, now that we are members of His family, what won't He give us? There's nothing that He won't give us that's not for our good. He'll provide for us in every way.

Now, that's a promise of God. So, in spite of the very real problems we face in life and the difficulties that we find ourselves in, do we really have reason to be anxious? Well, we're going to be anxious. I think we can be honest about that. We'll face difficulties and we'll become anxious and worry about them. But do we really have a basis or a reason to do that? Not if God can be trusted. Not if we are walking by faith and in obedience to His word. And if we haven't been doing that, or if along the way we fail to do that and we fall into sin and we wander away, and we suffer the consequences of that, the great promise of the Word of God is that He can restore to us what we've lost. He can restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten. In



Christ, we find satisfaction spiritually. We find restoration. He is our provider, spiritually, as well as materially. We find satisfaction in Him.

One of the greatest illustrations of this outside of the Bible is found in the life of one of the greatest men of the church, a man from Africa, Augustine. His life was a restless odyssey of seeking satisfaction. He was raised in the church by a godly mother, but he rebelled and he lived more like his pagan father. As a young man, he lived an immoral life, fathered a child out of wedlock. But he found that carnal pleasures didn't satisfy. He had a conversion to philosophy, but he found that empty. And so, he tried religion, and he converted to Manichaeism, which was a Persian cult kind of combination of Eastern thought and Christian heresy. Again, he wasn't satisfied. And so, he buried himself in his career. He became a successful teacher of rhetoric, a very respected position in that day. But he was still restless.

Then, in the city of Milan, he came under the influence of Ambrose, one of the greatest preachers of his day. He began to reconsider the old truths that he had learned as a child. And then, one day while sitting in a garden, struggling with his sin, he heard a child singing. And the words the child was singing was, "Take it and read. Take it and read." And he took up a Bible that was sitting next to him, and randomly, he turned to Romans chapter 13 and read verses 13 and 14. This is not a gospel text, and it's not a very good method of study, for that matter, but it worked for him on this occasion, and he read the words of Paul. "Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing in drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts."

In reading that, he came to faith in Christ. He put on Christ as his Lord and his Savior. And, he at least was satisfied. Later, he wrote in his spiritual autobiography, "The Confessions," putting it in a prayer to God, he wrote, "You have made us for Yourself and our heart is restless until it finds rest in You." In Christ alone do we find rest, in Him alone are we satisfied.

So, as we conclude, I ask you: do you know Him as Savior? If not, you'll never find satisfaction in this world. It can set before you a sumptuous banquet like that in Herod's palace, and it only does that for a few people. Most people never get to enjoy the pleasures and the riches of this world that they seek after. But, for those that do, it can provide something, but never a meal that really satisfies, nothing that

leaves a person spiritually complete and fulfilled. Really, in the final analysis, it only brings sadness.

Rest and satisfaction are found only in Christ, our creator, our provider, our Savior. He is the bread of life, and so the invitation to the sinner is to come to Him, to find rest in Him, to receive life from Him. Life, which once you have it, you will never die, you cannot die spiritually. You are secure in Him. And life in which you need never be anxious, because he is a constant provider, constant companion, constant protector and shepherd. That's our Lord Jesus Christ. Well, may God bless these thoughts to Your thinking, and help each of us to live lives of faithful service to Him. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for what we are reminded of in this passage, and what we see of our Lord in it. He is sufficient for everything. He is omniscient. He knows all of our needs. He is omnipotent. He can supply those needs. He can do everything except sin, except deny Himself, except lie and break His promise. All that You command us to do will be done. We are simply to live in obedience, to live in faith. And so, we pray that You would help us to do that. Help us to be a people who serve You faithfully, knowing that You are always faithful to us, and provide us with all of our needs. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.