God's Miraculous Provision
John 6:1-15

In our study today, we will consider one of the best known of the miracles performed by the Lord Jesus, the feeding of over 5000 men and their families. I mention "over 5000" because some bible scholars estimate the number to be as high as 15 to 20 thousand, because the Jewish families of that day were quite large. And many of the wives and mothers would have surely come along with their husbands, bringing their children with them.

We don't know for sure about all of that, so we will simply do as the bible does and quote the number 5000.

But regardless of the debate over the number, this was certainly what these scriptures define as being a "miracle".

Why do I mention this? It's because for some reason, many bible theologians over time have debated as to what a miracle really is, how it should be defined, questioning whether God still performs miracles.

Many seem to want to believe that when God "rested" after creating the heavens and the earth, He also ceased, or at least limited, much of His ongoing involvement with the people and the matters of daily life on this earth, and only comes to our aid when we pray to Him, and even then on rare occasions.

But oh dear friends, He didn't do that. He didn't cease His involvement or even limit it. And Jesus said so just a few verses earlier here in the Book of John. Here in John chapter 5 verse 17, Jesus said to them,

> 17 . . . "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." (John 5:17)

So then, yes, God still does provide His watchcare over us with signs and wonders and miracles and other works of His Hands. And while some of you might not have wondered about such things as you have studied these words, others have.

But what does a miracle look like? How would we know one if we saw it?

One dictionary defines a miracle as being "an extraordinary event caused directly by God or by one of His angels that surpasses the normal powers of nature, evokes wonder, and acts as a sign pointing to divine authority and purpose."

And that definition is pretty clear to me. But I confess that I am one of those people who carries the definition even farther. I am personally convinced that God is doing His miracles all throughout the day, every day, expanding on those "normal" events of daily life, pouring out blessings upon us that we don't always attribute to Him. And that He is continuously and actively sustaining the entire universe every moment, "upholding everything" as Hebrews chapter 1 tells us, even the air that we breathe and all the daily affairs of life.

I also personally like what C.S. Lewis said about miracles. He described miracles as an "interference" or "suspension" of fixed physical and biological laws by a supernatural power. In other words, God is stepping into an event that is taking place and changing what would naturally occur in order to bring us blessings and protection. An example for me personally might simply be Him moving that deer from in front of my car at the right moment.

And yes, on occasion, perhaps many occasions, performing very obvious and extraordinary feats of wonder like calming a raging storm, and then this one, feeding 5000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fishes.

But most of all, and I'll ask you to permit me a little leeway to be personally imaginative, I am convinced that the Lord Jesus and His angels walk with me daily, performing little miracles all along my way to make provision for me, and to protect me from harm, especially from the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms spoken about in Ephesians chapter 6.

And as I read and ponder these words of our Lord given here in John chapter 6, I can clearly see the loving provision of a "Father" as He takes personal care of and makes provision for his children.

Here, with this "miracle" of God feeding these 5000 men and their families, He is doing as He did in the desert over a thousand years earlier, once again reminding His children that He can and that He will make provision for them.

And folks, God wants you and me to read about these "miracles" of His and to know, by faith, that yes, He is our Father and that He will ever and always take care of us, "His Children".

But it is so important that we always keep in mind that the first and most important purpose of why Jesus performed His signs and wonders was to bring glory to Him as the Son of God, the Messiah and to declare that He has the authority and the power to forgive sin.

Recall that Jesus spoke about that on the occasion when some men brought a paralyzed man to Him to be healed. listen!

> 20 When Jesus saw the men's faith, (the men who had brought their friend to Jesus) he said to the paralyzed man, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."
> 21 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"
> 22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 23 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? 24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins…." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. 26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. (Luke 5:20-26)

And there is often more than just one miraculous work taking place within Jesus' miracles. At least three miraculous works took place there as He healed that man. First, Jesus was able to know every thought that each one of them was thinking, and then, He forgave the man His sins, and then He also healed the man's paralysis, three miraculous works.

Folks, we ought to be constantly amazed at our Lord. He is at work, performing signs and wonders and miracles that we are not aware of every minute of every day.

And while these signs and wonders and miracles were bringing glory to Him, they were, at the same time enabling "faith" within the hearts of those who follow Him.

We are told about that on the occasion of when Jesus turned the water into wine. There in John chapter 2 verse 11, we are told,

> 11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. (John 2:11)

Let me say this again! Yes, Jesus' signs and wonders and miracles benefited the people, but they were done first or the expressed purpose of "manifesting His glory and enabling people to believe in Him." And the same should be taking place within you and me.

And now here, in this passage, Jesus performed what some believe to be the most convincing of all of His miracles, the feeding of 5000 men and their families.

And this truly is a "miracle".

May we pause for a moment and read this passage given to us here in John chapter 6. Leading up to this moment Jesus had been in Jerusalem where He had healed the man at the Pool of Bethsaida. And then we're told,

> 1 Sometime after that, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (the Sea of Tiberias), 2 and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. 4 The Jewish Passover Feast was near.
> 5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.
> 7 Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"
> 8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 9 "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"
> 10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. 11 Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.
> 12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." 13 So they gathered

them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.
14 After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." 15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. (John 6:1-15)

Oh dear friends, all of the miracles that Jesus did were far beyond the abilities that you and I can understand. But this feeding of the five thousand was perhaps one of the most extraordinary, and the most visible to the most people.

I don't know that it could be said that any one miracle that Jesus did was any more important that another. They each had their purposes, with some of those purposes being more obvious than others.

But as we said a moment ago, I believe that it can also be said that all of Jesus' miracles served at least two other common purposes, to enable faith within the hearts of His followers and also to declare to them that He had the power and authority to forgive sin.

This miracle of the feeding of the five thousand certainly declared that kind of power and authority, but it also had other purposes behind it. And I would like for us to think about two of those purposes in this study.

The first purpose that was obvious was that it separated Jesus out from the other prophets that had been sent to Israel.

Jesus was a prophet yes, the greatest of all prophets. But He did not come to earth to be a prophet. He came to be so much more.

The people of that day had been taught to expect another prophet to come. The woman at the well thought that Jesus was a prophet. And now here in verse 14, after Jesus had fed the multitude, we read,

14After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." (John 6:14)

Jesus knew that as the Messiah, He needed to separate Himself out from the other prophets in the minds of the people, and especially from the prophet Moses.

But please don't think that this was a matter of competition folks. Not at all. It was simply a matter of order and purpose. The people needed to be able to see Jesus for who He truly was, the very God who had enabled even Moses to do the miracles that He did back in Egypt and in the desert.

And Jesus needed to change their manner of thinking completely, to divert their eyes away from their long held dependence upon following the laws that Moses had given to them.

The new order of things that He was bringing into being would be through "faith", "faith", and not through obedience to a set of rules and laws.

And so, it was no small coincidence that Jesus performed this miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. He knew that it would be directly connected in their minds to the giving of the Manna in the desert.

Listen to what He said when the people asked Him about the Manna. Verse 31, they said to Him,

> 31 Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"
> 32 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (John 6:31-33)

Again, Jesus wasn't seeking to displace Moses as a prophet, but to simply establish the order of position and authority and purpose. And by performing the amazing signs and wonders and miracles that He would do, He was declaring to the world exactly who He was, the God and Savior of the world.

I love what the Holy Spirit has to say about the Lord Jesus in the Book of Hebrews chapter 3. There He said,

> 4 Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. 2 He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. 3 Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. 4 For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. 5

> Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. 6 But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast. (Hebrews 3:4-6)

We can't know all that the disciples might have thought as they went about handing out the bread and the fishes. And we can't know what all the many thousands of people were thinking as they ate their fill of food that day.

Yes, we're told that they might have wanted to make Him King. But those were probably selfish thoughts, wanting Him to be King so that they could have "free food" and could be rescued from the Roman rule. And those kinds of thoughts will always be in our minds also. Our sinful nature seems always to prompt self-centered thoughts and behaviors.

But God, of course, wanted them to think other thoughts. As with the smaller crowd at the wedding at Cana, the turning of the water into wine, the miracle brought "faith" to the hearts and minds of some of them.

And that would have been what God desired from these many thousands of people. And I'm sure that some did have the right response and did put their faith in Jesus. But not all. And again, such is the way of man's sin-filled heart.

But clearly, from the words of this passage, the Lord Jesus wanted to use this circumstance of the feeding of this multitude as a special teaching moment for His disciples, one that would guide and direct their faith in all of their future responses.

Consider again the circumstance of this miracle. And remember that nothing in God's providential realm is happenstance. The traveling out into a deserted place where no provision of food would be available to them was clearly by God's plan. And note also that for their comfort He provided a grassy field.

And it was also clearly in God's providential plan that a question would arise in the minds of the disciples about the need for food, bringing them to the circumstance they were in. What were they to do?

And the first thing that took place was logical reasoning, "send the people away into the local towns to find food." And logical thought is usually a very

good thing. We need it. Logical thought is God's way of helping us to carry out the common matters of daily life.

But we must also keep in mind that logical thought is not an end-all to every situation and every need. Often, God has a different plan, and perhaps even a far greater provision available to us than the one provided to us through our logical thinking. And that is where our "faith" must enter into the equation.

And let me add, faith must become a regular part of every Christian's logical manner of thinking, to by faith, remember that God is always at work with a perfect plan for every situation in our path. In other words, part of our logical reasoning should first include our asking God about His plans for the circumstances we have in front of us.

These disciples were still very new at the discipline of faith, so Jesus took the time to allow their logical thinking to work its way through its process. And using the logical reasoning of their minds, they determined that they had neither the food, nor the money necessary to feed such a large crowd. So their logical conclusion was to send the people away into the local towns to find their food.

The stage was then fully set for Jesus to carry out His plan, and His plan began with a special "testing" question to His disciples. He asked, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"

What could that question be about? Jesus knew that His disciples did not have the wherewithal to feed such a large crowd.

Perhaps it was to place within them special memories that would guide and encourage them as they carried His ministry forward in future years.

Because, later on, after Jesus would endure the sufferings of the cross and be resurrected, He would meet with these same disciples on a beach while they were fishing, and there He would give Peter and His other disciples a similar sounding instruction. He would say to Peter, "Feed My sheep".

These words that we read here today in our text were a very important prelude to those later instructions there on that beach.

Jesus wanted those men then, and you and me now, to know that none of us, of ourselves, ever have the adequate or appropriate food to feed His sheep. Those disciples then and we now need to understand that it is Jesus and Jesus alone who has the "Bread of Life" that people need to nourish and to sustain their life.

Yes, this was "physical food" being discussed here. And Jesus would again, there on that beach supply Peter with a great number of fish.

But the allegory is strong and to the point. Jesus instructed His disciples to give these people food that they obviously did not have.

Hidden beneath His command was the intention of compelling the disciples to know that they would never, of themselves, have the appropriate food, "the Bread of Life", to set before people.

It was much like a parable that Jesus told to them on another occasion. In that parable, found in Luke chapter 11, Jesus said to them,

> 5 . . . "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? 8I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. (Luke 11:5-8)

Folks, you and I, like these disciples, must always know that we truly do not, of ourselves, ever have the necessary provisions, the right words, the Godly advice, the comforting counsel to set before those who come to us each day. Only Jesus has the true Bread of Life. And we must ever and always turn back to Him and persistently knock at His door until He gives us His true bread to give back out to the friends who come to us.

Here in this passage, the disciples were easily able to understand that they did not have the wherewithal to feed such a great crowd of people. But such a conclusion will not always be so simple or easy. And we must be very, very careful in the "food" that we hand out. It might still leave our friends hungry and wanting.

Thankfully, these disciples were able to come to the right decision. They turned back to Jesus and in their turning back to Him allowed Him the opportunity to meet and to satisfy every need of every one of those people.

And dear Christian, Our Lord will do the same for you and for me every time we need a special provision from Him, words to say, advice to give, comfort to show to some hurting soul. And His provision will be plentiful for their every need.

Pray with me!