

**The Memoirs of Peter
The Lord Will Provide!
Mark 6:30-44**

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Tonight, I invite you to turn again with me to Mark 6 as we continue our journey through Mark's wonderful gospel, his record of the life of our Lord, and not just a historical record, but rather a record purposefully compiled to communicate a message, and that message is unfolded in every story, and we'll see it yet again tonight. Mark 6, and we're going to begin looking at verse 30 and following.

When I was in college, I read for the first time a biography of a man named George Mueller. Perhaps you have heard of him, or you have read of him. He was best known for being a man of prayer, and specifically for the orphanages that he ran. More than 10,000 orphans were cared for through the ministry of George Mueller. And he often found himself without the necessary means to care for them and threw himself on the mercy of God. He planned, he didn't leave everything to chance, or even to the Lord's providence, but he often, as we do, found himself beyond his own means, beyond his own abilities.

One morning, the story's told that, in his biography, that the plates and cups and bowls on the table at one of the orphanages were empty. There was no food in the pantry. There was no money to buy anything else. The children were all standing there as they often did, waiting for their morning meal behind their places; when Mueller said something like this, "Children you know we must be in time for school," so you know school had to march on, meal or not, and so he simply lifted up his hand, and he said this prayer, "Dear Father, we thank Thee for what Thou art going to give us to eat."

As soon as he finished praying, and this is a true story, this is not fabricated, as soon as he finished praying there was a knock on the door, and it was a baker, from the town there in Bristol; he said, "Mr. Mueller, I couldn't sleep last night, somehow I just was afraid you wouldn't have bread for breakfast, and the Lord wanted me to be here with some for you. So, I got up at 2:00am, and I baked some fresh bread, and here it is, I brought it."

Mueller thanked the man, closed the door, and no sooner had he closed the door, and there was another knock, and it was a milkman. The milkman announced that his milk cart had broken

down right in front of the orphanage. And so, he said he'd like to give the cans of fresh milk that were on the cart to the kids, so that he could empty his wagon and make the necessary repairs.

Really a remarkable story of God's care and provision for those orphans, and through Mueller. Verse 27 -27 You know that amazing example is really consistent with who God is. This is the constant message of Scripture; God will provide for His creatures. You go back to Psalm 104, and there the psalmist says,

... You give to them, they gather *it* up (speaking of all of His creatures), You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good.

God opens His hand, and I love that image, because it pictures God as we sometimes do with small animals, opening our hand with food, and they come up and eat out of them. That's the picture the psalmist is giving of God, to all of us as His creatures.

You come to the New Testament, the message is the same; Acts 17, I'm sorry Acts 14:7, and as Paul testifies to the pagans he says, "... [God didn't] leave Himself without a witness ... [to you, because] He did good, and ... He ... gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, [and He satisfied] ... your hearts with food and gladness." Paul told those pagan Gentiles, "The God I'm preaching is the One who has provided those things for you."

In Acts 17:25, he tells the Athenians, "[God – our God, the true God, the living God – is not] ... served by human hands. [He doesn't need anything from us,] since He Himself gives [watch this] to all ... life and breath and all things." As James said, "Every good ... and ... perfect gift comes down from ..," where? "... from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning."

Mark says anything good in your life, anything good in the life of anyone you know, anything good in the life of anyone on this globe, comes from the hand of our Creator, a good God who provides. In 1 Timothy 6, there Paul says, God is the One, "... who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy."

What's unique about Mark 6 is that Jesus personalizes that message; He Himself, He says, is the One who will provide, especially for His own. This story is in all four of the gospels, the feeding of the 5,000; it's in Matthew 14, Mark 6 here, and Luke 9, and John 6. Obviously, that means if

all four of the gospel writers included it, it means it's really central to the message about Jesus Christ, and about His life, but what is it really about? What did Jesus intend to teach us through this dramatic miracle?

Well, there are a number of powerful lessons, and we're going to look at them, but first we need to make sure we really understand the story. The theme of the story of the feeding of the 5,000 is simply this, our Lord has a genuine concern for and power to provide for both the spiritual and physical needs of people. Our Lord has the concern for and the power to provide for the physical and the spiritual needs of people.

You can see this in two verses; you'll notice in verse 34, when Jesus saw the large crowd, He felt compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd, so they had no spiritual food and notice what He does, He begins to teach them many things. He gives them what they need spiritually. He provides for them, and then verse 42 when there was nothing for them to eat physically, He provides for them in that way. They all ate and were satisfied. So, our Lord is the provider. He's the provider of all our spiritual needs; He's the provider of all our physical needs. That's the message behind this remarkable account of the feeding of the 5,000.

Now let me give you an outline so just you know where we're going. We're going to look first at the milieu, the setting of the miracle, verses 30-34; then the miracle itself, the feeding of the 5,000, in verses 35-44; and then we're going to look tonight at the end, at the message, the implications from this remarkable miracle for us. So, let's begin with the milieu, the setting of the miracle.

First of all, there's a report. Notice verse 30, "The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught." Now this has context. The last time we looked at Mark, you remember, we looked at the death of John the Baptist; but go back to verses 12 and 13 of this chapter. You remember Jesus sent the 12, verse 7, "... He summoned the twelve ... began to send them out in pairs ..." and then verse 12 says,

They went out and preached that *men* should repent. And they were casting out many demons ... anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.

So, the 12 had been sent out in pairs to minister all over Galilee. In verses 14 and 16, in response to that Herod hears about the ministry that they're having, and he begins to think that maybe it's John the Baptist back from the dead; and because of that, Mark interrupts his story to explain why he would think that. So, it was sort of an interruption that fit into the story that fit into the point Mark was making, but now we come back to the return of the 12. They'd been out, perhaps a few weeks, perhaps as many as a month or two, on a ministry mission, in pairs all over Galilee, and here we hear, verse 30, of their coming back. He had sent them out and now they report of all that Jesus had done through them when they gather again together.

Notice what Jesus does; they all gather together, and He had them report, notice what He says, "... all they had done ..." Jesus wanted a full report on everything they had done in their ministry, the healings, the casting out of demons, where they had stayed, who didn't receive them, and all of that. But that's not all; notice He also had them report on all they had taught, verse 30 says. Jesus was equally concerned about their doctrine. This, by the way, emphasizes the responsibility of those in leadership in the church, not only to know what ministries are going on, but also to know what's being taught, to know that those who are teaching are trustworthy with the doctrine.

You know, it's amazing really, the pattern of our Lord here in discipleship, and it's a pattern we all ought to follow. He taught them with the Word, then He showed them by His example, then He had them do it on their own, and then He had them report to Him, and He checked up on what they had done. It's a wonderful pattern of discipleship really, in any area of life, whether it's a trade, but especially spiritually.

So, there was a report. Then notice there's rest, verses 31-34, first of all rest needed. Verse 31 says, "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.)"

Probably at their base in Capernaum, people know the 12 have come back, Jesus is there, there's a buzz, it's a busy city, it's right on a major thoroughfare, and so people from all over have begun to hear about the ministry of Jesus, even Herod had, and so people are collecting, and they don't even have time to eat. How long had they been away? Well, weeks at least, maybe a couple months, and now they need rest.

You know, it's an interesting thing to me, that even though Jesus had no sin, He still needed down time, He still needed rest. In fact, you remember back in 4:38, we caught Him on the boat catching a nap, asleep in the stern. It's a good reminder that we, too, need rest; there's a need of rest even from ministry.

I think of Elijah – you remember Elijah in 1 Kings? He reaches the very highpoint of his ministry, he's on the top of Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal, the LORD sends fire from heaven, consumes the sacrifice and the altar and everything else, and then he is able to put to death all of those prophets of Baal. He runs before the chariot of Ahab back to Jezreel, and then the next day Jezebel sends a message, "I'm going to make you like them, by this time tomorrow." And he flees for his life. And here he is, the man of God, who confronted 450 prophets of Baal, running from Jezebel, and he's sitting under a tree in the desert, saying, "God, you might as well just take my life, it's over, my ministry's a failure."

What's remarkable to me about God's response, is that it's not what my response would have been if I had been God. You know what God did? The first thing He did was put him to sleep, and then He sent the ravens to feed him. He dealt with his physical body first, and then when that was dealt with, He took him to Mt. Horeb, and He gave him a fresh vision of Himself. It's just a reminder; you know sometimes we don't think as wisely, and we never think as wisely as our God, but sometimes we don't follow even His wisdom that's revealed in His Word.

Jesus said, "You need rest." And so, they tried, verse 32, "They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves." They left Capernaum and went to Bethsaida, Luke tells us.

Now this is just to remind you of the sort of overall feel of the Middle East, you see of the Sea of Galilee up there at the top. Both of the places in tonight's story are at the very top end of the Sea of Galilee. In fact, here is the top end of the Sea of Galilee, an actual photograph. And I think you can see the arrow pointing to the ruins of Capernaum, that's where Jesus' home was. That's where His base was. That's where Peter lived and Peter's mother-in-law and his wife, but then you'll notice about four miles to the east is another arrow, pointing to Bethsaida.

Between Capernaum and Bethsaida, the Jordan River empties into the Sea of Galilee at the north and of course it continues out the south end of the Sea of Galilee as well, but so that's what's going on. There're about four miles between them, and they leave the busy city of Capernaum,

and they head toward Bethsaida. It was on the north end of the Sea of Galilee, just east of Capernaum. It was probably in a place called the Plain of Bethsaida. Here are a couple of pictures; that, by the way, is the Jordan River at the north end of the Sea of Galilee where it comes in, empties into the Sea of Galilee.

There's a little better picture of it; you get some idea. Capernaum would have been to the left on this photograph, and Bethsaida to the west. Here's what the area in Bethsaida looked like; you can see the Sea of Galilee sort of there in the distance. It had rolling hills, but a lot of it was flat, plain area, but it a much more rural area, a lot of fields; and so, Jesus and His disciples go here to get away from the crowds.

But something more important is going on than just Jesus trying to get rest for His disciples. This departure from Galilee signals a significant change in Jesus' ministry in two ways. First of all, He is going to withdraw from Galilee. He's not going to stay in Galilee from this point forward. Why? Well, we'll learn about that in the weeks that are ahead.

But it also signals that Jesus is no longer going to go to the crowds always. In fact, in the coming months, He's going to spend His time withdrawing from the crowds and concentrating His time and His energy in His disciples.

So, they try to get away for some much-needed rest; but it doesn't always happen exactly like you plan because their rest is interrupted, verse 33, "*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."

Now, if you weave together the four gospel records, it appears that when Jesus and His disciples left Capernaum, people saw them, recognized them leaving the harbor there in a boat, and began to run alongside the shoreline. In fact, Mark 6:33, if you look at that verse again, it's not really the best translation at the end of that verse; our translation says, "... and got there ahead of them." What it literally says is, "They went ahead of them." That doesn't mean they arrived first, it merely means that for a while they were able to run faster than the boat could go, and then they reach, you remember where the Jordan enters the lake? And they had to go further up and around, so by boat to Bethsaida was about four miles, by foot it was about eight miles.

So, John puts it like this, “A large crowd followed Him because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples.”

So, they get to this plain area where that little hill was (I showed you in that vicinity), and they go up, and they rest for a short time. But it was a very short time because then Jesus sees a large crowd arrive, verse 34, “... Jesus went ashore, 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.” Luke adds this, “... the crowds ... followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing.”

You know it’s interesting, there’s no note in this passage until they pass out the food, that the disciples had any role in this ministry; our Lord said they needed rest. He gave them rest, but He could not allow the crowds not to be ministered to. As important as rest is sometimes the priority of people’s immediate needs trumps even that. Here were people that were like sheep without a shepherd.

Now what’s the major problem when sheep don’t have a shepherd? Well, there are many of them, but the chief one is they don’t have an adequate food supply. They can’t provide the food for themselves. They often wander where there isn’t adequate food. And so, what does Jesus do? They don’t have food. They’re like sheep without a shepherd, and so He begins to feed them. He begins to feed them by teaching them. You see His shepherd’s heart. He felt compassion for them, and because He saw them hungry, spiritually hungry. They weren’t getting anything from the Pharisees, they weren’t getting anything from the scribes, and so He begins to teach them, speaking to them about the kingdom of God; in addition, He was healing those who were sick.

Now that’s all the set up for the story that Mark wants us to have because that brings us to the miracle, the feeding of the 5,000 itself. This is as you know one of the most famous of Jesus’ miracles as I mentioned in all four gospels, so it must make a crucial point.

Notice the account of the miracle begins with the laudable concern for physical needs. First by the disciples. They’re concerned about these people and their physical needs, verse 35,

When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, “This place is desolate and **it’s** already quite late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”

Luke says the day had begun to decline. Matthew describes it as evening; so, it’s late in the day, probably in the afternoon around 4:00. There was the first evening that began around three, and the evening ended around six with sunset that time of year, so somewhere in that three to six window, this conversation occurs. The 12 said to Christ, “Listen, Lord, this place is remote, and it’s getting late.” Now this part of the land was dotted with fields and small villages, but there was no large town like Capernaum where most of these people had come from, and all the surrounding area of Capernaum. So, the only solution the disciples can see is, “Lord, turn them loose, let them go now while there’s time, let them go into the fields, let them go into the small villages, and scavenge for food.”

It’s not like you could go to McDonald’s (not that you’d want to do that), but it’s not like you could have done it if you wanted to. And so, this was going to be a challenge, the disciples suggest, dismiss the crowd, send them into the neighboring fields, the farms that dot the countryside, the small villages, and let them get food; but they just weren’t concerned about that. Luke adds, they wouldn’t have time to return to their homes by dark, and so Luke says, let them, “find lodging and get something to eat; ... [because this is] a desolate place.”

Now it’s commendable that the disciples were truly concerned about the physical welfare of these people; they felt responsible for them, but so did the Lord. Notice verse 37, “... 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?’” Jesus flatly refuses their plan, bad idea; and then He gives them this audacious command: “You,” and in the Greek text, “you” is emphatic, He’s making a point with these guys, He says, “You give them something to eat!”

It’s an impossible command. Now why would Jesus do that? Look over in John’s account; John 6, John 6:4,

Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. 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?” This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.” [This is why Jesus is saying this to the disciples, it’s why He said it to Philip earlier, and,] Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.” [Even if we spent so much money, everybody would only get a little, it wouldn’t be sufficient.]

So, Jesus knew what He was going to do. You know that’s remarkable, because it means that Jesus had already considered the practical ramifications of so many people coming out and following Him to a remote place. Now remember what I’m reading here in John 6 happened before they got there,; after Jesus and His disciples had landed were up on the little mountain, looking down, they saw the people coming and Jesus, “... seeing ... [the] large crowd ... coming,” verse 5 says, that’s when He said to Philip. So, this happened at the very beginning, this little interchange with Philip. And He’s testing Philip’s faith and all of the twelve’s faith as well.

Notice now back in Mark’s gospel, verse 37 continues, “... And ... [the disciples] said to Him, ‘Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?’” Now understand how the two events relate. Before Jesus had ministered to the crowd, while they were still coming, when He saw them coming, He and Philip had had their interchange. The conversation that Mark records here comes hours later, after the teaching, and after the healing. So, apparently, Philip had related to the other eleven what Jesus had said to him, and we know that Philip had because they’re going to use the same line; “Philip’s right, Lord, there’s no way we can do this; 200 denarii won’t cover this crowd.”

Now a denarius was the average pay for one day’s work for an average worker in the first century. That means 200 denarii is the equivalent of more than half a year’s work, 200 days of work. If you take the average annual salary in Texas and do the math, they would have needed to spend about \$30,000 in today’s dollars to feed this crowd. It’s huge! So, they said to Christ, “Are you saying You want us to spend that kind of money to give these people bread? Just enough bread to get by on? Lord, that’s not a good plan. You need to send them away.” From the disciples’ perspective Christ had gotten them into a fix which they couldn’t extricate

themselves from. But don't forget the Lord already knew what He was going to do; this was merely a test.

You know as I think about that, it reminds me that the Lord doesn't change, He's always the same yesterday, today, forever. He still does this. In the same way the Lord often knows what He's going to do in our lives, but He tests us first to see if we trust Him. How often do you find yourself in a situation where your own resources are utterly inadequate, your wisdom, your skill, doesn't get you anywhere? What are we going to do? When that happens, let's be honest with ourselves. Where's the first place we normally turn? We try to fix it; we try to come up with a plan; we try to engineer it; we try to make it happen just like the disciples did. When will we learn that those circumstances are often to test us, even as Jesus was testing the twelve? It's a test.

That brings us to the limited resources of the disciples. Look at verse 38. After He tells them, "You do something about it," then He said to them, verse 38, "... 'How many loaves do you have? Go look!' And when they found out, they said, 'Five, and two fish.'" Now what's the Lord doing here? Again, remember He knows what He's going to do, He knew from the beginning what He was going to do.

So, what's the point of this? The point is the Lord wants them to see that this situation is beyond their own solving; they don't have the means to fix this problem. So, He sends them out to see what they do have so that they will see the utter impossibility of handling this with their own resources. Mark tells us, "Five loaves, and two fish."

John tells us that it was Andrew, Peter's brother, who reported to Jesus, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" Andrew essentially says, "Lord, I hate to report it to You, but we got nothing. We have only a boy's lunch out of this whole crowd of 5,000 men, plus women and children. There's only one boy's lunch." Five barley loaves. Barley was a staple crop in Galilee; those loaves would have likely been round in shape and flat; don't picture, you know, something like you'd buy at the grocery store necessarily. At the biggest each one of these loaves would have been enough for one man for one day.

And two fish. These aren't fish you would particularly have wanted, either. There were three kinds of fish that fishermen fished out of the Sea of Galilee in the first century, the likely one here is the last one, sardines. Two small sardines and bread, five small loaves; those were the staples of the locals in Galilee.

Now don't miss what the Lord's doing because He often does the same thing with us. He shows us that our own meager resources won't even touch the problem. You ever found yourself there? Let me ask you differently; how often have you found yourself there? My resources won't even help. God brings us to the end of our skill, the end of our wisdom so that all we can do is look up and depend on Him. It's like the sailors in Psalm 107, you remember, those seasoned sailors who were brought to the end of their skill by that huge storm, and all they can do is cry out to God. That's where God often wants us, He wants us to truly acknowledge our weaknesses, He wants us to acknowledge our utter dependance on Him and His grace.

Isn't that what He did with Paul? You remember? In fact, turn over to 2 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 12. You remember this account? Verse 7, Paul says,

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me – to keep me from exalting myself!" [We don't know what this messenger was, there's argument about it among commentators and has been from all of church history, whether it was a person, a false teacher, or someone else, or whether it was some physical problem, we just don't know, but whatever it is,] verse 8, "Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me ... I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake ..." [I love this,] "for when I am weak, ..." [and I always am – what he really means is, "when I realize I'm weak], then I am strong."

That's what the Lord was doing to the disciples; you have nothing to contribute to fixing this problem.

That brings us to the lavish provision of the Lord. Verse 39,

And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. And they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. [Now that's interesting. Why would that detail be in?]

All four gospels emphasize Jesus' command to divide up these people; why is that? Well, probably it's because it would have made it easy to count how many were actually there. In other words, 5,000 isn't an exaggeration. It was based on a rough head count, and in addition, of course, it would have made it easier to serve that many people. There would have been 50 to a hundred groups sitting there on the grass. It was near Passover according to John. So, this would have been in the spring when, like in California, all the hills are green, and you can actually sit on them. And then each disciple would have been responsible for providing food for somewhere between four and eight groups, each group made up of 50 to a hundred. So, they would have been responsible for serving, one disciple responsible for serving a little less than the number of people that can be seated in this room.

What Jesus is about to do is truly amazing. Liberals hate this story, because of what Jesus does here; and since they don't believe in God intervening in human history, miraculously, they're forced to come up with some other explanation, and boy there are some good ones! But my favorite liberal explanation of what happens here is this:

You know, actually all of these people had brought their lunch with them, but none of them were willing to share with anyone else. It took a small boy, willing to come forward, and willing to volunteer his lunch, and when he did that all of those adults, all of those men, felt horrible about their selfishness, and they began to reach behind their robes and pull out their lunch basket and share with those that didn't have; what a wonderful thing! And it was all inspired by Jesus.

Listen, all four gospels go out of their way, to say that there was no food in the entire crowd, except for one little boy's lunch, which was two sardines and five small loaves. That's it! And so, it's an amazing miracle.

Notice how the miracle unfolds, verse 40; [41] “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...” and notice the wording here, the *New American Standard* has captured the Greek very well, “... and He kept giving *them* to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all [in the same way].”

It’s interesting the verbs here in these verses are almost identical to the ones used to describe the Lord’s supper; He took, He blessed, He broke, He gave. Here it’s not about the Lord’s supper. Jesus here took the puny resources that were available, and in His customary way of praying He looked up toward heaven, and He pronounced a blessing. We aren’t told what He said, it may very well have been the traditional Jewish blessing of food before a meal, which says this: “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the world, who brings forth bread from the earth.” Whatever it was, when Jesus finished His prayer in the Jewish custom of the first century, some 5,000 men would have said together, “Amen,” and then waited for dinner. But regardless of what He said, after He had blessed it, we’re told He broke the loaves.

Now it’s not likely that there was a table there in front of Him. It’s more likely that a basket was placed there, and the two fish and the five loaves were placed in that basket. They obviously had those on hand, probably stored in the boat. And so Jesus then begins to break the fish and the loaves into that basket, and from that basket He just kept reaching in, and filling the baskets of the disciples as each one of them came by and they went to serve their four to eight groups of 50 to a hundred each. If you just count the men that means each of the 12 served about 400 people, and then Jesus did the same with the fish. He broke it, again probably into the basket, and just kept pulling pieces of those two little sardines out of the basket as long as the 12 kept coming back. Incredible!

You know what I love about the gospel record is? They don’t go into all the detail about how He did it; they’re not like so many of the spurious gospel accounts that record these sort of magical things, they’re not so much fascinated with how Jesus did it as with who did it.

In case you’re tempted to downplay what Jesus did here, all four gospels make the same point; look at verse 42, “They all ate and were satisfied.” This wasn’t one of those restaurants where everything’s presentation and you leave hungry. This was an all-you-care-to-eat buffet of

sardines and barley loaves. Little different than the banquet at Herod's table that we studied last time, isn't it?

Just to remove all doubt, notice verse 43, "... and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish." There were a hundred times more leftovers than the food Jesus started with, after everybody ate, and everybody was satisfied. And there were, verse 44 says, "... five thousand men [there] who ate the loaves [and the fish]." Matthew adds, "... five thousand men aside from women and children."

You understand this? This isn't a fairy tale, this isn't make believe. Even the people who ended up not believing in Jesus realized something astounding had happened here, because Jesus fed a crowd of over 5,000 hungry men with two sardines and five small barley loaves; that's one small loaf of bread for every thousand men, and less than half a fish per thousand; less than half a sardine per thousand; and they all ate, and were satisfied. And He filled them up. And then, if that isn't enough, every one of the disciples came back from their groups with a basket loaded with leftovers from the groups that he was serving.

Crowd knew something amazing had happened. John writes this, "Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, 'This is truly the Prophet who has come into the world.'" Amazing miracle.

Now that brings us to the message for us, the implications for us. First of all, there's a lesson in the feeding of the 5,000 about the compassionate character of our God. Do you see it here? You see Jesus' personal concern for their physical well-being? Remember, Jesus was apparently the first one to think about that, because He's the one who asked Philip right after He saw the crowd start arriving, "What are we going to do to feed these people?" That's how God is. As we started this evening, God is the One who provides everyone with all things. Reflects God's genuine concern for our physical needs.

You know sometimes I think we're prone to think that God's only concerned to think about our spiritual help, and He is, more so than our physical well-being; but at the same time God is very much concerned about meeting the physical needs that we have. He made us two parts, both soul and body, and He's concerned about both. It is true at times God sends us leanness. We don't always have enough for a time. You remember Deuteronomy 8, He tells the children of

Israel, When you were in the wilderness I humbled your heart, and I didn't provide you with all you needed because I wanted to test you to see what was in your heart. He said, "But I'm bringing you then I gave you manna ... [and I sent you quail, and now I'm sending you] into a good land, ... [filled with milk and honey where you'll inhabit houses you didn't build and cities you didn't build.]"

Paul knew what it was to suffer leanness; 2 Corinthians 11:27 he says, "*I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, [I've been] in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure...." And yet Paul can still say at the very end of Philippians, "... my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Listen God is a compassionate, merciful God even when it comes to our physical needs. I don't know what situation you find yourself in right now, but God is concerned; His own great heart beats with concern as our Lord's did when He was here.

There's a second lesson, a lesson about the divine nature of Jesus Christ. This has been the issue throughout the last couple of chapters. The question of the day is, "Who is this Man?" You remember, the disciples posing that question? And in these two nature miracles, the one we're studying tonight, the feeding of the 5,000, and the one Lord willing we'll study next week, the walking on the water, the answer to that question becomes even clearer. Jesus is not an ordinary man. He sent out the 12, and He sent them out and gave them power, but nothing like this. In these two nature miracles Jesus shows that He is unique, He doesn't fit in anybody else's category except God's.

The people understood that. John tells us in John 6; they wanted to make Him King. Wow! Anybody who can do this let's make Him King; and Jesus could only prevent them by slipping away from them keeping them from carrying out their design. It was clear to them that Jesus was someone unique.

If you're familiar with your Old Testament, you recognize shades of the story. You remember the story of Elisha, in 2 Kings 4? In 2 Kings 4, in fact just turn back there for a second. Second Kings 4:42; this is in the ministry of Elisha, here's a true miracle, verse 42 of 2 Kings 4,

Now a man came from Baal-shalishah, (or shalishah I should say) and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And he said, “Give them to the people that they may eat.” His attendant said, “What, will I set this before a hundred men?” [Am I just going to set this before a hundred guys?] But he said, “Give *them* to the people that they may eat, for thus says the Lord, ‘They shall eat and have *some* left over.’” So he set *it* before them, and they ate and had *some* left over, according to the word of the LORD.

This is recorded in Kings to illustrate what an amazing man, amazing man of God Elisha was. But do you realize what happened? The great Old Testament prophet, held up before the people of God, and these men there that day would have known this story, the great Old Testament prophet Elisha, had fed a hundred men with 20 loaves, and that qualified as an amazing miracle, enough to be recorded in the text of Scripture to show that he was a true prophet with power from God. A hundred men with 20 loaves, and Jesus had just fed 5,000 with five loaves. He was much greater. He was in a totally different category above even the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. As we’ve learned already, and we’ll learn again, He was no one less than God the Son.

There’s a lesson here as well, a third lesson, about Christ’s ability and desire to provide for our physical needs. He’s more than capable, you see that here. What need do you have? Think, right now, about your physical needs, whether it’s health, whether it’s a job, whether it’s, whatever. Think about that need. He’s more than capable of meeting that need., and He will meet it in His way. It may not be the way you planned. It may not be the way you hoped, but He will meet your needs because He’s obligated Himself to do that; He’s promised.

You remember the Sermon on the Mount? Look at Matthew 6:25,

[Jesus said,] “... [Don’t worry, don’t] be worried about your life, *as to* what ... [you’re] going to eat, or what ... [you’re going] to drink, nor for your body *as to* what you’re going to put on. Is life not more than food, and the body more than clothing?” [And then He uses a couple of examples; He says,] “... [Consider] the

birds ..., ... [consider the grass of the field, that is] the lilies of the field, the flowers, the wildflowers that grow in the fields.”

And notice what He says in verse 30, “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you?” If God clothes the wild grass with the flowers that it has that are so radiant and beautiful, we all go out to see them, we go on long trips down to the Hill Country to see it, and do you think He can’t clothe you? Think He can’t take care of you?

He’s basically promising here that God is going to do that; look at verse 26, “... [Consider] ... the birds, they don’t sow, they don’t reap, they don’t gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.” Underline that – Your heavenly Father feeds them! Every single bird you see flying around, your heavenly Father feeds them; are you not worth much more than they? If God feeds them, is He not going to feed you?

So, verse 31,

“Don’t worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat? ... What will we drink? ... What will we wear for clothing? ... the Gentiles ... [are all about this; but] ... your Father knows that you need all these things. ... Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, [the spiritual priorities of life] and all these things will be added to you.”

He’s promised to do it. Philippians 4, “... my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

Oh sure, there may be lean times, difficult times like there was for the Old Testament people when He tests your heart, He tests my heart, to see what’s in it, but He will provide. God’s own character is on the line. Why do I say that? Because we are now His children. Remember we studied it even in Ephesians, the end of Ephesians 2, we are now members of God’s household.

So, God has obligated Himself to care for us. Maybe you’ve never thought of this text in this light, but look at Timothy, 1 Timothy 5:1 Timothy 5:8. Remember we’re part of God’s household. Verse 8 says, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

God in a sense has put His own reputation on the line by taking up the responsibility of us as His children; He will keep His own requirements. He is perfectly righteous and will live by His own rules; He will provide for His children.

There's a lesson in faith. When you have physical needs, what do you do first? What do you do first? Where do you put your trust? Are we like the apostles? Do we put our confidence immediately in our own plans and our own schemes and our own devices, in our own puny resources, in other human beings, or do we put our confidence in the Lord? Do we really doubt that Christ can provide for us and our families when He can feed 5,000 with two sardines and five small loaves of bread?

I know there are folks in our church right now who are going through hardship, without work, some cases not enough work. Listen, don't lose your confidence in God; don't go to your own scheming. Yes work, work hard, work harder to get a job than if you had a job, but don't put your confidence in yourself, or your contacts, or your resume; put your confidence in Christ. He's more than capable of providing for you and your family, in His way and in His time, and He will. Believe in Him.

Finally, there's a lesson in consecration. One small boy, the lad of John 6 as Andrew describes him, made his resources available to Christ; that was all that was there. It was just two small sardines and five little loaves of barley bread, small, ordinary, nothing really; but from that boy's willingness to let Jesus use him, Jesus fed a huge crowd.

You know, I think there's a remarkable analogy there, a remarkable lesson that Jesus can do the same thing with us. We don't offer Him much, do we? Do any of us offer Him anything really? We're nothing. We're less than two sardines and five loaves of bread; but if we're willing to allow Him to use the resources we have; if we're willing to, as it were, place ourselves in His hands, He can bless us and break us, and He can use us in ways far beyond our own ability.

It reminds me of what the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:7, he says, "... we have this treasure in earthen vessels ..." that's how the *New American Standard* translates it; a better translation is, "... we have this treasure, ..." the treasure of the gospel, the treasure of our new life in Christ, "... we have this treasure in clay pots ..." that's what he says. We're like clay

pots. Why? "..., so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves."

We don't have much to offer Christ, but the amazing thing about the power of our Lord is He can take nothing and use it for something.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for this remarkable account. Thank you for revealing to us again the power of our Lord, who He really is.

Lord, there's already no question in our minds as we've trekked our way through Mark's gospel, that He is unique, that He is nothing less than Your Eternal Son in human flesh. Father, we see it on every page, and we thank you that again tonight we've seen His power working in the physical world, taking two small sardines and five little barley loaves and feeding a huge crowd. What a miracle!

Father, what a lesson about who He was, and what a lesson about who You are and who He is to us. Thank You, Father, that You are, through Your Son to us the great provider. There's nothing that we need that You can't and won't provide for us, in Your way, in Your time.

You might test us; You might put us through leanness, You might test our faith, but in the end, You will provide our needs. Don't let our faith waiver; and Lord, when it waivers, forgive us, and bring us back. Remind us again who it is and in Whom our faith rests. We thank You and praise You that You are able to take very little, nothing really, nobodies, with no real skills to offer You, nothing to offer You. You can take us and by Your grace You can bless us, and break us, and use us, beyond what we can ever imagine; not because of who we are, but because of who You are.

We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.