

**The Gospel of John (37);
The Fourth Sign of Jesus;
The Feeding of the 5,000**

Introduction:

Let us turn in our Bibles to **John 6:1-14**.

After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ²Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. ³And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.

⁴Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. ⁵Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" ⁶But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.

⁷Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little."

⁸One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, ⁹"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"

¹⁰Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. ¹¹And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." ¹³Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. ¹⁴Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

In our study of John's Gospel we have been addressing both the signs of Jesus as well as the discourses that follow the signs. This episode of the feeding of the 5,000 is the fourth sign of the Gospel, which gives occasion to the fourth discourse of Jesus, in which He presents Himself as the Bread of life (6:22-77).

The feeding of the 5,000 is one of the most familiar stories of the Gospels. One reason for its familiarity is that it is the only miracle performed by the Lord Jesus that is recorded in all four Gospels (except for the resurrection).¹ Commonly in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there are parallel accounts of the miracles. But apart from this event before us, John's Gospel is significantly distinct from the Synoptic Gospels in the miracles that it records.

I. The different emphases in the four accounts of Jesus feeding the 5,000

Now an unspiritual mind might put forth the challenge, "Why the needless repetition of four accounts, and why the divergent details of this one miracle of the feeding of the 5,000?" We understand the blessed Spirit of God to have inspired the Gospel writers to record the event in the manner in which they did, in order to convey to their readers spiritual truth. There are different emphases in the four Gospel accounts of this one miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

¹ The miracle of Jesus feeding the 5,000 is also recorded in Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44, and Luke 9:10-17.

In **Matthew's account** there are several points of emphasis in his record of this miracle. First, Matthew set forth *the Lord Jesus as an example to His disciples in that He fled persecution in order to teach the Word of God to others*. Later He would tell His disciples of their need to flee persecution as they take the gospel to the Gentile world. In addition, Matthew presents the crowds as “following” Jesus, His disciples being among them. Matthew is able in this way to emphasize the importance and the role of discipleship to Jesus Christ.² But in addition, the account in Matthew is designed *to lead His disciples to greater faith in Him* to provide for their needs and to enable them to minister to others as His Apostles.

Mark's account emphasizes *Jesus' compassion upon the multitudes as a flock without a shepherd*. In feeding the multitude the Lord Jesus was doing what the Old Testament prophets foretold of the Messiah. He would come to shepherd His people. As one wrote,

Jesus does what God promised to do in Ezekiel 34:11, 14: “I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out... I will feed them in good pasture.” Jesus acts as the Shepherd of God's people, like Moses (Num. 27:15-17; Psa. 77:20), David (Psa. 78:70-72), and God Himself (Psa. 23:1; 74:1; 78:52, 53; 80:1; Ezek. 34:15).³

The record of Jesus feeding the 5,000 in **Luke's Gospel** serves to show that *the Lord was able to help His disciples do what they were otherwise incapable of doing*.

At the end of the day the Twelve would have sent the crowds away to provide for their own food and lodging. They were not aware that they had any resources of their own with which to feed them. But Jesus was able to take their limited and totally inadequate resources and give them back to them in such a way that they were able to feed the crowds and have enough to spare. Thus the narrative in its Lucan form depicts the inadequacy of the disciples in contrast to the ability of Jesus to help the crowds. With His help the disciples could do what otherwise they could not do.⁴

But what is the emphasis of John in his account in this fourth Gospel? **John's Gospel** uses the miracle to set forth *the Lord Jesus as the fulfillment of the typology of the Old Testament event of Moses providing bread from heaven for the Israelites*. The conclusion of those who witnessed the miracle was: “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world” (John 6:14). The miracle as a sign also provides the setting for Jesus to teach what is recorded in John 6, including the setting forth of His deity and preexistence (6:32f; 38, 62), the doctrines of election (6:37, 39) effectual calling to salvation (6:39, 44f, 65), perseverance of the saints (6:39), and the promise of the future resurrection of His people (6:44, 54).

Though all four Gospels record this miracle of Jesus feeding the 5,000, John's Gospel does provide details that are not found in the other three accounts. Here is a setting forth of some of these distinctives:

In this account we see that the reason for the multitude's presence was the attraction of the “signs” that Jesus wrought. John also records Philip's perplexity as to the feeding of the great crowd, and his little piece of mental arithmetic which showed so clearly the impossibility of a solution out of the disciples' own resources. And he tells us that it was Andrew who brought the boy forward. It is in this Gospel that we read of the proximity of the Passover, of the bread as “barley loaves”, of the reason for gathering up the fragments, of the effect on the people in general. Clearly John has quite a lot of information not derived from the Synoptists (i.e. Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Characteristically, John describes what happened as a “sign”. The effect of the sign is to make some people think of Jesus as a prophet, and some wish to make a king out of Him.⁵

² Robert H. Gundry, **Matthew; A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art** (Eerdmans, 1982), p. 293f.

³ Note in **The Reformation Study Bible** (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 1572)

⁴ I. Howard Marshall, **The Gospel of Luke; A Commentary on the Greek Text** (Eerdmans, 1978), p. 357.

⁵ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 338.

Edward Klink sought to set forth the main idea of this episode in the role that it serves in the narrative (story) of the Gospel. Here is his understanding of the “main idea” of these first 15 verses of this chapter.

When humanity did not know for what it was hungry, Jesus came into the world, becoming the host in a strange land of darkness and providing true food that satisfies every desire. The church must recognize Jesus as He is, not as it wants Him to be, allowing the Prophet and the King to be what He also came to be: the One who serves.⁶

We will next consider the details of the account in verses 1 through 15. As we do so, we will consider some implications and applications that the Holy Spirit has set before us.

II. The meaning of the details of John’s account of Jesus feeding the 5,000

We first read of the setting of this event in **verse 1**, “*After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias.*” The setting is in the region of Galilee, that is, on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, which is also called the Sea of Tiberias. We most often think of this body of water as the Sea of Galilee. But there are several names in Scripture that were assigned to this large fresh water lake. The Sea of Galilee is called *the Lake of Gennesaret* in Luke 5:1f, which reads, “So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets.” And although “the land of Gennesaret” is identified in two places (Matt. 14:34; Mark 6:53), the Lake of Gennesaret is only here in Luke 5:1.

In our text this lake is also called **the Sea of Tiberias**. This was the official name of the lake beginning in about A.D. 20, when Herod Antipas named the lake in honor of Emperor (Caesar) Tiberias of Rome. Among the Jews in the days of our Lord it would have been known and referred to as the Sea of Galilee. John refers to it as the Sea of Galilee and the Sea of Tiberias, perhaps because by the time John wrote this Gospel (90’s AD?), this formal name was most commonly ascribed to the lake by his Gentile readers.

We read in **verse 2** that Jesus was not alone as He crossed the sea, but large crowds were following Jesus because of the signs they witnessed of Him. We read, “*Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased.*” I suppose some followed Him in boats and others travelled on the shore as they attempted to keep the boat in sight in which He was traveling. The Greek verbs in verse 2 are in the imperfect tense, which shows forth continuous action. In other words, great multitudes were continually following Jesus for they were continually witnessing the signs which He performed in healing the diseased. Whereas it would seem in the flow of John’s Gospel Jesus had not spent much time in Galilee, this verse indicates that knowledge of Him and His reputation for performing miracles was widely known in that region. He had been ministering there quite extensively for quite some time.

John described the miracles Jesus performed as “signs” and that the people followed Jesus because of them. But we will see later in this chapter that the people were sadly seeking Jesus not because these miracles directed them and identified to them the person of Jesus, in other words, it was not because they believed in Him to which the signs pointed. Rather, they were looking to the miracles themselves, the signs themselves, not to Him to which they pointed. By the way, here we see John referring to many miracles as being many “signs”, although John singles out seven of these signs in a special way that testify to the identity and nature of Jesus Christ.

⁶ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 299.

We read that after Jesus and His disciples had crossed the sea, they came to, or went up on a mountain. **Verse 3** reads, “*And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.*” Interestingly, the text specifically declares that Jesus went up on “*the* mountain”, not just “*a* mountain.” In other words the presence of the definite article (Greek: “the”) may be a suggestion that this is a rather symbolic action. One suggested, “Alongside verse 4, it is likely that the narrator’s setting of the scene is intended to echo the scene at Mt. Sinai with Moses, who will be alluded to shortly in verses 31-33.”⁷ But this may be somewhat of a stretch of meaning. **Leon Morris** wrote of this verse:

The place of these happenings is defined as “the mountain.” This expression occurs several times in the Gospels (e.g. Matt. 5:1; Mark 3:13), and raises the question whether there was a particular mountain which Jesus and His immediate followers familiarly knew as “the” mountain. If so, we have no means of identifying it. In any case the expression may mean no more than “the hill country.”⁸

Donald Carson wrote of this articular construction, “the mountain”:

The Greek *to oros* (“the mountain”) does not necessarily refer to a particular mountain or hillside, but may simply mean “the hill country” or “the high ground”, referring to the area east of the lake and well known today as the Golan Heights. Mark’s “solitary place” (6:32) is not in conflict with this description, but is presupposed by it: Jesus *sat down with his disciples*, apparently intending to be alone with them (as Mark makes clear), and only then observes the great crowd closing in on him (v. 5).⁹

And so, it is probably more reading into the text than out of it that John meant that this mountain was a symbol of Mount Sinai that Jesus ascended with His disciples. I think that this is a good example of the maxim, “A little knowledge of Greek is a dangerous thing, for it may easily argue for unsubstantiated claims.” In general, I have discovered over the years that unless I know that the man is competent in matters, when I hear on the radio or television, “The Greek says...” or “the Hebrew says...”, I give it no credibility until I have checked it out thoroughly.

Interestingly we read a detail in the next verse that seems at a casual reading to have been inserted for no particular reason. **Verse 4** reads, “*Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near.*” It is true that John seems to emphasize these themes in his Gospel. “Here we have a number of Johanne characteristics: an interest in feasts, and in time notes, and the reference to ‘the Jews.’”¹⁰ But there may be more suggested by this statement. Here are the words of a rather obscure commentator of this Gospel:

Excited by the power of Jesus to heal the sick, a large crowd of Galileans followed Him into the deserted and mountainous district east of the sea of Tiberias. What took place there was already familiar to the readers of the gospel. But the Evangelist does not merely repeat the story in its well-known form; he adds that, when Jesus fed the multitude, *the Passover was at hand*. And so, at that very time, the priests were preparing to kill the lambs, and the Jews were assembling their families to eat unleavened bread and the flesh of an unblemished lamb, to commemorate their past deliverance from Egypt, to acknowledge the power and the mercy of God, and to be reminded of their peculiarity as His chosen people. The Passover was the most characteristic *feast of the Jews*, because, though primarily the commemoration of a past event, it also provided the ground of hope for a present deliverance and for the arrival of a present deliverer. Men thought of the present prophet *like unto Moses* (Deut. 18:15) and the messiah who would be their king. It was therefore not irrelevant or, at least, it did not seem to the Evangelist to be so, that Jesus should choose this occasion, when the Jews were seeking to kill Him (v.

⁷ Ibid, pp. 302f. A rather broad presentation of Jesus as one like unto Moses in John’s Gospel is set forth in J. Louis Martyn, **History & Theology in the Fourth Gospel**, revised and enlarged (Abingdon, 1968), pp. 102ff.

⁸ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 342.

⁹ Donald A. Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 268.

¹⁰ Morris, pp. 342f.

18), to gather His disciples about Him and to feed the people with bread, or that afterwards, in the synagogue of Capernaum (v. 59), He should proclaim Himself to be the living bread and finally offer His flesh that men might live and not die. The movement from the miracle to the discourse, from Moses to Jesus (vs. 32-5, cf. 1:17), and, above all, from *bread* to *flesh*, is almost unintelligible unless the reference in verse 4 to the Passover picks up 1:29, 36, anticipates 19:36 (Exo. 12:46; Num. 9:12), and governs the whole narrative.¹¹

In other words, John's reference to the Passover in verse 4 does help link Jesus with Moses, the Lord Jesus as the true Passover, the Lord Himself the true Bread that feeds the Lord's people rather than the manna in the wilderness. What is being suggested throughout is that Jesus Christ is the full realization of the hope of the Jewish people they had held through history.

We then read in **verses 5 and 6**:

⁵Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" ⁶But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.

Jesus was concerned for the physical well-being of these many people who followed Him. He felt it was His responsibility to feed them, even though their resources were quite limited. He asked Philip of the available resources. John included the detail that Jesus, "***knew what He would do.***" This miracle was for the benefit of multitude present, but also more specifically and directly for the benefit of His disciples. He was teaching them that if they would desire and be willing to care for others, the Lord would see to it they had the means to do so.

The Lord has the ability to provide for His people when it is their intention to provide for others. Paul would give forth this principle to the church at Corinth with view to their collection for poor believers in far off Judea. Paul wrote of the Lord's ability to give to them so that they might give to others.

⁶But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. ⁹As it is written:

***"He has dispersed abroad,
He has given to the poor;
His righteousness endures forever."***

¹⁰Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, ¹¹while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

The Lord's blessing our church family in this manner was quite evident through this past year. When our total missions' giving was figured for 2018, it was determined that we gave toward missions, including our radio mission, a total of around \$83,000. This is a wonder for a congregation our size. But the Lord was ***to make all grace abound toward us, that we had all sufficiency in all things, to give in abundance for this good work.*** And we believe that He can and will do the same for us this year, and we pray to that end.

Notice the attitude of our Lord toward these people in general. Jesus believed that it was His responsibility and His disciples' opportunity to feed this large number of people. Jesus had genuine

¹¹ Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, **The Fourth Gospel** (Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), p. 281.

sympathy and concern for these many people. Matthew's account is very clear to state His concern on this occasion. We read in Matthew 14 the parallel account of feeding the 5,000 and what led up to this event. There we read these words:

¹³When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. ¹⁴And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; **and He was moved with compassion for them**, and healed their sick. ¹⁵When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food."

¹⁶But Jesus said to them, "**They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.**"

Now we are Reformed in our understanding of the Scriptures. One of the truths of Scripture we recognize and affirm is the unique, special, covenantal love that God has for His chosen people. God calls His people, "My people." He speaks of them in endearing terms, as "His Sheep", His "bride", "the apple of His eye", and numerous others terms. God repeatedly refers to His people as His "beloved." God loves His elect with an everlasting, eternal, covenantal love, for God sees them in union with His Son. They are in Christ, whom the Father loves supremely, and so He loves them supremely. But although He loves His own uniquely and specially, we affirm that God has compassion for many who are not numbered among His chosen people. He is loving toward many people that He does not love covenantally, because the nature of God is love. He loves His own people because they are rendered lovely in Christ; but He is loving to sinners that are "unlovely" because God is loving by nature. Remember how God appealed to Jonah after Jonah was discouraged and depressed when God had relented in His purpose to destroy Gentile Nineveh? God said:

"And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:11)

Often times we are impatient, even hard-hearted toward those of the world, whom we perceive to hold to values contrary to the Word of God, or whose morality conflicts with our own. We not only have little pity and patience toward them, but sometimes we have attitudes and opinions of them that are wholly incompatible with the Christian faith. Sometimes we may degenerate to the spirit of "the sons of thunder" (Mark 4:17). We read of them in **Luke 9:51ff**:

⁵¹Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, ⁵²and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. ⁵³But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "**Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?**" ⁵⁵But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. ⁵⁶For the Son of man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." (NKJV)

These two disciples, two brothers, thought that these unbelieving Jews were deserving of the utmost punishment due to their sin. They desired that justice would be rendered to them then and there. But they did not know what manner of spirit they had. When we desire that God bring His judgment on others, who may be deserving of His punishment, when we fail to have concern and compassion on others, whether Christian or not, we are not thinking spiritually; we are not thinking in terms of the gospel. We should desire that God would show mercy on all, or at least forestall His judgment for a time. We should pray, "Lord, please have mercy on them, that they do not receive from you what they deserve, but that You would make them the recipient of Your mercy, not the object of Your wrath. We should be more like Stephen (Acts 7:60) rather than like Jonah 4. Our Lord had compassion on the multitude, and we ought to have compassion upon the multitudes of people who are lost in their sins, are having difficulty in their lives, and who may need and profit from our assistance. Here in John 6 we read that Jesus desired to feed this large gathering of followers.

John's Gospel records the beginning of this miracle to be a test that Jesus posed directly to Philip. Again, we read verses 5 and 6: "Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where we shall buy bread, that these may eat?" ***But this He said to test him***, for He Himself knew what He would do."

The Lord was testing Philip. This is one way that you may train and develop another into a more faithful and informed disciple of Jesus Christ. You pose a situation to him and call for his explanation or a solution to the matter. It moves him to think about matters carefully. It leads him to determine precisely what his responsibilities are before God in a given situation. It causes him to have to think biblically, "What would the Lord have me to do?" Or, "What can I do with this challenge or opportunity before me?" Or better, "What can I believe God can do using me in this matter?"

This year I am reading through **The Spurgeon Study Bible** published by Holman. I was reading Spurgeon's comments on our Lord healing two blind men. When they came into the house where Jesus was, Jesus asked them, "Do you believe I can do this?" Here is the complete note on Matthew 9:28

"When He entered the house, the blind men approached Him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe I can do this?" True faith believes that Jesus Christ "can do this." It believes, of course, that He is able to do twenty thousand other things, but it believes especially that "He can do this"—to forgive this sin of which I am so deeply conscious, to remove this trial with which I am now so sorely afflicted, to sustain me under this temptation which so fiercely assails me, to strengthen men to accomplish this duty which so clearly is before me. As each special case arises, faith will exercise itself upon that particular thing and believe that Christ "can do *this*."¹²

Well, before Philip this situation arose, which was humanly speaking, a near impossibility to meet. Jesus tested Philip, essentially asking him, "Do you believe I can do this?" And so it is, the Lord brings us into situations, particularly when we desire to be true, devoted disciples, as Philip here, and He tests us. The Lord does not tempt us, for that is not possible. James wrote,

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. (James 1:13f)

No, the Lord does not *tempt* His own, but He may use the temptation of the devil to *test* His own. Here Jesus was testing Philip, to see what he would do. "***He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?"*** But in this testing of Philip, the purpose was not so that Jesus could discover what Philip would do, but that Philip would discover what Philip would do. For we read of Jesus, "***But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.***" Jesus already knew that He would feed this multitude.

Why did our Lord single out Philip? Perhaps because Philip was from the nearby town of Bethsaida (cf. John 1:44). If there were any among His disciples that would know how to produce food for this large group of people, it would be Philip. But Philip did not fare well in this test, but I am sure, nevertheless, he came out of it stronger than when he entered his test. And he was perhaps a bit more humble, which is always an improvement in one's walk.

In **verse 7** we read Philip's response to our Lord's question to him. "***Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little."*** One denarius, of course, was the average daily wage of a common laborer. It would take 200 days of labor by one man to acquire the money required to buy bread for so many. Humanly speaking, Jesus and His disciples did not have the resources to cover this expense.

Matthew Henry wrote of Philip's struggle:

¹² *The Spurgeon Study Bible* (Holman, 2017), p. 1295.

See the weakness of Philip's faith, that in this strait, as if the Master of the family had been an *ordinary person*, he looked for supply only in an *ordinary way*. Christ might now have said to him, as He did afterwards, "Have I *been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?*" Or, as God to Moses in a like case, "*Is the Lord's hand waxen short?*" We are apt thus to distrust God's power when visible and ordinary means fail, that is, to trust Him no further than we can see Him.¹³

And so it is with us also. We tend to be of the same mind as Philip.

But another disciple spoke up, that being Andrew. We read in **verses 8 and 9**, "***One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, 'There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?'***" Interestingly, Andrew was also from the same nearby town as was Philip, that being Bethsaida. Did Andrew seem to have a hint of what might be done with these five barley loaves and two fish? I think probably not. He was probably asserting what they all thought, except for the Lord Himself, that they did not have enough resources for the need before them. And yet in this Andrew might be commended. He would not hide what little food might be available to him and His disciples, as a reason to withhold what they had from others.

A principle may be found here. Even when we our resources are meager, we should not withhold from blessing others with what little we have. Andrew knew they did not have much, but what little they did have, he was willing to give it away for the benefit of others. It is a law in the spiritual realm that if you care for others, then the Lord takes it upon Himself to care for you. Proverbs speaks to this in several places:

Proverbs 22:9. "He who has a generous eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor."

Proverbs 19:17. "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his deed."

But the failure to care for the poor, when it is in your ability to do so, shuts off from you the blessing of God. Solomon wrote, "There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: riches kept for their owner to his hurt. (Eccl. 5:13). He also wrote **Proverbs 28:27**, "He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses."

Sometimes the Lord tests us in the matter of stewardship, similar to the manner that He tested Philip. It is as though He asks you, "Will you trust in My unlimited resources or will you, rather, trust your own limited resources that you have in hand?" Many times the Lord may call His people to give to some cause or some needy person even when they do not have the full resources in hand to carry them through after they do so. He desires to teach us to trust Him rather than trust our riches or resources. He does so in order to take away our anxiety about the needs and concerns of life. He desires to free His people from money worries, but He does this through testing and thereby training His people that ultimately He is their provider, not their employer, or the government, or some other human entity, or even your own abilities and resources that can easily be exhausted due to the uncertainty of times and events that transpire.

Consider the account of the Lord providing for a widow lady with very few resources in difficult times. Elijah the prophet came to a widow in the days of a famine in Israel.

⁸Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ⁹"Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, ***I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.***" ¹⁰So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink." ¹¹And as she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand."

¹³ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 939.

¹²So she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.”

¹³And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said, *but make me a small cake from it first*, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. ¹⁴For thus says the LORD God of Israel: *‘The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.’*”

¹⁵So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah. (1 Kings 17:8-16)

The bottom line is this. Our Lord would have us be free from the tyranny of worry about things, so that we may live in joy and peace before Him, and so that we may be loving toward others in helping them in their distress. This will not be experienced by us if our emotions and affections are governed by our needs and the fear that we will not have enough. Clearly the Lord would have His disciples have full confidence, that He would provide them the things that they needed to live in this world. The Lord will provide for His people when they trust Him. Jesus told His disciples that they should not be like the unbelieving Gentiles. “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him” (Matt. 6:8). The Lord Jesus gave a great deal of attention to this in His Sermon on the Mount. He would have us free from worry about ourselves and our own, so that we might show love toward others and in doing so demonstrate our love for Him.

And so, the disciples had no resources or money to provide food for this large number of people. But no matter! In **verses 10** and **11** we read our Lord’s instruction:

¹⁰Then Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. ¹¹And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.

John wrote that there was “much grass in the place.” It was the time of Passover, which was early spring. The winter was past and the green grass was pleasant to look upon and comfortable to sit upon. Galilee is a Mediterranean climate. It is much like Northern California west of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. When May arrives in California the tall grass all over the hills and valleys turns very dry and brown. It remains that way until the mid-winter, when the rains come and the new grass grows. Here in New England the grass is green in the summer but brown in the winter; in California the grass is green in the winter but brown in the summer. Many times at Christmas time we would drive the four hours to our home town through the green hills and mild weather. It must have been quite pleasant on this hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee, when they sat down to hear Jesus teach them and then to be fed by Him.

We might imagine what the disciples were thinking as they seated the people on the grass, preparing them for a meal when they knew they only had the barest of provisions. “What did the Twelve now think—all these people sitting down as if to dine, and only this bit of food in sight?” Were they surprised? Or were they humbled, knowing that they had been foolish and unbelieving for having not anticipated what would occur?

Now this was not a sumptuous meal, but it was sufficient and no doubt deeply appreciated by all present. Galilee was the land of wheat farming and so rich wheat bread was the common fare. Barley loaves were a poor substitute for wheat bread. “Barley was regarded, according to the Talmud, as a course food, only fit for horses and donkeys.”¹⁴ And the fish were probably quite small and dried. They were not feasting on filets. But it was enough.

¹⁴ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 333.

Matthew Henry sought to show from this that as Christ's disciples, we should be content with what the Lord gives us. He argues that we should not think that we must live on water and gruel to be truly spiritual, nevertheless, we should be content with what the Lord gives us.

It does not follow hence that we should tie ourselves to such coarse fare, and place religion in it (when God brings that which is finer to our hands, let us receive it, and be thankful); but it does follow that therefore we must not be *desirous of dainties* (Psa. 23:3); nor murmur if we be reduced to coarse fare, but be content and thankful, and well reconciled to it; barley-bread is what Christ *had*, and better than we *deserve*. Nor let us despise the mean provision of the poor, nor look upon it with contempt, remembering how Christ was provided for.¹⁵

We then read in **verses 12 and 13** these words of our Lord's instruction to His disciples:

¹²So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." ¹³Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

"So when they were filled." Everyone had as much as they wanted to their full satisfaction and enjoyment. Clearly the Lord Jesus performed a great miracle, one that everyone present recognized and acknowledged. Some have tried in vain to make this a non-miracle, that the people had their own resources that they finally brought out in the open when Jesus made them feel guilty for being miserly. This is silly. "There was not merely a morsel for each man, but an abundant supply, enough and to spare."¹⁶

Jesus and His disciples would want not (i.e. not lack) for they wasted not. "***Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.***" This was practical and wise. Tomorrow they would again be hungry. Although the Lord provided in this wonderful way today, they should not presume upon Him, but make provision in advance for tomorrow's need.

This miracle was the fourth sign of John's Gospel that pointed beyond the miracle itself to the identity and nature of Jesus of Nazareth. The people concluded rightly from this event that Jesus was the promised Prophet of the Hebrew Scriptures, the One that Moses had declared would come one day to deliver His people from their sin. We read in **verse 14**, "***Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.'***"

Moses had declared to Israel that God would one day send a Prophet to Israel who would be much like Moses, that is, He would have the authority to rule over the people of God. Moses declared that the people of Israel were to believe and obey everything that this Prophet taught and commanded them. Those who failed or refused to do so would be "cut off" from the people of Israel, the covenant people of God. All those Jews who failed or refused to believe and submit to Jesus, were cut off from membership in the Israel of God.

We had spoken of Jesus as the promised Prophet when we were in the first chapter of this Fourth Gospel. The subject arose in the discussion of what some Jews thought regarding the identity and role of John the Baptist. We read of this question of the Jewish leaders of John the Baptist:

"Are you the Prophet?"
And he answered, "No." (John 1:21-23)

They did not ask if John was *a* prophet. They asked if John was *the* Prophet. There is the definite article, "the", in the Greek text that precedes "Prophet." They were asking John if he were a specific prophet.

¹⁵ Matthew Henry, vol. 5, p. 939.

¹⁶ Ryle, p. 335.

Again, the common understanding among the Jews was that with the coming of the Messiah, God would send a Prophet who would have the same authority and standing as had Moses, yes, even greater authority than had Moses. Moses himself had declared this word in **Deuteronomy 18:15-22**. I will read the larger passage for context:

¹⁵“*The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear,* ¹⁶according to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’

¹⁷“And the LORD said to me: ‘What they have spoken is good. ¹⁸*I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.* ¹⁹*And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.* ²⁰But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’

²¹And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’—

²²when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

The Jews thought, “Would John claim to be the Messiah, or the forerunner of the Messiah?” The queried John to see if he claimed to be this promised Prophet.

Of course the Word of God declares that Jesus Christ is “the Prophet” that Moses had foretold would come. Jesus Christ is our **Prophet**, Priest, and King. He is the Prophet greater than Moses. The people on this hill in Galilee recognized that Jesus was this promised Prophet that Moses had foretold would come.

But we will find in our study of John 6 before us, that the perception and devotion of this crowd was terribly faulty. The people had a fascination with Jesus, but they had no true saving faith in Jesus. They are like many in the world, they only sought Him for what they thought they could receive from Him. They did not seek Him for who He was in truth. Verse 15 records that the people were ready to make Jesus their King, but Jesus refused and rejected their efforts. He would in His fourth discourse reveal to them the nature of true, saving faith in Himself.

The Lord has said, “For those who honor Me I will honor,
and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.” (1 Sam. 2:30)

A few comments of
Charles Spurgeon
(1834-1892)
On the Lord’s Prayer

Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.

¹⁰Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us this day our daily bread.

¹²And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matt. 6:9-13)

Each element can be divided into most instructive heads.

“Our Father in heaven” -- I am a child away from home.
“Your name be honored as holy” -- I am a worshipper.
“Your kingdom come.” -- I am a subject.
“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” -- I am a servant.
“Give us today our daily bread” -- I am a beggar.
“And forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors” -- I am a sinner.
“And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” -- I am a sinner in danger of being still a greater sinner.¹⁷

More comments of Spurgeon on “**Jesus, a Friend of Sinners**” (Matt. 11:19)

The enemies of our Lord desired to brand Him with infamy, hold Him up to derision, and His name down to everlasting scorn through their words about Him here. Their scandalous charges increased Jesus’ reputation. To this day the Savior is adored by the title that was coined as a slur. It was designed to be a stigma that every good man would shudder at and shrink from, but it has proved to be a fascination that wins the heart and enchants the soul of all the godly. Saints in heaven and saints on earth delight to sing of Him as the friend of sinners, which means He is a friend of us all. What the resentful Jews said in bitterness has been turned by the Holy Spirit into a most gracious account. Where they poured out vials of hate, odors of sacred incense arise. Troubled consciences have found a sweet balm in this title for Jesus. He has proved Himself to be their friend, and they have become friends with Him. He has completely justified the name His enemies gave Him in an offensive way. This title sets forth His excellence as the Redeemer, and we must remember that what He was at that time He is still today.¹⁸

¹⁷ A footnote in **The Spurgeon Study Bible** (Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), p. 1290.

¹⁸ **The Spurgeon Study Bible** (Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), p. 1298.