

Christ's Power to Provide

'And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.'

Mark 6.34

Preached at Baldock Baptist Church by Pastor Jonathan Northern on 7 July 2024.

We turn this evening to the Gospel according to Mark, chapter 6, and I'll read from verse 34. This evening, we will review this mighty miracle of the Lord Jesus Christ, known as the feeding the 5,000. It was, of course, more than 5,000; it was 5,000 men, and women and children beside.

Verse 34 reads: *'And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.'*

Our subject this evening is "Christ's Power to Provide", or "Christ's Sufficiency Displayed", and there are three things I want us to consider together. Firstly, how the Lord Jesus Christ views us—what is His perception of the human race and our needy souls. Secondly, we see here that in compassion He begins to *'teach them many things'*, and thirdly, we then see this miracle that He performed—a mighty miracle in which there were over 5,000 who witnessed the power and the sufficiency of the Lord, which itself was a means of instruction.

The compassion of Christ

The occasion here is that the disciples needed a break, and the Lord instructs them to take a vessel, a ship, and they travel a little way down the coast to a deserted place with the intention that they could relax. But, of course, the people notice their whereabouts, guess the destination, and run on foot, so there is no time of relaxation and leisure. The disciples are irritated, as we read elsewhere in the gospels, but the Lord here has compassion upon them. Verse 34 tells us that he *was 'moved with compassion toward them'*.

It's a wonderful thing to think of the compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Compassion is something that, in some ways, is increasingly rare. We can be cold and selfish; we can think so often of our own situation and have little feeling for others. But not Christ. He had a compassion for this great multitude that ran on foot to follow Him.

Sheep

Christ sees them as sheep not having a shepherd. He sees them differently than the disciples. They said, *'send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread'*. But the Lord deals with them differently. He sees many of us differently as well.

How do we view ourselves? Some people would view themselves as lions, in this sense: "I can look after myself, thank you very much. I can be independent, I can provide. I've got the strength, the vigour, the ability - all that I need to pursue a life of happiness and fulfillment. I don't need any help, and I certainly do not need the help of God and the Lord." But the Lord Jesus Christ sees this whole company as sheep.

What are sheep? They are dependent creatures; they need a shepherd. If they are left to themselves, they are vulnerable to wolves, bears, and preying animals. They will soon find that their life is miserable or taken from them.

Sheep are prone to wander, and they are thoughtless creatures. They just put their head down, graze the grass, move on, and before you know it, they've gone far away from where they started. Isn't that sheep? I'm not a shepherd, but this is the picture that we have of sheep. They are needy creatures that need to be provided for; they need to be led to satisfying pastures.

Of course, the Lord didn't see these people as being physical sheep with wool and so on, but their character, their condition and their need was that of a sheep. Is that how you see yourself? It is how the Lord sees us. He recognises that we are dependent creatures – He has made us that way. We are made to know Him, to call upon Him and to be dependent upon Him.

We live in a world where there are so often pitfalls and dangers. Isn't that true? How often people fall into a pit—some pit of sin or a pit of addiction. They set out on life, full of hopes, without a care. They have their dreams; they think all will work out for good, and then, before they know it, they fall into some helpless or miserable condition. Things do not turn out as they expected, and they are as if they are in a pit. They don't seem to be able to extricate themselves from the difficulties that they are in. That's why we need a shepherd. We need the Lord.

Sheep without a shepherd

Look at this phrase: He says here, He saw them not only as sheep but '*as sheep not having a shepherd*'. Now, the Bible teaches that the leaders of the nation were like shepherds. The prophets were shepherds, the priests were like shepherds—those who ought to be suitable guides to the souls of their people. But tragically, in those days, the shepherds were false shepherds. They had no care for the souls of the people. They were shepherds that could give no credible, meaningful or reliable guidance.

We are in the same situation today. There are the shepherds of atheism. They say, "Follow me. I'll lead you. I'll show you the way to live." They'll put some placard on a London bus that says, "There is no God. Now just get on with life." They're false shepherds. They will lead you astray. It will lead ultimately to an unsatisfying life with no purpose, no fulfilment, and ultimately eternal ruin at the end.

There are the shepherds of the entertainment industry. They claim that you should follow them. "We'll provide satisfying things. You can have 50 different TV channels, access to as many films as you want to watch. Just buy into our plan for life, and you can watch the box sets, and you can enjoy almost unending leisure and pleasure." But it will lead you astray. On a deathbed, what will that subscription to Netflix do for you when you come to that point where the doctor says, "I'm sorry, there's nothing I can do. You've got a few days to live?" I don't want to be miserable, but imagine then in that situation how many there are that come to that point and they realize that their life has been wasted and they know nothing of the Lord.

Then there are the shepherds of mysticism. Increasingly, people in Western society turn to the mystic religions. They say, "Well, there must be something more than simply the mechanical capitalism of the West", and they begin to explore and inquire into all the mysticism of the Oriental religions—how you can get to a place of peace, nirvana, calm. It's all fabricated nonsense. There's nothing substantial. It doesn't answer the deepest needs of our soul.

Then there are—and these were the predominant shepherds of Israel—the shepherds of what we may call works righteousness. "Well, you need to be a religious person," say these shepherds. "You've got to tick all those boxes of religious ceremonies and rites. You've got to tithe your mint and your herbs. You've got to live a life of conformity to all the expectations of Almighty God. And if you live that way, then all will be well with you." But of course, those shepherds left these people with a hollow heart. They told them, "You're not good enough for God. You've got to ascribe to be like the Pharisees, meticulous in all your keeping and observances, and then you'll be saved." But their consciences told them that they failed so often. They were sheep without a shepherd.

There are some today that follow that same deception: "Well, I've been a religious person. I've said my Hail Marys, I've counted my rosary beads, I've been to see the priest and made confession. I'm sure it will be well with my soul." They know nothing of the glorious work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ teaches our souls

Look at what He does then, having seen them as sheep without a shepherd. How did he display His compassion? *'He began to teach them many things.'*

Do you wish to be taught? Do you wish for the compassion of Christ? Then how would you expect Christ to show His mercy and tenderness to your soul? The best way, this passage tells us, is when Christ begins to teach us of Himself, of His heavenly Father.

Perhaps we would like to know what those many things were which the Lord Jesus Christ taught these needy people that had followed Him on foot, that were attracted either by His miracles or by His previous teaching. Perhaps some of them had been struck; they were astonished with the manner of His communication and the authority of His statements. But what did He teach them?

Well, we know the kind of things that Christ would have taught them because we have four gospels, and they tell us of His teaching. So often He would have taught them of God, not the caricature, disfigured God that the Jewish leaders had communicated to them. They had lost their grasp and their vision of the glorious God of the Old Testament. He was simply a God who was severe, who demanded that His laws be kept. They didn't grasp that the Lord is also a God of grace and truth.

He came—the Lord Jesus Christ, that is—to set before men not only the judgment of God, and He did speak more of hell and the judgment of God than any of the Old Testament prophets, but He also spoke of the grace and forgiving love of God. And He didn't only speak it; He illustrated it through so many miracles that He performed.

He spoke of guilt. He spoke that our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes. That was a staggering statement to those that heard the Sermon on the Mount. They looked up to the scribes and Pharisees as being the leading lights of religion. And yet, despite the fact the Pharisees describing themselves as being almost perfect, the Lord says, that *'except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.'*

What did He mean? Not that these people by their own efforts could become more righteous than the Pharisees. He would provide a righteousness that was far more excellent than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. He had come into this world, *'to give His life a ransom for many.'*

What was His life? It was a life of perfect righteousness. It was spotless, it was blameless. He kept the demands of God's just and holy law in every respect. He kept every commandment, not only

outwardly in conduct but He kept it in thought, in will, in desire, in purpose, in intention. It was a life with holy motives that led to holy words and holy actions. There was nothing in the life of Christ that God demanded that He neglected to do.

Some people think, "Well, I haven't done this and I haven't done that. That makes me a good person." But the law of God demands positive obedience – kindness to our neighbour, full worship, and a reverence for God in every respect. We've fallen far short of God's law. How can we attain a perfect righteousness that will open the gate of heaven to our souls? It's only through the righteous life of Christ that He laid down at Calvary's Cross, that His righteousness could be credited to the account of all those that come to believe in Him.

The miracle

He spoke of grace, He spoke of hope, many things, but then He ended the day with a mighty miracle. You could say that this was the greatest paragraph in His teaching that day. It was a teaching miracle. Yes, it filled their hungry stomachs; it was an act of kindness, but it was much more than that. It was an illustration of His bounty and sufficiency and power and grace.

C.H. Spurgeon said that the miracles are a kind of "index of what He (Christ) is prepared to do again should need arise." Here is the index: here are people in need. They're in a deserted place; there's no access to food sources. They cannot provide for themselves, but the Lord provides for them abundantly, magnificently. It is an index.

Do you have need? Do you feel that you cannot provide for those needs? Then Christ can do all over again what He did here on this memorable occasion by the Sea of Galilee. He is the all-sufficient provider.

Let's look at some of the detail here. I read from John before we looked at this miracle because we need to understand that there is a spiritual lesson. Of course, the Lord here provided an abundance of physical bread for 5,000 men, besides women and children, but the Lord Jesus Christ wants us to understand that He is, in a spiritual sense, the bread of life.

Bread is a natural necessity; it's the staple diet by which men and women and young boys and girls obtain strength and energy. If our souls are to be satisfied, we need Christ. He is bread for the soul.

You probably struggled, some of us at least, to understand what Christ meant when He said in John chapter 6, *'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you'*. You are not saved.

He didn't, of course, mean that we have to physically eat His flesh and drink His blood. He's speaking about His death. He would give His life, His life blood; He would give His body, His flesh broken at Calvary's cross as an atonement for the guilt and sin of lost and needy souls such as we are. And we must take Him to ourselves; we must be united to Him in just the same way as we take physical bread and ingest it—it becomes part of us. Unless we are united by faith and trust to Christ, we cannot be saved.

'A desert place'

But let's come back to this miracle, and the first thing I want us to notice, really in passing, is verse 35. Look at what the disciples say in verse 35: *'This is a desert place'*. That's the circumstance, the situation of this miracle—in a desert or deserted place, Christ is going to supply and satisfy the

cravings of these people. Friends, this world is a *'desert place'* for our souls. The moment we sense our need of God, the moment we realise our guilty, sinful and ruined state, we find that this world is a desert place. It cannot provide what we need. We can look here, there, and everywhere, but this world, full as it is with all sorts of offerings and pleasures, it cannot satisfy our needs.

It cannot settle the conscience that accuses and reminds us that before God we are guilty. It cannot provide peace and assurance that all is well when we come to die. We need something out of this world. It is *'a desert place'*.

Have you found it so to be? Have you tried all its pleasures and possessions, and you find that they still leave you with an aching void, something within—an unease, a fear of death, a concern that you're not right with God? Have you tried all the things of this world to drown out the voice of conscience and it hasn't worked? Have you tried resorting to a religion of "do this, and do that, and do the other," but you found that you still have a conscience that troubles you?

Martin Luther was like that, living in those dark days when the Roman Catholic faith dominated Europe, and people thought, "Well, if I pay, my relatives can be released from purgatory. If I give enough to the priests, their prayers will avail for me, and I'll be released from my sin." But Luther saw through that sham. He realised that it could never truly give peace to his conscience.

He took himself to the monastery, and he exacted of himself the most meticulous way of life. He subjected his body to pains, and then what happened? He discovered he was proud of what he had done, and then he realised that he was still guilty. He found no peace until one of the senior priests or monks said, "Go and read the book of Romans", and there he learned of Christ.

I keep digressing. What do we see in this miracle? We see a great need and no means of meeting that need, humanly speaking. The disciples recognised it: *'they say unto Him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?'*

In those days, a penny or a denarius, a Roman coin, was a day's pay for a labourer. And so here they were saying, "If we spend the equivalent of 200 days' wages for a common labourer, that may begin to go some way towards it. It's impossible. Can we find that in this neighbourhood?" Here the picture, you see, this is the index—the picture is of a need beyond the disciples providing. Man, ordinary people, couldn't provide for the needs of this vast multitude.

How great is our spiritual need?

Pardon for sin—can we buy that in this world? It's impossible.

Reconciliation with God—no one can pay a sufficient price to gain reconciliation with God. God doesn't need our money. He doesn't need our half-baked good works and religious observances.

A new life—we need a new nature. We need our heart to be revived from all the fallen ruin of our sinfulness. We need a work of God within. Our needs are great, but here is an advertisement for the sufficiency of Christ.

Christ Himself invites and provides everything

Secondly, we see in this miracle that Christ Himself invites and provides everything. You could say that the disciples provided a token packed lunchbox—five little loaves and two fish—but nothing

really that could substantially satisfy this vast congregation. Christ invited them, and Christ would provide for them.

What a description, what an illustration, friends, that is of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He invites us to come to Himself and to look to Him in expectation, just as this ordered congregation settled into their hundreds and their fifties in '*companies*'.

The word here translated company means a symposium, and in Old English, that came to mean a drinking party. Of course, it doesn't mean that here, but it means parties, little gatherings—symposium after symposium, hundreds and fifties. Having been ordered into such seating arrangements, they looked up. Christ invites their expectations, and then He meets those expectations.

That's what the gospel does. The gospel calls to us in all our lost, ruined and helpless condition and says, "Look to Me. Don't look to yourself. You're bankrupt; you cannot provide. But look to Me, and I have a sufficiency to meet all your needs."

Do you need righteousness, a righteousness that will stand you in good stead before the pure eyes of an all-seeing, holy God? Christ can provide you with His own righteous life. It can be imputed, credited to your account, such that it is your title eternally.

Do you need atonement, the penalty for your sin paid? Christ would do that at Calvary. He would soon be telling His disciples how He would go up to Calvary and suffer.

Do we need a Father in Heaven to care for us? Christ can secure such a relationship by reconciling us to God. God pledges Himself to us as a Father, to be everything to us a father should be, far more perfectly than any earthly father.

Do we seek eternal life, hope upon the deathbed, such that when our souls are called to leave our decaying bodies to stand before Him, all will be well with our soul? Christ can meet that need. He promises to plead His name, His righteousness, His dying love before our heavenly Father. That's why He calls Himself the bread of life. He can satisfy the souls of all that look to Him.

Christ provided an inexhaustible supply

Thirdly, we see here that Christ provided an inexhaustible supply. Perhaps some of us here have doubts. "Christ may have been able to save that person and that person, but what of me? Is there sufficient in Christ to provide for me? I'm the worst of sinners. My conscience reminds me how I spent my youth in a filthy way of life. How can I expect the Lord to take me and forgive all my sin and cleanse me and make me His own?"

There's a sufficiency in Christ to satisfy even the deepest and darkest accusing conscience. That's the picture here.

The power of God at work

Look at verse 41 here—this is the fourth observation I want to make. Christ, '*when He had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, He looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves*'.

Why did He do this? To show that this was the power of God at work. All the blessings that this vast company were about to experience were blessings from His Father in Heaven. It was divine power, it

was divine bounty, it was a divine generosity that furnished this table in the wilderness and blessed these souls. They should understand that this is just the index, as Spurgeon put it. In all your need, remember to look up. Remember it's Christ, through the power of His Father, who grants such blessing.

Enjoying the blessings

But how did these blessings—and this is my final point this evening which I hope it will be helpful to us—how did these blessings become enjoyed by this congregation? It's such a simple answer. How do we enjoy the blessings of salvation? How does our soul partake of Christ as the bread of life?

These people, they had to eat. It was no use having that bread placed by the relevant disciple and set before them. They had to take it; they had to eat it, and that may be the problem for some of us here. We do not yet have peace with God; we do not yet have that inner sense of peace. We do not yet know the profound grace of God changing our heart, imparting to us a new life and a new nature. And you say, "I don't know why."

But have you eaten of Christ? Not physically, of course, but have you come by faith and taken Him to yourself, consciously depending upon Him rather than anything else? This is the way that we enjoy the blessings of the gospel. We have to consciously look to Christ and depend upon Him and Him alone.

"Oh Lord," we must say, "there's no good in me. I am guilty and ruined by the Fall. I inherited Adam's fallen and depraved nature. I'm lost for all eternity. I cannot save myself, but I look to the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who in a mighty way provided a feast from beginning to end for this vast congregation. Lord, I look to Thee to provide all that I need for my soul, that I may be counted righteous, that my sin may be forgiven and that all my guilt should be washed away. I look to Thee alone. I lean upon Thee. I trust in Thee."

Have we done that? If we haven't consciously depended upon Christ, taken Him to ourselves and yielded our heart to Him, then that may be why we know no peace in our heart. Remember, the Lord said, *'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you'*. The flesh and blood of Christ represents His dying work in the place of sinners at Calvary. To eat and drink is to take and depend upon it for all our soul's salvation. May the Lord give us faith to do so.

Closing prayer

Let's pray together:

Lord, we thank Thee for the precious glimpse that we have here of the bounty, power and sufficiency of the grace of Jesus Christ.

Here was a great crowd, and they were doubtless a vast assortment of people with different backgrounds, with different sinful pasts, and yet all were received and generously provided for. May that glimpse encourage us, whatever our state and condition, to come to Christ and to depend upon Him for our soul's salvation.

We ask these things for His sake. Amen.

Closing hymn

Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high:
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide;
O, receive my soul at last!

Other refuge have I none;
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me:
All my trust on Thee is stayed;
All my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of Thy wing.

Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in Thee I find;
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
Heal the sick, and lead the blind.
Just and holy is Thy name,
I am all unrighteousness;
False, and full of sin I am,
Thou art full of truth and grace.

Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin;
Let the healing streams abound,
Make and keep me pure within.
Thou of life the fountain art,
Freely let me take of Thee;
Spring Thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity.

Charles Wesley, 1707-88