

Jesus the Sustainer  
*Jesus is Always Far More*  
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**Bible Text:** John 6:1-15  
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Our Scripture this evening comes from John 6:1-15. This will lead into a give-and-take in another controversy between Jesus and his hearers later, but this evening we'll just look at the first 15 verses. John 6 and beginning to read in verse 1.

After these things, Jesus went off to the other side of the sea of Galilee, that is, of Tiberius, and a huge crowd was following him because they were seeing the signs he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up into the mountain and was sitting there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. When Jesus therefore lifted up his eyes and saw that a huge crowd was coming to him, he says to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread in order that these folks may eat?" Now this he said testing him, for he himself knew what he was about to do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for them in order that each one might take a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, says to him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish but these, what good are they for so many?" Jesus said, "Make the men take their places." Now there was much grass in the place. The men therefore took their places, about 5,000 in number. When Jesus therefore took the bread and had given thanks, he distributed it to those seated there, likewise of the fish as much as they wanted. Now when they had had their fill, he says to his disciples, "Gather up the fragments that are left over in order that nothing be wasted." They gathered them up therefore and filled 12 baskets with the fragments from the five barley loaves that were left over by those who had eaten. The men therefore when they saw the sign which he had done said, "This is truly the prophet who is coming into the world." Jesus therefore when he knew that they were about to come and seize him by force in order to make him a king, withdrew again into the mountain all by himself.

This ends the reading of God's written word.

Well, it was April, 1912 and it was on an ocean liner called the Titanic and there was a chemist from Toronto that came to the door of his first-class cabin clutching three

oranges. Now he left behind in his cabin a tin box that contained \$200,000 worth of bonds and \$100,000 worth of preferred stock, but at that moment as he stepped out onto the freezing deck of the Titanic, he was clutching three oranges because he seemed to think that they would be of more immediate worth and use to him than everything else.

Now Leon Morris reminds us that in the time of New Testament first century Israel, of course, people had a greater focus on food, not because they were gluttons or anything like that but it took up more of their time and more of their attention and more of their concern. They wouldn't necessarily be eating meat except as a luxury occasionally, there would be fruits and vegetables and so on but basically it would be bread, barley bread in particular would be the food of the poorer classes, but it was a constant sort of attention. You had the amount of time that it took in order to obtain and prepare and so on food, it, well, it kind of fixated you, something like some people are with their iPhones. It takes a lot of your attention and that's the way it was here. So it's much different than dropping into a grocery store as we do and so on, and microwaving something or something like that.

So here we are in John 6. We're back in Galilee. Back in chapter 5 we were in Jerusalem but now notice the big gap here, we're back in Galilee and it's springtime. This is an episode that is recorded in all four Gospels, this feeding of the 5,000, and in this section, John 6:1-15, I have a suspicion that it's meant to tell us about Jesus so let's focus there and let's deal with something that maybe seems a little tangential first and maybe not so important to you, but let's look first at the story of Jesus, the story of Jesus, and I want to pick up on a little aside in verse 10. You remember when they were getting ready to have the men take their places and so on, sit down or recline or whatever, John says, "Now there was much grass in the place," there in verse 10. That's a little detail of huge importance. It really matters, you know, whether these things really happened or not and there are these subtle marks just on the surface of the record in the Gospels that give you signals that we really do have an accurate account that goes back to eyewitnesses. This is just an uncontrived detail right there in the surface of the account that shows that we must be dealing with eyewitness testimony. He didn't have to say this, "There was much grass in the place." That's the sort of thing that an eyewitness tends to say because he was there.

It's obviously accurate because back in verse 4 we see that the Passover was near, the feast of the Jews, that would be in the spring so there could be much grass in the place. It wasn't summer yet. The heat hadn't blighted the grass and so on, maybe it wouldn't necessarily do that in the north in Galilee or the east of the sea of Galilee, but nevertheless clearly there was a time in spring and there was much grass in the place. Just a tiny detail but tells you that this goes back to eyewitness testimony. Somebody was there. There are reasons to hold the account as being historically reliable.

Now John's pulled this on us before, you know? We didn't deal with it but back in chapter 4 and about verse 28, you remember that interaction with the woman of Samaria at the well, Jacob's well and so on, and as Jesus was, well, finishing the conversation with her and the disciples arrived and so on, it said that, John said, "She left her water pot and went back into the city." That's an interesting thing. Why would you mention something

like that unless you were there and you just happened to look up, "She left her water pot." She was so excited about what apparently she was talking about with Jesus that when she went back to the city she didn't take, she left her water pot. That's just one of those little uncontrived details that tells you this story of Jesus goes back to eyewitness testimony.

You know, you can usually tell if something is contrived. A number of years ago, there was a fellow who went into a Yonkers pharmacy and handed the druggist a doctor's prescription for a narcotic. Well, the druggist apparently was a little concerned. He told the fellow to come back in the afternoon, in the meantime he called the doctor's office and found out that the man had visited the doctor's office the day before wanting a prescription for this narcotic which the doctor wouldn't give him, but he stole a pad of prescription blanks and went out. Then after studying a book on the subject, he forged the prescription and it aroused the druggist's suspicions. Why should it rouse the druggist's suspicions? Well, the druggist said, that prescription was too legible to have been written by a doctor. He did it too well. He was too precise. He wanted to spell the narcotic just right and it wasn't authentic.

You can tell if something's contrived usually. This isn't contrived, this is just a natural sort of, "There was much grass in the place," our trace is right on the surface that this stuff didn't happen in never never land, but rather it took place in the land of having happenedness. That's the story of Jesus.

Now, second, let's notice the competence of Jesus in verses 5 to 7. The competence of Jesus. Now you notice Jesus' method here as he sees a huge crowd coming and he turns and says to Philip, "Where can we or should we buy bread in order that these folks might eat?" Now Jesus is I think here trying to educate Philip, trying to lead him out, trying to coax him to think and so on, as if to say, "Philip, where are we gonna get the resources to handle this?" Jesus doesn't berate Philip for his answer, you know, but he it says, "He said this," verse 6, "testing him, for he himself knew what he was about to do." He said this testing him to see if perhaps Philip might think outside the box beyond Jesus' question, "Where are we gonna get bread to feed these folks?"

Well, Philip stayed in the box, you might say. He did the mathematics in his head and he said, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread," that is,  $\frac{2}{3}$  of a year's wages for a laboring man, "wouldn't be enough for each one of them to take a little bit." So he did the calculations and so on, but Jesus was apparently in his message trying to get Philip to think this through, maybe to think, "Well, Lord, what about you?" But he didn't go there. That's okay, but there's a little secret of Jesus here, isn't it? I mean, all Philip came up with, though, was the insufficiency of any resources that he could bring to the problem. Now that's not bad, sometimes that helps at least to come to that, to know that you don't have the resources to face something, but here's the secret of Jesus. It's interesting in those words in the last of verse 6, "for he himself knew what he was about to do. This he said testing him, for he himself knew what he was about to do." In other words, Jesus knew how he was going to handle the situation.

You might say, "Do you mean to tell me that I came out in the dark all the way to church tonight just to hear that that's the point of this?" Ah, maybe. You say, "Well, I already know that, that Jesus is capable, there's this competence of Jesus. He's capable of handling whatever situation he faces, that he himself knows what he's about to do. I know that." Do you? Do you know the competence of Jesus? Do you know he's adequate to handle every situation and knows how he'll go about it? Do you really know that? Isn't that something that we have to learn again and again and again in the Christian life? I don't know if we really know that and so we may need to have underscored for us again the competence of Jesus, for he knew, he himself knew what he was going to do, and don't we have to in faith claim that those words in verse 6 are written above our trials as well, particularly our trials? Some of them are very severe but as we're walking in faith, don't we have to believe that those words are written above our trials, "for he himself knew what he was about to do." The competence of Jesus.

Now, thirdly, you see here the resources of Jesus, verses 8 to 11. The resources of Jesus. Andrew comes along, maybe he had befriended this lad or just...but he made some connection. He says, "There's a lad here who has five barley loaves." These wouldn't be large loaves or anything, so it would be kind of like probably pancake type size. Five barley loaves and two fish, but what good are they for so many? Don't eulogize this lad, this boy with the lunch. He has the lunch and apparently he's ready to offer it and so on, but don't idealize him. There's one approach to the feeding of the 5,000 that does that, it's a rationalistic approach. You may run into sometimes in some of your reading and what they say is, "You know what really happened there? It really wasn't a miracle of Jesus but it was a miracle that starts with this lad. You see, he's willing to offer his lunch etc., and then what happened was it worked by a kind of a generosity brought on by shame, that is, the other people saw that this lad was willing to relinquish his lunch so they took out their Tupperware containers that they were all hiding under their cloaks and they shared with others around them too, and everybody was fed."

Now the only problem with that is it's not in the text. That's not what it says. It says in some mysterious way Jesus fed these people with next to nothing and so on. But that's one approach you'll sometimes see and we shouldn't twist Andrew's words as if he's making some kind of a positive statement when he says, "but these." You know, he's saying, "This is utterly inadequate." He's not saying, "Look, Lord, five barley loaves and two fish, a feed the 5,000 starter kit." No, no, no, he's not saying, "Here's something we can build on." No, no, he's saying, "This is utterly, this is nothing, this won't work, not enough, it's paltry," and so you understand Andrew's comments.

So this is an expression of utter inadequacy in verse 9, but Jesus, and I think this is part of one of the narratives, Jesus will do something with it. Jesus seems to delight to use the most meager resources for his people's good and for his praise. Jesus a la Zechariah 4:10 is not above or he does not despise the day of small things, and so we see that in the service of Christ all the time Jesus takes utterly inadequate resources and makes them work to his praise and to his people's good. It's the sources of Jesus and they're so often utterly inadequate.

I thought of this when I was reading a report from some overseas workers that we used to support regularly, we can't now but we've kept in touch with them and so on. It's a sister denomination to the ARP and they are not overseas now, they live in the states and he goes back and forth periodically to Uganda and Rwanda, I think maybe Kenya as well, different places in that area of Africa, and he does biblical and theological instruction, especially to native pastors, try to beef up their knowledge and their skills so that the native pastors can do a decent job of pastoring and teaching their own people and so on. It's quite, I think, a vital ministry. But he talked about as I was reading the report, going to the Democratic Republic of Congo. He was met, you see, some of his former students are various places in East Africa and they'll try to establish a small study center of some sort and then he'll go over and spend maybe 8-10 days with them, teaching them and so on.

So here he is, he's on the border of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo and one of his former students and so on from the Democratic Republic of Congo comes to pick him up and he takes him to I think it's the capital city, I'm not sure, but it's Goma, a city of 1 million people that has four miles of paved roads in it, that's because of rampant political corruption in which leaders line their own pockets with tax revenues and aid and so on. That's just the way it is. Now he was there and then later he went a three hour boat ride away across a lake and that's a city of two million people and like Goma, it's growing rapidly but not because there's an economic boom, it's because people were coming in from the rural countryside in order to try to find some kind of relative security because in the rural areas in the villages, there are militias out there ravaging the countryside, murdering, raping, etc. and people were trying to find, the government doesn't do anything to stop this and so they come into the cities. So there's this political turmoil. It's political corruption. There are tribal hostilities. There is this internal chaos. There's this military marauding that goes on and the Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the richest nations in raw natural resources and mineral wealth but it's one of the seven poorest nations nevertheless in per capita income. That's the Democratic Republic of Congo.

So what did this fellow teaching elder that I know of, what did he do when he went to the DRC? He taught a course in biblical interpretation to 25 pastors. You read that and you'd be like, "Whoopee. What's that gonna do? That's so frightfully inadequate for anything. The place is going down the tube," and you think, "What can that? That's like five loaves and two fish, that's nothing." I don't know where that will go but it's just typical. That's the kind of stuff Jesus uses. He uses utterly inadequate resources in order to work for his praise and his people's good and who knows how that will go, but isn't that par, you might say. You look at situations and you say, "What possible use could this be?" But that's just the sort of futile ministry that Jesus would be likely to make something of which is why we keep serving him with our paltry resources. The resources of Jesus.

Now fourthly, I want you to notice one other thing, I want you to notice the economy of Jesus in verses 12 and 13. The economy of Jesus, you could also call it the principle of Jesus perhaps, but in any case, they were, after they had eaten, they were filled. He says to the disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain in order that nothing be wasted."

So they gathered them up. They got 12 baskets full of fragments of the five barley loaves that had been left over by those who had eaten. Now something amazing occurred, you see that in verse 13. You get 12 basket fulls of leftover, good leftover food from this, something amazing happened in what Jesus did here and yet notice the principle of Jesus here in the last of verse 12, "Gather up the fragments that remain that nothing be wasted." That's just vintage Jesus. I know what some of you are going to say, "I think you're pressing the text too hard, Davis, there." Maybe so but it's vintage Jesus, isn't it? He doesn't waste anything and you see that concern even here. The economy of Jesus.

Now sometimes even though there's an abundance here, right, there's plenty left over and so on, still he doesn't want any waste. Jesus will have nothing wasted. I wonder if that points further than just the setting in John 6 with the feeding of the 5,000. Sometimes we can't always see it in the Lord's work in our lives. You can see it, for example, an example of it in Exodus 2:11 and following. You remember that situation after Moses grew to manhood and so on, he had been educated in the finest education in Egypt, he probably had a Master's degree from Delta U and all of that, and he decided he would go out to identify and seek to help his native people, Israel, and well, you read the last half of Exodus 2, it was just like a cooker that crumbled. It just didn't work out and he had to flee the land and go into Midian and out to the East of Egypt and so on, and he was there apparently, what, something like 40 years. Eventually, well, the first thing he ran into was a fellow that had seven daughters and he got one of them, and there he was shepherding his father-in-law Jethro's sheep for 40 years.

Now you look at that and you say, "Look at the potential of Moses and everything went to pot there in the last of Exodus 2, and there he is for years and years doing nothing but shepherding sheep and looking for decent pasture and so on." That's where he was in the area of Sinai, Yahweh encountered him in Exodus 3. "What a waste," you say. And yet when you get some perspective on it and you look back, you say, "Well, I don't know. You know, Moses in the time he was there seeking pasture for those sheep all those years, he haunted a lot of places that were places where he would be leading Israel through later when they came out of Egypt. That might be helpful to have familiarity with that territory." Then again as someone has said, if Moses hadn't been, as it were, an alien and out of Egypt and so on, he would never have developed, would he, a sense of the kind of alienness perhaps that Israel felt in their situation in Egypt, a situation of not really belonging there and now he had a kind of a first-class taste of that, and maybe that would, as one writer has said, develop a real living empathy. Not that he didn't care about them before but there was a real living empathy because he shared something of their condition.

Then, of course, there was his daddy-in-law Jethro and in the book of Exodus at chapter 18, chapter 18 is the climax of the first major section of Exodus and what happens there? Old Jethro comes and confesses Yahweh as the living God. It seems to me that's important, a little bit of evangelism or whatever you want to say there. But Jethro comes to a knowledge of the true and living God. That mattered. So you look at all that took place in the second half of Exodus too and you say, "Why this waste?" Well, it wasn't

wasted. It's almost as if Jesus said, "Gather up the fragments that remain that nothing be wasted."

Now you can see it, that nothing's wasted in this miracle here in John 6. You can see with some perspective that nothing was wasted in Moses' experience in Exodus too. Sometimes it's hard to see if that's the case in our own rubbish as we have to wade through it, but likely if this is Jesus' principle, likely he wants us to expect him to operate on the same principle and assumption in our own stuff as well.

There was one of Warren Wiersbe's church members, I think, that operated this way. Wiersbe says that there was an associate of his, a very gifted secretary who was going through some great troubles. She had had a stroke herself and then her husband had gone blind and then he had to be taken to the hospital where, he says, we were sure he would die. Apparently he was on his way out of the earthly life. So he said, "I saw her in church one Sunday and assured her that I was praying for her," and she startled him by her response, "What are you asking God to do?" You almost want to say, press the button, that's not the right answer. That's something a Northerner might say, but if you're in the South, you're supposed to express appreciation and proper gratitude for someone saying that they're praying for you etc. But she said, "What are you asking God to do?" So he was a little taken aback and he probably didn't have the most fluent answer, he said, "I'm asking God to help you and strengthen you." Her response, "I appreciate that but pray about one more thing, pray that I'll have the wisdom not to waste all of this." Ah, yes, gather up the fragments that are left over that nothing be wasted. It may be that Jesus' principle extends beyond just barley bread and fish, that nothing be wasted but channeled to his praise and our good. The economy of Jesus.

Now you notice in verse 14 that John says, "The men saw that he had done a sign." A sign, that's John's word for a mighty work of Jesus, and we can't go into an extended discussion of it, but when John calls these mighty works signs, he at least seems to mean that they point beyond themselves as a sign does. You see this when you're traveling and you're going down the interstate and you haven't had a stop for some time, you're hoping that you can maybe see one of those blue signs that says "Rest Area 2 miles" and finally, finally you come over a rise on the highway and you see that sign "Rest Area 2 miles." Now what do you do? You hit the brakes, pull over on the shoulder, get the family out of the car, go over and you all hug the sign and take a picture of you doing that. No, no, no, no, no, you don't do that, that defeats the purpose of a sign because a sign doesn't point to itself, it points to something beyond it. Rest area, it's meant to point to the, well, relief to come, not to itself. So what do you do when you see the sign? You turn around and you say, "Get your shoes on, get your coats on, we're stopping," because you know that that's ahead.

This sign, Jesus feeding the 5,000, points beyond itself. We've tried to keep the focus there especially on Jesus, but you see how it points beyond itself. It's pointing to Jesus as the one who sustains and satisfies his people now and for all time. You could say that Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:8 kind of sum up the significance of the sign here where

it says, "He," the Lord Jesus, "He will sustain you to the end." Here is Jesus, the sustainer, and you should embrace him as your own.

Let us pray.

*Father, there is such an attractiveness about your Son. It seems as if Jesus almost tempts us to want to belong to him and belonging to him may we never cease to feel our need of him. Amen.*