

Christian Stewardship in Biblical Perspective
“The Feeding of the 5000”
John 6:1–15
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November 5, 2017 • Morning Sermon

Our text this morning is a wonderful event recorded by John that has for us some lessons of stewardship embedded within it. This is God’s Word and God’s Word is the truth. John 5:1–15 says [1] *After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tibe’ri-as.* [2] *And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased.* [3] *Jesus went up on the mountain, and there sat down with his disciples.* [4] *Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.* [5] *Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, “How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?”* [6] *This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.* [7] *Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.”* [8] *One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him,* [9] *“There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?”* [10] *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. (The other Gospels note that He had them sit in groups of 100.)* [11] *Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.* [12] *And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost.”* [13] *So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten.* [14] *When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!”*

[15] *Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*
The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

When I was walking away from the Lord in the cesspool of sin I would always remember Bible verses and songs. How did I get those Bible verses and songs? One of those ways was through my grandmother. When I was born my grandmother was 35 years old and she said ‘no is going to call me ‘grandmother’ at 35’ so she told me to call her Lois which was her first name. Because I was young I couldn’t say the ‘L’ so I would call her ‘Nois’ and she would meet me after school as I was just starting when we lived in Greensboro, North Carolina. She would sit me on her lap and teach me a Bible verse and a song. It was those verses and songs that would come to my mind as I grew older and I still remember them today.

One of the songs I remember is ‘Isn’t He Wonderful’ that says;
Isn't He Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful
Isn't Jesus, my Lord, wonderful!
Eyes have seen, ears have heard,
It's recorded in God's word.
Isn't Jesus, my Lord, wonderful!

I cannot tell you how many times I remember that song when I walked away from the Lord. When I sat on my grandmother’s lap I would hold this black stuffed dog which I still have to this day. It’s the only dog my wife will let me have for a pet now. There was another song

she taught me but I can only remember one line from the song and my own children have heard me sing it time and time again but I will tell you that one line at the conclusion of this study. That one line comes from this passage in John 6.

This season in our church is like a family season where for the past 50 years this church takes this time to focus on what the Bible says about Christian stewardship. This season is a real delight for me for a couple of reasons. One, is that I personally need to be constantly reminded about what Christian stewardship is. In this church when we focus on stewardship we do it with three 'T's' – time, treasure and talents. Every one of you who know Christ as your Savior has not only a physical talent but a spiritual talent/gift that God has given you but He designed it for the common good to be used in the body of Christ. We want you to be a good steward of your spiritual gift so use this season to ask God where He wants to use your calling and gifts so you can engage in the body of Christ. I maybe a hand, a foot, a head but I can't say to the Body 'I don't need you' and yet the Body needs you because the Lord has designed you to do something very unique so pray through that in this season.

Secondly, is your time. Many of us have different gifts and resources but we all wake up each day with 24 hours. So how are you going to use your day/time for Jesus Christ? One of the key places is prayer. We really want to encourage you to set aside prayer for the work of the Gospel in our nation and around the world and prayer for one another – intercessory prayer. Commit yourself to it. A number of years ago we made a commitment to intercessory prayer for we knew that preaching and teaching the Word was important so all the members would take one meal a day as they gave thanks for their physical food we prayed for the spiritual nourishment of the leaders in the church, the preacher and the preaching of the Word because of how much that is needed. I think God has honored that throughout the years. So take some time each day for intercessory prayer.

Thirdly, is our resources. This is the time that we embrace the giving of our tithe, where the ten percent of the top is God's training wheels for learning Christian stewardship. The tithe is the Lord's, it's not mine for He just entrusted it to me to bring in worship and praise to Him so I don't want to rob God. I want to embrace that gift of worship material on the Lord's Day to bring it forth in praise to God.

When we gather for worship on the Lord's Day there are three moments that are so powerful to me in my heart and life. One is when we stand up to give praise to God in that opening hymn for coming out of week of failings, faltering and victories it is incredible to stand up and give God praise for that. I love the preaching of the Word when God's people gather around the Word but thirdly, I love the offering time. I think it is a glorious moment where God's people stand up to bring forth and put at the feet of Jesus those things that we have. Paul puts it this way in II Corinthians 9:7, *[7] Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart (to give), not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver* (NASB and I Corinthians 16:2). We are to do this on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day and together we stand up to praise God from whom all blessings flow. We are bringing the tithes and offerings to Him because we are telling Him He has us because of the offering He gave for us in Jesus Christ. I think that is an unbelievably, powerful moment in our lives.

I am so old that I can remember getting in the car as a kid with my mother on a Tuesday as she would go pay our bills. At that time you would go to the power company each week to give them the money for your electricity bill. You would go to the gas company to give them the money for your gas bill. You pick out a day once a week where you would go and pay your bills. Then we started doing this through the mail where you would write a check and mail your

bill to the company. These days most things seem to be done 'online.' I want you to understand at this point I am not opposed to online giving for I understand why it is done this way but I would encourage you to save a few dollars of your giving so you can participate in worship that way on the Lord's Day in the service.

I used to watch my uncle do this every Lord's Day even when he had already tithed. I remember asking him 'Uncle Lonnie why do you always put something in the offering plate every Sunday?' He said to me 'Shall I appear before the Lord empty-handed? I want to participate in worship and make it apart of worship.' I love how God has choreographed it that we can all sing, read, hear, confess and give and when we give we stand up together and praise God from whom all blessings flow. That is part of what we are doing, we are purposing in our hearts to give.

How do I use my spiritual gifts, time and treasures/resources? I am going to start with the tithe that God has given me. So what offerings would He put into my life so I would not rob God but bring it to the storehouse the tithe and offers to the praise of His name? So I love this season because I not only can work it into my life personally but it is also a time I can teach my family about it as well. It is such a joy now to see my children and their spouses teach their children in seasons like this about Christian stewardship so that their family is learning and then it goes to the next generation and the next of how to be a good steward of the time, talents and treasures God has given you.

Also, pastorally it's a blessing to teach that glorious truth of it's more blessed to give than to receive and see that maturity build in your own life through congregational communities and small group discipleship. As you do this it gives directions to our leadership, our deacons as they put together a budget for our church and do it according to the mission of our church which is for God's glory Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians to worship God to reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. When God's people make their commitments financially the leadership will make sure it goes to that mission for fifty percent of it goes to evangelism, church planting outside of Briarwood, church revitalization, missions, benevolence and mercy, but you pull the trigger when you tell them what God is going to do through you. They do this intelligently as they are faithful to the mission and the vision for coming generations Briarwood desires to be a Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, Spirit-filled, equipping church where every member is a minister and every minister is a missionary.

The deacons then give this budget to the elders who perfect it, approve it and then we have the wisdom that comes through God's people as they are engaged in it for the cause of the mission, message and ministry that God has given to us. Through this our treasures are given to the praise of God but then are directed to the mission, message and ministry God has given to this church. I also thank God for the other lay leaders over the various ministries so that when you bring your spiritual gift they attempt to use it meaningfully to accomplish the Great Commission. So there is good stewardship for our spiritual gifts as well. I thank God for those who help us learn how to use our time for the glory of God as they are discipling us. We do this so that all these elements of stewardship are being used to the fullest purpose God has given it to us to do.

All of this has been in place even before I came here and it has blessed me personally, pastorally and hopefully it is increasingly a blessing to you in your own personal development of stewardship as well as your family's stewardship. It also gives me the opportunity to focus a couple of studies/sermons on this to keep building this matter of Christian stewardship from the Word of God. So this text in John 6 is what I chose for this study. But it is a big task before us

to go and make disciples of all the nations and to reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. That is why I like this text in John because I think there is a lesson here that is very crucial about stewardship. There are multiple lessons in this text but I want to focus on one here.

In the Scripture we know of two times that Jesus fed a large number of people. He also cleansed the temple twice, once at the beginning of His ministry and once at the end of ministry. The two times Jesus fed large groups was one when He fed 4,000 and one when He fed 5,000 and in this study we are looking at the time when He fed the 5,000. The time Jesus fed the 5,000 is actually recorded in all four of the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

I want to tell the reason I picked the recording of this from John. There was a friend of mine who was actually a groomsman in my wedding named Jack LaFave. He was a sportscaster of baseball in Gastonia, North Carolina. One time when baseball season was over he asked if I wanted to join him on the other side of the microphone during a high school football game, up in the booth, to be his color commentator. For most sporting events there are usually two people that are announcing the game with one of them being the play-by-play announcer telling the audience what is happening and the other one is the color commentator. This person is giving color commentary on what is happening, the inside story. For instance, what is that catcher talking to the pitcher about out there besides where they will eat after the game or what is happening between the manager and the umpire right now during the game or what is happening in the huddle or why did they fake this way or move that way. This is the person that gives you the back story, the details about what is happening – the why, how and what you don't know is happening – but ends up making what is happening much more interesting.

That is what John is doing here in the feeding of the 5,000. John's Gospel is the color commentary. Have you ever noticed some of the little things John adds in his Gospel? For instance, 'put your nets on the other side, ok', '153 fish', 'It's the Lord', 'Peter puts on his cloak and dives in the water.' John is the only one who tells us Peter put his cloak in before he dove into the water and the others just say Peter dove into the water. John is the one to let you know there was a 'charcoal' fire. John it like a good painter who tells you what you are looking at and makes what you are focused on much more meaningful. They know what to cut out and what to put in and that is what John does constantly. Even though this is recorded in all four Gospels John is the one who adds some stuff that is really interesting. He is giving us the inside scoop, the backstory of what is happening here.

I'm going to give you ten things that John unfolds for us in this text that does not contradict anything from the other three Gospel accounts but it adds to the event. It's like going from 2D to 3D to 4D in the way that John presents this event.

The first thing is John tells us where this happens. All the four Gospels tell us that this event happens at the Sea of Galilee but John reminds us that the Sea of Galilee in the days of Jesus that the Romans would tell people to call it the Sea of Tiberias because they had just built a Roman city called Tiberias to collect taxes. The building of this city had not been finished yet but they named it after a Caesar and it was being built right over a Hebrew cemetery. Do you think that this area may be an area of controversy after realizing all that? It is a place of significant controversy. He also tells us this took place on the other side of the Sea, why? It was because where this event was happening was a place that Jewish kids did not go to for it was a place of demons. It was Decapolis and here they refer to it as the 'other side' like the 'other side of the tracks' so to speak.

Secondly, John tells us that the time this event took place was the time of the year for the feast of the Passover for the Jews. This was the supper to celebrate the deliverance from bondage.

Thirdly, John tells us it was a desolate place. It means it was a wilderness of resources, for there was nothing there. It was a place where nothing was available.

Fourthly, John tells us Jesus went up on a mountain and sat down to teach. That is the way it used to be so I don't know how we have it messed up today. In those days the teacher sat to teach while the audience stood and it would generally take place for six hours.

Fifthly, John says that everyone was hungry and Jesus had ascertained their hunger.

Sixthly, John says that Jesus felt compassion because they were in a desolate place, hungry and with no resources.

Seventhly, John tells us there were 5,000 men although we don't know how many women and children were there. We also know that when Jesus had them sit down He sat them down in groups of one hundred and they sat in a grassy area.

The eighth thing is that in the other Gospels it says the disciples ask Jesus where He will get the food to feed them but here in John we get the backstory for Jesus had actually started this conversation with Philip one of His disciples. It wasn't a conversation to get information but a conversation to give information for Jesus is instructing Philip by asking him a rhetorical question. Jesus asks Philip 'Where are we going to get food to feed all these people out here in this desolate place?' Jesus is doing this to set up Philip and the other disciples to teach them something. Interestingly, Philip is not preoccupied with where they will get the food but with how much it would cost to feed all these people. Two hundred denarii would even give all these men a bite to eat. So the disciples are thinking not only how are we going to get the food but where will we get it because they didn't even have the resources to get it.

The ninth thing is in the other Gospels the disciples tell Jesus they have five loaves and two fishes but John tells us specifically that Andrew is the one who brought this news to Jesus' attention who was also Simon Peter's brother. I think this boy had brought up what he had, the five loaves and two fishes but Andrew brought up the boy to tell them this was all he had found probably saying 'this five loaves and two fishes won't even begin to feed all these people.' Then Jesus receives the five loaves and two fishes from the nameless boy brought to Him by Andrew and from Philip and the rest of the disciples Jesus looks up into heaven and give thanks. They then start giving out the five loaves and two fishes and everyone began to eat.

The tenth thing we are told is that they didn't eat a little but all ate until they were full. In other words, there on the other side of the Sea God opened up an all-you-can-eat fish and chips buffet. When it was over they loaded up what was left in baskets, enough to fill up 12 baskets. I would say that is a pretty clear message to 12 disciples.

What was the result? There were two results from this. One is because of this sign, wonder, miracle the people shouted 'here is the Prophet!' Notice the text said *the* Prophet which is a name for the Messiah and secondly they said 'He is the King!' They wanted to make Him King and Jesus knew it but it wasn't the time for that for it wasn't time for Him to be headed to a crown first but a cross first to save us from our sins to give us a crown of eternal life. Jesus still has some work to do as Priest and that's to bring a sacrifice to save His people from their sins on the cross. So He withdraws from them.

So why did the people decide He was the Prophet and King? John gives us the insights into this. Think about those ten things I just gave you. The people are hungry and in need. They rest by the Sea of Galilee as they sit down in green grass. In the Old Testament there is a type of

the Messiah as King and his name was David. He wrote Psalm 23:1-2 which says [1] *The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want;* [2] *he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.* John is painting a Psalm 23 picture here and the people did not miss it. Here is the King of Kings.

Then John points out that Jesus goes up on a mountain and sits down to teach and they call Him a Prophet. Why? It is because the first prophet in the Old Testament, Moses, went up on a mountain and they even called in the synagogue the chair of Moses as he would sit down with the posture of a teacher and would teach. As Jesus does this now we don't have a prophet but the Prophet for Moses said 'Coming after me is a greater Prophet than me.' Jesus sits down and teaches as a prophet would teach.

Then there are all these men and I believe it was no accident that Jesus puts them into groups of 100. The feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000 has already been prefigured for us in the Old Testament through a prophet named Elisha who received from a little boy 20 barley loaves to feed a hundred men. They thought 'how could these 20 loaves feed these 100 men?' Elisha says 'The word of the Lord has come for He will not only feed them to full but there will be some left over. This is recorded in II Kings 4. Now in the feeding of the 5,000 as the men sit in 100s this is One greater than Elisha and Elijah. This is the Prophet who feeds not a little, but feeds to overflowing.

This event took place during the time of the Passover where the people were delivered from their bondage from Egypt and they went out into the desolate place of the wilderness and the Lord fed them with the manna from heaven. Now in the season of the Passover, in this desolate place, the Lord feeds His people with the bread, the loaves. They haven't missed it at all for they see it, understand it and embrace it and they cry out 'This is the Prophet, this is the King!' John is giving us the backstory to see it.

In the midst of all of that there is something about stewardship I want you to see. Do you realize what God is leading us to do? Right now our national mission's pastor is in the northeast meeting with two church planters and in this coming year we have the possibility of planting churches in two cities that are absolutely bereft of any evangelical witness of Jesus Christ. Literally millions of people surround those cities. God is calling us to plant these churches and not just those two. We are giving away Embers to a Flame to four different denominations nationally and two internationally.

It is hard for me to contain my joy of the new friends I've made this last week at the National Baptist Convention who hosted Embers to a Flame in New Jersey. I count that as an unbelievable achievement in my life to have been to New Jersey and back. This is the largest African American denomination in America and they are so excited about Gospel health and vitality. The door is opening wide. They have so many churches that it would swallow the Presbyterian Church in America but God is opening doors.

It is unbelievable what God is doing through our ministries here at Briarwood from those in Fairfield to the Fellows Ministry to those in prison ministries. I don't have time to name them all but it is astounding at how God is opening doors through these ministries. It is so big! God, where are the resources for all of this? Look at us. We're not as diverse as I'd like for us to be but we have young, old, rich, poor and a lot of in-between. How is God doing this?

LEAD is the theme for next year and if God brings revival it *leads* to evangelism. LEAD will be the acronym for Lifestyle, Evangelism And Discipleship. We want each person to be able to know how to share Christ one on one, person to person, at evangelistic events and then enfold people into small groups where they grow in their faith and mature through God's Word.

This way they can reproduce themselves as well. It is that grassroots movement of the power of the Gospel where everyone is sharing Christ to everybody everywhere. Those are the opportunities and the challenges that are before us.

Look at us for we aren't sufficient for all of this. Now I will tell you the one line I remember from one of the songs my grandmother taught me. My kids have heard this one line their whole life. The one line is 'Little is much when God is in it.' Twenty barley loaves and a hundred men, that's nothing, watch this – five barley loaves, two fish and 5,000 plus sitting in groups of a hundred are fed. Then there are 12 baskets left over. Little is much when God is in it, why? Here is your takeaway.

The takeaway is God delights to multiply the resources He has given us when we give them back to Him while He is teaching us... We didn't come up with it for He gave us everything we have. Little is much when God is in it, doesn't mean that I will give a little. For us it might be much but for the task it's little, but God is in it and when God is in it our tithes, offerings, spiritual gifts and time now becomes much. He is the One who gave it to us and when we give it to Him He gets in it and we find out how amazing God is with what He does with what we give back to Him. We are going to now consecrate to Him what He has laid on our heart to commit to give this year. Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, use these gifts that are given. Multiply them. Multiply my time, talents, tithe and treasures. Pray for how God will use these gifts in the ministries God has given to us and commit to pray for this on a regular basis. Consecrate what you are giving to now. Father, I want to pray for the giver. They will pray about how You bless the gift and I want to pray that you will fill the giver with joy overflowing, to be those cheerful givers that will create the laughter of grace and for them to gladly bring their all just as that little boy did in the feeding of the 5,000. We will give You the praise. Use this Lord in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

The Feeding of the 5,000

Two Results

The Back Story

LIFE TAKEAWAY

God delights to multiply the resources He has given us when we give them back to Him while teaching us... **LITTLE IS MUCH WHEN GOD IS IN IT!**