

Abundant Provision

John 6:1-21

Call: Ps 34:1-8a (ESV)

Scripture: 2 Cor 9:8-11 (ESV)

I. Intro

Good morning! I've been told that one of the main principles in marketing is the principle of scarcity. You can create a sense of urgency with consumers if you can convince them that the product is scarce. That makes sense doesn't it? It's simply the law of supply and demand. Convince people that a product is in low supply and suddenly, that product immediately becomes more valuable. We saw this first-hand with toilet paper at the beginning of this pandemic. Somehow the idea that toilet paper was scarce or was going to be scarce became a powerful driving force in our culture, to the point that people began to stockpile and hoard it. And, that's exactly what happens with a mindset focused on scarcity. It will lead people to grasping, clinging, selfishly possessing and controlling. And, so, it is an interesting question to consider – am I controlled by a scarcity mindset or an abundance mindset? Today's text will address that question.

Let's pray.

Father as we open up your Scriptures, we invite your Spirit to come help us. Soften our hearts this morning that we may hear from you and empower us to put your words into practice. In Jesus name, amen.

Well, this morning, we come to chapter 6 of John. Like chapter 5, we will spend three weeks in this chapter, as we look at another sign this morning, and spend two additional weeks exploring Jesus' teaching that accompanies this sign.

So, I invite you into our text, John chapter 6, beginning at verse 1.

II. The Context (1-4)

1 After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. 2 And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. 3 Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. (ESV)

A. In Galilee

Sometime after that makeshift trial in Jerusalem, Jesus goes back to Galilee, specifically to the other side of the Sea. John emphasizes that a large crowd is following him.

B. At Passover

John also tells us that it is the Passover, *the* feast of the Jews. This is the second of three Passovers in John. The first one was when Jesus cleansed the Temple, and the third one will be

his crucifixion. And, this gives me a chance to explain the importance of feasts in John.

C. The Feasts

Cultures are built around festivals and holidays, because it is through them that we tell our cultural stories and share our cultural customs. Many times, these festivals are built around the seasons. In a few weeks, we will celebrate Thanksgiving, which tells an historical story, but also celebrates the harvest. We also celebrate Christmas, Presidents Day, Easter, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, etc. Children know these holidays better than anyone because they get off school. Our cultural year revolves around these holidays. Some are very important to our faith, some are not. And, there are themes and symbols related to these holidays which we all understand. Like this cornucopia behind me thanks to Barb Jensen for making it for us. We think Thanksgiving when we see it.

The ancient Jewish world was no different. A year for a Jew in Jesus' day revolved around the feasts. The three greatest feasts were Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. We will visit each one in our studies in John. In the Jewish world, their festivals pointed entirely to their history, which is God's story. And, so, for the Jews, the feasts were times to remember and renew, remember what God had done and renew hope for what God would do in the future. Remember and renew.

D. The Feast of Passover

Today we come to the feast of Passover. Passover was a time to remember God's great acts of salvation, when God set His people free from slavery in Egypt. During Passover, the Jews remember with sorrow the bitter suffering of their ancestors at the hands of the Egyptians. During Passover, the Jews remember with humility the sprinkled blood of the lamb which protected them as the angel of death passed through Egypt. This blood caused judgment to "pass over" their homes. During Passover, the Jews remember with awe the power of God and how the Living God parted the Red Sea. The freed people could "pass over" to the other side and escape the pursuing armies of Pharaoh. And during Passover, the Jews remember with gratitude the gracious gifts of God, how the Living God miraculously provided manna from heaven and the flesh of quail so the people could survive in the wilderness. All of those themes and symbols, and all of the accompanying scriptures would be in the forefront of their minds during the feast of Passover.

But, Passover was also a time to renew hope. Moses was the main man of Passover. If you remember last week, we ended our study in chapter 5 discussing Moses. Moses was the one who led Israel out of bondage to freedom. And he was the one who prayed for the manna from heaven. But, he was also the one who promised that one day God would send another leader, like himself, to speak God's Words to His people. Deuteronomy 18 says this, *"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him"* (Deut 18:15). And, by the first century, there was the growing expectation that during some Passover feast, the Prophet like Moses would come. And, not only come, but bring with him the same miraculous deliverance and the same miraculous

provision of God. For there was even a saying in the 1st century that went like this: “As was the first redeemer, so will be the final redeemer; as the first redeemer caused the manna to fall from heaven, even so shall the second redeemer cause manna to fall” (Johnson).

Now we are ready to hear our story, verse 5.

III. The Abundant Provider (5-13)

5 Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” 6 He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. 7 Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough 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 boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” 10 Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. 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 leftover fragments, 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. (ESV)

A. The Compassion of Jesus

The feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-14). And, this number doesn’t include the women and children, so there are probably around 8,000, 9,000 or 10,000 people at this feast. John tells us that Jesus lifts up his eyes, sees the large crowd and becomes aware of their needs. And filled with compassion, wants to provide food for them.

B. The Test by Jesus

He turns to Philip and asks him where to buy bread. But, this is a “test.” Philip, this is only a test. John is continuing with the theme of the exodus, when the Israelites were tested by God in the wilderness. And, just like those Israelites of old, Philip fails the test. He looks at the crowd and responds skeptically that 200 denarii of bread would not be sufficient to feed such a large crowd. A denarius was the equivalent of a full day’s wages. 200 denarii would be the equivalent of 6 months of wages.

Think about it. Philip has seen Jesus turn water into wine. He has seen Jesus heal an official’s son. He has seen him heal a man who had been lame for 38 years. And, those are only the miracles John has recorded. Who knows how many others Jesus has done by now. This is a test for Philip. Will he focus on the scarcity or will he focus on the one who is standing next to him? Philip looks at the scarcity.

At this point, Andrew shows up. And, he shows up with a picnic lunch brought by a little boy. If you remember, Andrew is the one always bringing people to Jesus. This time he brings a boy, let’s call him Sammy.

Sammy's mom packed him a good lunch that day, probably all Sammy could carry, *"five barley loaves and two fish"* (6:9). At that time, barley loaves were the bread of the very poor. And, the fish would have been pickled fish about the size of sardines that were famous throughout the Roman empire.

Whereas Philip focused on the scarcity of money and responded skeptically, Andrew focuses on the scarcity of the lunch and responds hopelessly with, *"What are they for so many?"* He is like Eeyore. Winnie the Pooh asked Eeyore, "Lovely day, isn't it?" Eeyore responds with, "Wish I could say yes, but I can't."

Both Philip and Andrew fail the test. They are focused on the scarcity of resources. But, don't we do the same thing? As we look out at all the needs around us – and there are many these days – don't we ask, "How far can my little, tiny resources go?"

Jesus has an answer. He says, *"Have the people sit down"* (6:10). Hold it, what Jesus? Sitting down does not solve the problem. Once again, Jesus' response to the crisis does not seem immediately to solve the problem.

C. The Sign by Jesus

After the crowd sits down, Jesus takes the loaves and fish and gives thanks. Next, he distributes the bread and the fish *"as much as they wanted"* (6:11), and John says, the large crowd *"had eaten their fill"* (6:12). The crowd is filled full. In other words, they had to loosen their belts to walk home. The miracle isn't even stated. It just happens.

Jesus then instructs the disciples to pick up the leftovers. And, there were 12 baskets left over, implying that each disciple brought back a basket-full of leftovers. Now, these baskets are not small bread baskets like what we place on our tables. They were probably large backpack size containers that the Jews were known to carry with them so they could carry their own food to observe their food laws. Why 12? Most people see here an allusion to the 12 tribes of Israel or the 12 disciples. Maybe the point is that Jesus is more than enough for the upcoming mission of the 12 in distributing the bread of life to the world?

D. Abundant Provision

Or maybe the number isn't as important as the overly extravagant abundance of Jesus. I run out of words at this point! If this is the creator of the world, don't you think he would have known exactly how much bread and fish to make! This is a ginormous miracle! But we are so used to it, it doesn't hit us.

1. The Abundant Creator

Imagine if you were there! What did this look like? Jesus takes a small piece of bread and two small fish and makes more of it very quickly. How long does it take to bake bread? I'm not a baker, but I'm pretty sure it doesn't happen instantaneously. And, how long does it take to make more fish? I have no clue – probably depends on the

species of fish, but I know one thing, it doesn't happen instantaneously either. But, then again, John prepared us by saying, *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God... and all things came into being through him... And, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"* (1:1, 3, 14). Jesus is the creator God doing what the creator God does. He ginormously creates in overly extravagant abundant ways.

2. The Abundant Lover

But, not only that, he is providing for human need. The physical world matters to Jesus. Which means, *"For God so loved the world"* is not some abstract theoretical love (John 3:16). This is real, concrete love in action. Real, overly extravagant abundant concrete love! Jesus is the abundant lover.

3. The Abundant Partner

But, not only that, John's telling of the story includes one small detail that is not included in the other Gospels. What is it? John says that the bread and fish come from a little boy. Little Sammy. Sammy is used by Jesus to do this ginormous deed. Jesus does not create the bread and fish out of thin air, ex nihilo. For whatever reason, Jesus cannot do his work without the help of Sammy. I can just see Sammy burst into his home that evening telling his mom about what happened: "MOM! You would never believe what happened today! Jesus *and I* used your lunch to feed a whole crowd of people!" Jesus uses Sammy to do this miracle! And, he uses little old you and me to provide for the needs of people today. Little old us.

Jesus is the God of abundance. As Darrell Johnson says, "Jesus seems to know and be connected to another world, a world of great abundance and great love!" Don't you want to be connected to that world? I sure do! He sees us in our needs and takes small stuff, and out of that small stuff, provides much, much more. Which is why, in the face of all those people, he can give thanks for the small. When Jesus enters the picture, he can take into his hand what is there, give thanks for it and then provide overly, extravagantly, abundantly much more than we could ever think or imagine. We think our offerings – time, energy, resources, ourselves – don't amount to much and yet, "little is always much in the hands of the God of abundance" (Barclay, 239).

Now, we see the response, verse 14.

IV. The Response (14-15)

14 When the people saw the sign that 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. (ESV)

A. The Temptation

Maybe this is John's version of Jesus' temptation? If you remember the temptations from the other Gospels, there are three specific temptations. But, essentially in all three, Jesus

is tempted to use his power in the wrong way. He's tempted to use his power for himself, autonomously from God. But He resists as he does here in John.

B. The Prophet

As we alluded to earlier, these people see Jesus as the prophet promised by Moses in Deuteronomy, which he is. But, then they put their agenda and priorities on him, wanting him to be a political Messiah. The Jewish people were looking for a king like David who would ride into town on a white stallion and take out all those bad Romans! But, Jesus will not be a political Messiah. He will not be the next Alexander the Great, crushing people to promote himself. He will be a sacrificial servant, reigning in love from a cross. I think of the Philippians hymn Paul says Jesus did not think of his own interests, but of the interests of others. In doing so, he becomes a servant, surrendering his rights and privileges, obeying the Father to the point of death.

C. The Refuge

Jesus gets wind of the people's plan and retreats to be with his Father. Most commentators think that Jesus retreated to the Eremos cave when he wanted to get away from the crowds. This cave is high on the hillside west of Bethsaida, overlooking the Sea of Galilee. He could find shelter there, be with his Father and still keep an eye on the lake, and in this case, he could still keep an eye on his disciples.

Verse 16.

V. The Water Walker (16-21)

16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. 18 The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. 20 But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." 21 Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going. (ESV)

A. The Storm

In all four Gospels, this scene happens after the feeding of the 5000. That seems to imply that we should continue with our Exodus theme in understanding this scene. As God controlled the waters of chaos at the Red Sea in the Exodus, so Jesus, being the same God, controls the waters of chaos here.

The disciples get back into the boat to go back across the lake, essentially going from the northeast side of the lake to the northwest side of the lake. And, it is dark. It could be that John tells us it is dark because Jesus is not with the disciples. A storm arises. The Sea of Galilee is famously known to have strong storms approach quickly. Fishermen particularly dreaded these storms because the wind is so strong, it is impossible to row against. In this case, the disciples row out 3-4 miles, putting them in the middle of the lake when the storm hits. At this point, they see Jesus coming near the boat. It appears the disciples are more afraid of seeing

Jesus walking on the water than of the storm. Wouldn't you be too? There simply would be only one category to put this experience. Only the creator God has control over creation, and Jesus is standing in that spot.

B. The I AM

Jesus then responds with "I AM." Although this is the normal way to say "it is I" in the Greek, there is nothing normal about this situation. A man is walking on the water! Jesus says he is the same I Am that spoke to Moses from the burning bush, and the same I Am who tells Job that he alone "walks on the waves of the sea" (Job 9:8). Jesus then tells his disciples to not be afraid, the most common exhortation in all of scripture, "Do not be afraid, because I am with you."

And, the scene ends with them taking Jesus into the boat, and them arriving at their destination. Some people take the "immediately" here to mean another miracle happened to get them quickly to land. John doesn't explain what happens here, but I think John is simply saying they safely made it to land.

C. The God Who Sees

The picture that John paints for us here is one of this: the creator God is up on a mountain watching out for us and recognizing our need. As Jesus saw the crowd and saw their need, so he sees the need of his disciples here. He then meets them in their need. His presence is all they need. God's presence is an ever present help in the midst of trouble. He is present with us in the dark moments of our lives. We are not alone. We don't have to fear because he sees us in our needs and meets us there.

VI. Reflection: Scarcity vs. Abundance

A. The God of Abundance

So, what are our takeaways from this amazing story? Well, first of all, Jesus is portrayed here as the God of creation, full of love and compassion, who sees us in our need and wants to provide abundantly for it. He then takes our meager offerings and abundantly provides. And, out of that same abundance of love, he offers his presence to us in the midst of our needs.

Only the God of creation can do these things. And, of course, it makes sense because the Bible begins with a celebration of abundance. Genesis 1 is a song of praise for a God of abundant generosity. This world is well-ordered and good, even very good. God blesses everything in it in every way, saying, "be fruitful and multiply." There is fruitfulness and goodness everywhere. There is no lack of restraint on God's part. He lavishes his goodness and grace and beauty on us and all around us. Later, the Psalmist repeatedly makes clear that we do not have to worry because our good God is utterly faithful and trustworthy.

So, we come back to our original question – am I controlled by an abundance mindset or a scarcity mindset?

B. The Test

In this passage, when Jesus tests his disciples, he is really testing the first inclination of their hearts. What is their first inclination? Is it the God of abundance is here or is it the scarcity of resources? And, they fail.

Jesus then explodes “the myth of scarcity” as Walter Brueggemann calls it. Scarcity is simply a fallacy when in the presence of the God of abundance. It’s a myth. Jesus is teaching them and us the truth about abundance. He is teaching us that the father has more than enough provision to go around.

C. The Modern World

But, in the modern world, the “myth of scarcity” dominates and controls our world. There is enough food and money in this world to feed everyone, yet 815 million people lack food. Why? Because we in the west believe there isn’t enough to go around. The supply is low, so we need to grasp, cling, selfishly possess and control. We are never satisfied. And, all the while The God of Abundance wants to use little old us in his provision.

D. Abundant Generosity

There is another way to live and it’s radically counter-cultural. We can live focused on “the God of abundance is here” modeling his abundant generosity. I can then be overly extravagantly abundantly generous! I can give joyfully and abundantly! I can give radically and extravagantly! I can even give beyond my family, church and favorite charity, after all that’s just tribe mentality. I can even give beyond my tribes! I can simply open my hands and give, trusting the God of abundance to meet my needs. There is enough to go around. And, even if we don’t have much, like little Sammy, “little is always much in the hands of the God of abundance” (Barclay, 239).

E. Abundant Generosity #2

But, there’s more. We can give abundantly in more ways than physical. As Paul says in Ephesians 1, we have been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing! What would it look like to be abundantly generous with our spiritual riches?

- We’ve been abundantly blessed with his presence, so we can abundantly bless others with our presence. We can put down our phones and be present with others.
- We’ve been abundantly loved, so we can abundantly love others, even those not of our tribe. Even those of the other political party.
 - BTW – Jesus is on the throne of the universe today. And, he’ll be there tomorrow and Tuesday and Wednesday, regardless of what happens Tuesday night. He’ll still be on the throne and we don’t have to fear. And he is who we give our allegiance to and is our hope.
- We’ve been shown overly extravagant abundant mercy, so we can show overly extravagant abundant mercy to others.
- We’ve been given abundant peace. He’s made peace with us through his blood shed on the cross, so we can go be peacemakers abundantly and everywhere.

To not do these things is to live by the myth of scarcity. But, to do these things is to recognize the God of abundance is here with me right now. And, that is to pass the test. Jesus, I want to pass the test.

Amen.

VII. Benediction

Now receive this benediction (Rom 15:13): May the God of hope and abundance fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope and abundant generosity by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Resources

Barclay, William, *The Gospel of John, Volume 1*

Brown, Raymond, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*

Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*

Brueggemann, Walter, *The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity (Christian Century Article, 1999)*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching the Gospel According to John* (Regent College Course)

Klink, Edward, *John (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*