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**LIFE IN HIS NAME**  
**THE FEEDING OF THE 5000**  
John 6:1-15

After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. 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?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" 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. 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. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" 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.

John Newton, the author of "Amazing Grace," the famous hymn, had a simple life motto; three words: None but Jesus. Phrased in the positive, he was saying that Jesus is everything. Jesus is everything that I could want, everything that I need for this life, and the life to come. Ask yourself for a moment, "Is it really possible that Jesus Christ is enough?" It's a fantastic claim that Jesus makes. In fact, this chapter of scripture, John Chapter 6, is the longest chapter in the New Testament, 71 verses, and it takes us through this theme: Jesus is all sufficient, Jesus is more than enough. It takes us layer by layer through this central truth.

God made you. And God made you with a tremendous capacity for happiness. Said in another way, you were created with ability and desire to experience true eternal joy. That capacity for happiness, that capacity for abiding joy is so vast that the scripture claims it can only be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. So, Jesus is more than enough. The ironic thing about happiness is that the more you seek happiness itself, the more you will self-destruct. But the more that you seek Jesus, the more you will experience not just true happiness, but eternal happiness.

I want to confess to you that today is a little bit of a bait and switch. I want to you hold up before you an invitation to happiness, true happiness, eternal happiness, abiding happiness, and then I'm going to switch and put Jesus there, because Jesus is the only source capable of the fulfillment of all that your soul needs and longs for.

Forgive me for this comparison, but your happiness is a little bit like the national debt. I was reading a recent study that was just put out by James Grant. If you know anything about our national debt, we owe almost 14 trillion dollars. I don't even know what a trillion is, except that it's a million millions, or a thousand billions. A trillion is a lot, and 14 trillion is 14 "a lots."

Just to put it in perspective, there are a number of countries in worse condition than we are. Japan, for example, though with a vibrant economy, is in worse shape. Germany is about where we are. India and China are in better shape. There is a big debate about how big a deal it is.

Without going into all this, let me just give you a simple illustration. In order to pay off the national debt, every person in America would have to write a check for \$42,998.12. So, I would have to write a check for \$42,998.12. The problem is I have six kids and a wife. Well, the \$42,000 would be a problem, but it gets worse. Thankfully, my daughter got married, so she is her husband's responsibility now. They would have to write their own checks, but I would have to write a check for my remaining children and my wife. My check would be \$300,986.84. I could write the check. I would have to borrow the money. There's a certain irony in that, right? In order to pay the debt I would have to borrow the money, but I would never write that check, right?

I wouldn't because the reality is that my check would not make a dent in the national debt. Even if somehow miraculously the national debt was paid for, how long would it be before we were right back in the same situation? When I gave you that number, almost 14 trillion, it's really a misleading number. That's only the money that we owe other people. We borrow internally as a government from ourselves. For example, we are borrowing from Social Security all the time. If you take our

internal borrowing, the national debt is more like 19 trillion. We have a borrowing problem. We have a spending problem.

This is not a commentary on government or political position. Whether the spending is legitimate or illegitimate, we see that the need outruns our ability to meet it. It's vast, and that's what happens for us in this pursuit of contentment and satisfaction and happiness. Even as we experience good things in this life, they just outpace us. Our capacity for it is so great, and our ability to achieve it is such that even when we get our hands on something that's fulfilling, we soon choke it to death.

When we make it the source of our happiness, it's just incapable -- whether it's a relationship, a romantic relationship or familial, our family, our children, our parents, our job, our career, or material things, or pleasure - whatever it may be. It's a little bit like the person in your life who has a life-controlling addiction, and the more you try to help them, the more they take that help and turn it around to feed that addiction. How do you help that person?

Jesus comes to that condition when he becomes a man. There is a need in us, and on the surface when you go to meet that need, things get worse. But we see his glory, we see the amazing glory of Jesus in that he is sufficient to meet that need. We are going to have three portions of that truth today -- how Jesus does that -- three movements through the passage. Let's start with the first one.

I. God's Power.

This is the first part of what is revealed in this passage. The story on one level is really about Jesus feeding this mass of people. We call it "The Feeding of the 5000." It's a very famous miracle of Jesus. It's the only miracle that is recorded in all four gospels. The New Testament begins with four accounts of Jesus' earthly life. We call them gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John -- and this is the only miracle that all four gospel writers tell us about. It's called "The Feeding of the 5000," but that's misleading because there were 5000 men, and we know from the other accounts from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, that there were women and children present. A conservative estimate of the crowd would be 20,000 people. So, you have 20,000 people that Jesus is going to feed. He is going to feed them with two fish and five cakes of bread. The fish are probably pickled fish like sardines. They are like an accent to the bread. After Jesus performs this miracle, there are

12 full baskets leftover. There is this clear revelation of the power of Jesus, the abundance of Jesus Christ. This is the theme throughout the New Testament.

Let me just take you through a quick tour. If you are taking notes, you can write down the references and go later to some of these passages.

In Ephesians 3:8 Paul said that he had been given grace to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.

In Ephesians 1:18-20 he prays for the Christians at Ephesus, that their hearts would be enlightened, that they would know their hope in Christ, their glorious inheritance, and listen to this: that they would know what is the immeasurable greatness of God's power toward us who believe, the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.

This theme is that God's power cannot be measured. It cannot be exhausted.

Ephesians 3:16-19: Again, Paul is praying for the Christians at Ephesus. He says, "I pray according to the riches of his glory, that he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Do you hear him again asking us to look at God and his vast riches of grace, and in this case, that his love is beyond measurement? He is saying, "I want the Holy Spirit to help you. I want the Holy Spirit to give you eyes of the heart to see. I want the Spirit of God to fill you with Christ. I want you to be strengthened in the inner man. When that happens, you are going to be filled with love. There is going to be this vast expanse of God's love expanding your soul. That love is beyond our ability to measure. In fact, it's beyond our ability to even comprehend, and you can't get a sense of it apart from God's Spirit helping you." The inexhaustible, immeasurable love of God.

So, we see these terms, just follow me: the riches of his grace, immeasurable power, immeasurable, inexhaustible love. The same is applied to the wisdom of God in Romans 11:33 and 36: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." God's wisdom, God's knowledge is beyond searching out.

Ephesians 3:20-21 is an interesting conclusion to one of Paul's prayers: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." Paul prays for people to be filled up, strengthened from within, filled up with God's fullness and the knowledge of how vast God is in power and wisdom and goodness and love. He says that not only will God answer this prayer, but God will do with this prayer what he does with all true prayer. He will do it in a way that's beyond anything that we can imagine or think. And he will do it, not only for you there in Ephesus, he will do it for every generation, forever and ever. It's awesome, isn't it? Don't you get excited to think about God's immense power?

Then the reference to Isaiah 40 that God just brought to our attention in the midst of worship:

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.

Listen:

He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he increases strength.  
Even youths shall faint and be weary,  
and young men shall fall exhausted;  
but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;  
they shall run and not be weary;  
they shall walk and not faint.

Let me quote John Newton on this theme. He says that Christ "is inexhaustible, like a boundless, shoreless, bottomless ocean; like the sun, which having cheered the successive generations of mankind with his beams, still shines with undiminished luster, is still the fountain of light, and has always a sufficiency to fill innumerable millions of eyes in the same instant." He says Christ is like an ocean with no shore and no bottom, and he is like the sun, who for generations past has always given light. They have lived in the brilliance of the light of the sun and in this moment, millions of

eyes are simultaneously filled with the luster of its light, and it is not diminished, and it all happens instantly before us in the past and in the future. Of course, we know the sun to be a created example. Jesus is uncreated and inexhaustible, like a boundless, shoreless, bottomless ocean.

Friends, our existence, our equilibrium begins by gazing at God and considering his infinity, his eternal wisdom, his inexhaustible power and love. We need a vision for how great God is. Our takeaway from this first point is very simple: It's faith. It's faith that comes by looking at God. God's Power.

## II. My Poverty.

God's Power. My Poverty. All that they have to feed this vast group is a boy's offering. The loaves, we are told, are barley loaves. This doesn't mean anything to us, but in Jesus' day, barley was the grain of the poor. The boy was poor. He had not five big loaves of bread, but little cakes, most likely, and the cakes were made of barley. He brings this little offering to God, to Jesus. The fish, as we said, were these inexpensive pickled fish. Then Jesus asks Philip this question, testing him, we are told. He says, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" Verse 6: "Jesus said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do." Of course, when they bring the offering to Jesus, they are apologetic, right? Well, what good is this going to do?

This is how life works, right? We see God's power, but in order to really connect to God's power, you have to see your poverty. It's a test. The need is immense. The question you are going to ask is, "What good is my offering going to make? What difference is my check going to make toward the national debt? Why would I invest this? Why would I give this?"

As soon as we begin living God's plan, we immediately experience our poverty. That's true not just financially, but that's true in every realm. As soon as we say, "Alright, I want to live for God. I want to live in a way where my life pleases him. I want to live with moral purity and integrity. I want to live in a way where I think of others and prefer them and give to them," we will quickly come to a revelation of our poverty.

We have this marriage class coming up, and it's one of the realities of marriage. You have this ideal before you, this picture of romance and marital bliss...and then you get married. Maybe we should turn the tape off for a moment, just so my wife doesn't listen to this next portion. We have this little joke in my home. I grew up with a little bit of an embarrassing nickname. When I say

nickname, everyone called me this until I was 18. The nickname was “Happy.” I was just a happy baby in the nursery, and the nursery coordinator gave me this name and it stuck. My old youth directors are here, Jim and Sherry - it was probably hard for them to quit calling me Happy. My wife tells this joke that I was Happy until I got married, then I became Brian.

There is a sobering reality to the fact that the divorce rate is over 50%. There is a sobering reality that many of you have been touched by the pain of family brokenness. Many who have remained married, in their heart of hearts, their testimony would not necessarily be that it's just been so fulfilling. I was serious in the beginning when I was talking about the fact that we have this quest for happiness, but when we go for it, we self-destruct. We need the Savior who blessed the bread and broke it with 12 baskets leftover to bless every area of our lives.

One of my greatest joys in life has been to be a dad. One of my greatest pains in life has been the times when I have hurt my children with my anger or pride or selfishness, or just sheer ignorance. Jesus tells us, “Bring your poverty to me, and I’m going to take your poverty and put it with my power, then something wonderful is going to happen.”

This is an interesting theme. If you go all the way back to the Old Testament, there are two examples. One is Elijah. In 1 Kings 17, we are told about the story where Elijah visits a widow. There is a drought in the land and everyone is starving. He says to her, “I want you to make a cake for me,” a little piece of bread. She says, “Okay, I will do it, but let me tell you that I was just going to do that, and my son and I were going to eat this, then we are going to die, because this is all we have.” So Elijah tells her, “Okay, what do you have in your house?” She says, “I’ve got a little oil and a little flour.” He says, “Okay, go make that cake, and here is what’s going to happen - you are going to give that to me. You are going to make that cake and you are going to see that that flour and that oil will never run out.” So, you have her poverty, and the word of God, the sufficiency of God’s provision. You put them together and this widow is provided for.

You want to say, “Why do I have to give my little bit of flour and oil?” Well, we are going to get to that as we move through Chapter 6, but let me give you a little preview. God wants to do more than just give you that little cake of flour. He wants to meet a deeper need. He wants you to invest in the process. In order for you to know him, you have to know your poverty and learn to trust in him, and not yourself.

The second example is very similar. It's in 2 Kings Chapter 4, and it's the example of Elisha. So, you had Elijah, now you have Elisha - these two great miracle-working prophets. Here Elisha meets a widow who is destitute. He says, "What do you have?" She has this little vessel of oil. He tells her, "Go borrow all the vessels you can borrow, and don't be shy." So she goes and gets all these vessels. Then he tells her, "Start pouring the oil. Fill all the other vessels with your vessel, and your oil will not run out." Then she sells those vessels and she is provided for. Again, same picture, right? Her poverty, God's provision. God's Power, My Poverty.

### III. God's Plan.

On one level, as you read about the feeding of the 5000, the story is about a mass of people and Jesus' compassion for them. Rather than send them away, he supernaturally feeds them. We see a revelation of God's power, of his compassion, of his love, and he uses the apostles to do that. Even going a little under the surface, it's a magnificent story. But on another level, there is a whole other plot line, right? Did you pick up on it? It builds throughout John Chapter 6. There are these clear indications that they are not getting what they are supposed to get. They are misunderstanding Jesus.

Jesus shows up. He is really trying to get alone with his disciples, but there is this mob of people. Why are they following him? It's right there in the beginning of the passage: because they have seen the miracles that Jesus has done. We have seen this theme before, right? There is a right way to respond to Jesus' miracles, and there is a wrong way. The implication here is that we are starting to sense that theirs is the wrong way. They want just what Jesus will do for them. They are not really interested in Jesus' plan or in personally knowing Jesus. They just want his power, or maybe they are just enamored with the supernatural, but their motives are not right, and we see that as we begin.

We are told that this is the Passover. The Passover is called here "the feast of the Jews." For Israel, it's a little bit like our July 4<sup>th</sup>. It celebrated their independence, their exodus from Egypt. Our Independence Day here, if you are familiar with it, is about our independence. Probably, to be more accurate, it's like a combination of July 4<sup>th</sup> and Christmas. It's a big holiday -- all the festivity that we associate with those two days, and the celebration. The reason I add Christmas is because of the magnitude of it, but also because of the religious overtones. That's what it was for Israel. God delivered us, and there is a celebration of the work of God, but there is also this nationalistic fervor.

At the end of the miracle we are told that Jesus is aware that they want to come grab him and make him king. And what does he do? He leaves. He wants no part of it. You see, they have a response, an agenda, to which Jesus is saying, “You are not getting what I am about. What you want you think will bring happiness, but it won’t. It will just lead you into further debt, and it won’t deal with your ultimate need. I have something much greater for you.”

There is this comparison that’s made to Moses throughout John Chapter 6. Jesus said something very disturbing at the end of John Chapter 5. Moses really was used of God to birth, in many ways, national identity. He was used of God to give them the law and the temple and the priesthood. And Jesus said, “You are not understanding who I am. Moses gives witness to me, and on the day of judgment...” (this is about as harsh a condemnation as Jesus could have given) he says, “on the day of judgment...” (this is right there at the end of John 5, where we ended our last study) “it’s not me who will condemn you, but Moses, the very one you claim to follow, because his words testify of me.” Moses was believed to be used of God to deliver God’s people, but Jesus is the true Savior, and Moses was pointing to him. Jesus is announcing on this deeper level that he has come to do something far greater than just give you bread. He himself is bread. He is the bread of life.

They sense something is up. In fact, they say right before we ended the passage in verse 14: “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!” That is a reference back to Moses. Toward the very end of Moses’ life and ministry, in Deuteronomy Chapter 18:15-18 Moses said this:

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen — (now listen to this) - just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

Here is what Moses says: Let me just remind you, Israelites - there was a day when we were at the mountain and we were in the presence of God. The mountain was shaking and we were there in the presence. The awesome fire of God was there before us, and people of God, you said, “We are afraid. We don’t want God to speak directly to us, or we are going to die. Moses, you speak with God. Let him speak to you, and then you speak to us.” That’s the context. And curiously, Moses

prophesies of one who will come, a prophet that you will listen to. The implication is this: You, because of your sin (talking to the Israelites), because of your need, you couldn't have direct relationship with God. You couldn't have intimacy with God. But one is coming -- he will bring my word to you. John, remember, Jesus is the Word. He will bring my Word. There will be a restoration of intimacy with God because of what Jesus will do. Jesus will do what Moses could not do by giving you the law. They remember this passage and they say, "Oh, this is the prophet that Moses spoke of!" But they do not understand the implications of what that means.

Let me just take a minute to draw this together as we get ready to close. It is God's power meeting our poverty, but it is God's plan. You see, God's agenda for you is not just contentment, bread, whatever that represents to you. It's intimacy with him. It's a relationship with him. It's knowledge of him, a true relationship. Then God wants to take you and transform you so that your quest is not for happiness, it's not for self, it's for God. It's for Jesus. And when that happens, everything is transformed. You live, not just to be blessed, but to be a blessing. Yes?!

This is the greatest part of the promise! Abraham was given seven glorious promises. "Abraham, I'm going to bless you. Everyone who blesses you will be blessed. Everyone who curses you will be cursed." That's a pretty great promise. There you are, Abraham, on the playground in kindergarten. Some kid makes fun of your red hair and you say, "I wouldn't do that! Everyone who curses me, God curses." It's a powerful promise, right?

When God breaks the bread and blesses it, two fish and five loaves feed 20,000! When God says to Abraham, "I'm going to bless you in a way you cannot imagine. Now leave everything you know behind and follow me. Your poverty, my power, my blessing, my plan." And here is the ultimate part of that - "Through you, Abraham, all the families of the earth will be blessed."

God has a plan for your life. His plan is for you to have intimacy with him, to love one another, and to bless every person in your life, to be a blessing. You are sitting there thinking, "Brian, you just don't know some of the people in my life. They are difficult to bless." Yeah - your poverty, his power, his plan. It's glorious! It's good news! Can you see just for a moment before we say, "Amen"? Twenty thousand people turned selfishly inward will all leave Jesus upset with him that day, by the time we finish John Chapter 6, except his closest disciples. Jesus has the strength to reveal himself in this miracle and to go forward in this journey that provides for ultimate salvation.

Here we are 2000 years later experiencing the grace of God, even from what was revealed in that very moment. Jesus is sufficient. Amen?

Let's pray.