

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT (Laetare) - March 19, 2023

Readings: Isaiah 49:8–13, Galatians 4:21–31, John 6:1–15

The Lord Feeds His People

The Lord provided bread from heaven for His people in the wilderness (Ex. 16:2–21). Now He who is Himself the living bread from heaven miraculously provides bread for the five thousand (John 6:1–15). This takes place near the time of the Passover, after a great multitude had followed Jesus across the sea, and when He went up on a mountain. Seen in this way, Jesus is our new and greater Moses, who releases us from the bondage of Mount Sinai and makes us free children of the promise (Gal. 4:21–31). Five loaves become twelve baskets—that is, the five books of Moses find their goal and fulfillment in Christ, whose people continue steadfastly in the doctrine and fellowship of the twelve apostles, and in the breaking and receiving of the bread of life, which is the body of Christ together with His precious blood, and in the prayers (Acts 2:41–47). So it is that God's people "shall not hunger or thirst" (Is. 49:8–13). For He abundantly provides for us in both body and soul.

Sermon Transcript

Grace, mercy and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I have several texts that we're going to try and weave together. First off, let's start with the Gospel, Jesus Christ feeding the 5,000. Now, this is the second time He fed a multitude of people. The 4,000 on the plain, the 5,000 here on the mountains. This is near up in Galilee and the Sea of Galilee. And He's telling the people to sit down. He tests Philip, he says, "Where are we going to get food to feed all these people?" And Philip's looking at Him like, "I don't know. I mean, 200 denarii is not even going to come close to feeding them." 200 denarii, remember, a denarii is a day's wage. So, 200 denarii is practically a full year salary and it's not even going to come close to paying for enough food. And then Andrew comes along, and I don't think Andrew even knows what he's doing, but he's like, "Well, we got to do something. So, this kid's got five loaves of bread and a couple of fish. Maybe we can get fed and send the rest of them away." Andrew doesn't seem to know what is going on or what's going to happen. The disciples, even though they've been with Jesus for this whole time, they've seen Him do miracle after miracle after miracle. They've seen Him feed the 4,000 before. They still don't seem to understand what's going on. But Jesus has everybody sit down and He's going to teach them again. So, He takes the loaves, He feeds them, feeds the 5,000. And then as soon as He does this, again, it's clear that people don't understand what this is all about because they want to take Him and force Him to be king. And Jesus has said throughout His ministry, "My kingdom is not of this world." My focus is not on the here and now, it's on the hereafter.

And Isaiah helps us to see that as well. When you read Isaiah, you hear about God answering us with a day of salvation, by helping us, by making us a covenant people, establishing us in the land. When Isaiah's talking about establishing us in the land, establishing the people of God, this is him prophesying about Jesus coming. You hear "In a time of favor," you hear echoes of "In the fullness of time, that God sent His Son, born of a woman, to dwell with us, to offer us salvation." Isaiah here is talking about a place where we will be at peace, "Where we will neither hunger nor thirst where the striking and scorching sun will not strike us." That's obviously not here in Florida. I mean, we know that for sure. But He has pity on them. "He leads them beside springs of waters and He will guide them." If you hear echoes of Psalm 23, you're right. "The Lord is our shepherd and we shall not want. He leads us beside still waters. He guards us. He protects us. He walks us through the valley of the shadow of death." See, Isaiah is giving us the hope and the promise of life everlasting with our Lord and Savior. The land that

is being prepared is not an earthly kingdom. The earthly kingdom was simply there to point us to the hope of an even better place, a better home, where we belong. Where we belong because we are children of the promise, not children of the law.

Now, getting into Paul and his talk in Galatians, I need to make a couple of caveats before I start going into this. Paul speaks allegorically. In other words, he says, "Sarah and Hagar represent something completely different that nobody's ever thought about, but I'm going to take them and I'm going to apply them to the law and to the Gospel." Now, I will never speak allegorically and never you do it as well. This is a dangerous thing to do unless you are inspired by the Holy Spirit to do so. And so we need to be careful. Only Paul, and this is about the only place that it's ever done to speak allegorically about something from the Old Testament. Sarah, Hagar, Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, those were real people. Those were real historical events that took place. By saying that he's taking this as an allegory, he's not saying, "I don't believe those things actually historically happened. I don't believe those people were real historical people." But inspired by the Holy Spirit, he sees God communicating something greater than what we initially see in the historical events. Plus, he's trying to deal with a problem that the Galatian Christians are dealing with. They have this group of Judaizers who are coming into their midst, who are trying to convince the new Christians, the gentile Christians, that they're not really Christians. "Just because you believe in God and you believe that he's your Lord and Savior and you believe he's forgiven your sins, that's not enough to be a Christian." "It's not?" "No, you have to follow the law. You have to come under the law first, and then do all of that right. And then and only then can you be a Christian. In other words, you need to be circumcised and you need to follow all the dietary laws and you need to follow all the dressing laws and you need to follow the ritual laws, not to mention the 10 commandments themselves. And you need to do all of that first. And when you've been a good Jewish person and lived under the law, then you can be considered a Christian." And Paul is saying, "Have you not listened to what I have said? Do you not understand what the law is supposed to do?"

See, the Judaizers were thinking that the point of the law was to prove your worth before God. They thought that the law was the means by which you pleased God and you were part of God's family. Paul is saying, "You are part of God's family because he has chosen you. He has adopted you and brought you into his kingdom through his Word." The law doesn't do that. All the law does is crush you and accuse you of your sin. That's not salvation, nor is it eternal. The law is only here for the here and now. When we get to heaven, we're not going to continue to follow the law because we will be perfect and we will be with God. So we will live at peace and we do not need the law. Now, here on this world, the law does serve a purpose, but it's not the goal of our Christian life.

If we think that we are to follow the law to become or be good Christians, we're getting the cart before the horse. Now, again, I need to say another caveat at this point. I am not saying that being a good Christian or following the 10 commandments is wrong. I'm not saying, "Should we sin all the more that grace may abound? God loves to forgive. So go and do whatever you want because He loves to forgive you. And don't worry about it." That is not what I am saying. Everybody got that? I am not saying to go do whatever you want because God's going to forgive you. That's not the point here. What I'm saying is that the law does not serve the purpose of making us Christians. It really doesn't even serve the purpose of making us holy. What makes us holy is Christ and Him within us, through the power of the Holy Spirit. That's what makes us holy. Now that we are holy, then we seek to serve God by listening to what the law has to say to us. But before that, all the law does is convince us and convict us of our sin. The law tells us that we have failed in thought, word and deed to even come close to

pleasing God. So why would we want the focus of our life to be upon the law? The focus of our life is to be upon the promise.

Paul uses the allegory of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar. These were all 400 and some odd years before the law was even given to Moses. So, he wants us to focus on the promise because the promise came first. "I will make you a great nation. I will claim you. I will be your God, and you will be my people. Now that you are my people, now that I have saved you..." And this is how the 10 commandments go. "I am the God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Therefore, you will have no other gods. You will not misuse my name and you will honor the Sabbath day," and so on and so forth. But notice how it starts out. "I am the Lord your God, who saved you from your slavery, who saved you from, you might say, your sin. Now that I have saved you, this is how saved people act. Honor me, use my name properly. Come and worship and receive my word. Honor your parents. Don't lie. Don't steal. Don't murder. Don't covet". The whole nine yards. Or the whole 10 Commandments, shall we say. But the commandments are not the point. We are called to live out of the joy of our salvation. We are called to focus upon His gift given to us, that was given to us as a promise. Not because of what we've done or not because of how well we have lived our lives, but in spite of the fact that we have failed to live up to the law. He still loves us because the only person that did fulfill the law was Christ. And He fulfilled it in our stead. And then after having fulfilled the law perfectly, He then took the punishment of not having fulfilled the law perfectly: death, rejection of the Father. And so He was rejected and punished and suffered what we rightly deserve in the law. And we receive the grace and mercy and love of God, which He rightly deserved because of the way He lived and who He was. He gets all of our junk, we get all of His blessing. It's amazing. Why do we want to then pull all that grace and mercy and love and joy and stick it back under the law again? No, we do not follow the 10 commandments because we must, or that it's the right thing to do. It is the right thing to do, but that's not why we follow it. We follow it because Christ loves us and has forgiven us and has given us the promise of everlasting life. So that when we die, we do not need to go before God and be afraid on the judgment day. We do not need to look at our lives and say, "I tried really hard to follow the law," and God looks at us and says, "Well, you failed." That's what would happen without the Gospel, without the promise. With the Gospel, and with the promise we come before the judgment seat of God on the last day. And He looks at us and He says, "Not guilty. Well done, good and faithful servant." And we're looking around like, "You sure you mean me?" And He says, "Yes, absolutely, because My Son has taken your place."

The law is temporary and only serves to show us our sin and to guide us as Christians to seek to live a life of joy and thanksgiving before God. But what is eternal is the promise, and that is what we should focus upon, that is what we should hold fast to, and that is what we should rejoice in. Because He has prepared a great and marvelous land for us, where we will be free from all the harms and dangers of this world, all the fears and cares, all the suffering and sorrows. And every tear will be wiped from our eyes. And we will see God and not be afraid, but rejoice, so that, as Christians, we know the wages of sin is death. And death is a fear to each and every one of us humans. But as Christians, we do not fear the punishment of death, because we know that in death we will be made alive in Christ. Because we have already died in our baptisms. We were buried with Christ in our baptisms. And if we were buried with Christ in His death, how much more sure we'll be raised to new life in His resurrection? That is the promise. Hold fast to the promise, not to the obligation and the law.

May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.