

Israel 2016
Talk 1
Charles Price
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Well I have been sent back here because I have got some windbreakers. So I can hold my Bible and just enjoy things and these folks; they are all flapping around in the breeze there. But actually I have got some rocks as well, just to make sure my Bible stays open at the right page.

That was great, Josh, leading us there in those songs of worship. I just hope you weren't being prophetic when you sang, "We hear the wind, we see the mighty thunder;" I just hope the mighty thunder wasn't on its way in as well.

But this is real Galilee. This is not set up. And we read about storms on Galilee a number of times in the Bible. In fact tomorrow afternoon I plan to talk about one of the great storms that Jesus experienced on Galilee.

I may have gotten the messages the wrong way around because this would be the ideal visual setting for it maybe. But having been in so many places the last few days, having been all over Jerusalem and of course much of what we see there has been built and added to and changed, and the shape of the city is different to what it was in Jesus' day.

But when you sit here and you look out over this landscape, so much of what we see is as it was 2000 years ago.

Tiberias up there in the corner was not quite as big as that. I don't know about these houses up here but there would have been some dwelling places for sure. And then the barrenness of some of these hills have been there ever since Jesus made this lake His base, living in Capernaum on the north side of the lake so very long ago.

But I want to read to you this morning from John's Gospel and Chapter 6. And I hope you brought a Bible with you to the sessions. If you forgot to or didn't think about and you have got one with you in your suitcase, bring it tomorrow. And if you don't have one in your suitcase there may be one in the hotel room; I'm not sure if there is in Tiberias but it will be helpful to have one with you to follow what is being said in each of the sessions.

But John Chapter 6 gives us a story that took place around this lake. I thought it would be good in the two sessions that I am going to be responsible for that I would talk about events that are related to the lake behind us so that you can visually see and imagine some of these things that we will talk about.

And this is the very familiar story known to all of us when Jesus fed 5000 people with just five loaves and two fish.

So let me read you that story – John 6:1:

“Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias)” (behind me), “and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.

“Then Jesus went up on a mountainside...”

And we can envisage how He might do that – there are so many mountains and hills surrounding this lake.

“He went up on a mountainside and he sat down with his disciples.

“The Jewish Passover feast was near.

“When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?’

“He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

“Philip answered him, ‘Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!’

“Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up.

“‘Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?’

“Jesus said, ‘Have the people sit down.’ There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them.

“Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

“When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, ‘Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.’

“So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.”

That is as far as I am going to read and I am going to read the next part of this chapter tomorrow afternoon because I want to look at a day in the life of Jesus.

You know a lot of what we have in the four Gospels is very concentrated into a very small period of time. We know that Jesus preached for three years. We put that together by the fact that there are three Passover feasts that were a part of His life and His ministry.

But if Jesus preached and ministered and traveled and performed miracles and told stories for three years, in all four Gospels we have less than one month of Jesus' ministry accounted for. That means there are 35 months of Jesus' ministry about which we know nothing.

Just this put together one month's worth of information and this event I want to look at this morning, which is Jesus feeding the 5000 people took place in the afternoon of a particular day. And that same night He sent His disciples across the lake in a boat and they got caught in a storm and thought they were going to drown. And Jesus came, walking on the water, to them.

And that occupies a whole chapter in our Bible and it reoccurs in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, or some details do, and so they take up a big portion of this one month of information that we have.

Therefore the things that happened this day are given to us for good reason, that we may learn lessons from them that potentially may change our own lives.

Now I don't know where you are this morning with us – most of you are viewers of Living Truth, some of you are friends and guests and family members of viewers of Living Truth. Some of you have never heard of Living Truth.

But I don't know where you are on the spectrum of those who are at this point, "I don't know much about Christianity, I don't certainly have a relationship with Jesus Christ, I don't even understand what that means" right through to those who say, "Well, I have a loving relationship with Christ that is at the very center of my life and that governs everything I do."

Where you are within that spectrum I believe that the message I have for you this morning is for you, for each of us on that spectrum.

It is very interesting that John's Gospel doesn't call the miracles, miracles – he does use that word – but he calls them signs. He writes about miraculous signs.

Now signs of course are not an end in themselves. Signs are pointers, a way to something else; they are not ends in themselves.

If you are driving into an unfamiliar town and you are looking for a particular place and you see a sign that is pointing to that place, you don't stop at the sign and say, "Well, I have reached it now; I have reached the sign." No, you don't stop at the sign; you follow the sign to the point, to the place to which it is pointing.

And the danger when we read some of these stories in John's Gospel is we read the sign, we admire the sign, we love the sign, we talk about the sign, but we don't actually follow the sign to the destination, the end purpose to which that sign is pointing.

And this miracle of Jesus feeding the 5000 is one which the disciples themselves did not follow through because in John 6:26 at the end of this chapter it says,

“Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw the miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.’”

In other words, you are not coming with Me because you understand the message that was in the miracle that you have just seen but because you got a free lunch and there is a bit of theatre that you are enjoying, a bit of – from a human perspective – but of magic going on, a bit of suspense. It’s a story to go home and talk about. “You will never guess what I saw today.”

But you haven’t understood the sign. And so it doesn’t take you into any personal experience of God, which these signs are designed to do.

Now the situation here of course is we have a great need – this is the problem in this story – the great need is 5000 hungry people. And we have no adequate resources, which is the means of feeding those 5000 people who have become hungry, having stayed much longer than they ever anticipated when they set out that morning and so they have become hungry and are here without sufficient supply.

I think that is the scenario that plays out in many of our lives, many times in our experience. There are great needs that we face that seem to come upon us but there are inadequate resources, completely inadequate resources, to address those needs.

Sometimes it has to do with our personal lives, sometimes with our family lives, with our marriages, with our children, with our work life. Demands that are being made on us, needs that stare us in the face and we say, “How in the world is it possible for me to meet that need?” We don’t have anything like sufficient resources.

So what do we do in that situation?

Well let me just summarize the story as it is told in all four Gospels. We have some to tell in Matthew, some in Mark, some in Luke, some in John – I read to you from John. There are bits of detail that come about in the other Gospel versions as well.

But basically the story is this. The day began by Jesus getting up, getting in a boat and crossing the Lake of Galilee in His boat. And when He arrived at His destination – it doesn’t tell us the address; we try to reconstruct where these places may have been.

But when he arrived at the intended place, He went up on a mountainside and He sat down with His disciples, presumably just to be with them.

“Let’s take a day,” He might have said to them, “and let’s go across the lake where nobody knows us and up on the hillside and let’s just spend time together.”

And while they were there they noticed a great crowd beginning to gather and coming towards them. The word had got out, “Jesus is up on that hillside with His friends; let’s go and see what He has to say.”

And when they came up the hillside, He began to teach them many things, it tells us in Mark's Gospel. We don't have any record of what He taught them, but He taught them many things.

And what He taught them was so enthralling and so gripping and so exciting to them that they forgot about the time, they forgot about their hunger pangs and they stayed much longer than they expected to do.

And towards the end of the day the disciples realized these folks are going to be hungry (probably because their stomachs were rumbling themselves).

They were in a remote place, it tells us. There are no fast-food sellers who have driven up in their camel-drawn wagons to sell hot dogs to feed the people. They are alone, remote. Nobody knows they are there.

So how do you deal with the problem?

There were five options that were presented. The first option was presented by the disciples and you find this in Matthew, Mark and Luke where I will read Matthew's version [Matthew 5:15]:

“As the evening approached, the disciples came to Jesus and said, ‘This is a remote place, and it is already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.’”

So the first solution is proposed by the disciples: send them away to look after themselves. Let everybody just look after their own need. It is not far to some villages – they can go and buy food.

Get them off our hands, in other words.

That was the disciples' recommendation. “We don't want to get involved in this. Send them away.”

The second option presented was that when they said that, Jesus replied,

“They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

Well what a ridiculous option, they clearly thought to themselves.

You know some of them have been fishermen but they weren't bakers and they weren't chefs. And in any case they hadn't got the basic raw materials. If they were to, you know, make a fire pit to start a barbeque, there are 5000 of them anyway, but there is nothing to cook on the barbeque.

So they say to themselves, “This suggestion of Jesus is utterly unreasonable, utterly foolish. How in the world can we provide for them?”

And then Jesus zeroed in on one of the disciples; his name was Philip.

And in John 6:5,

“When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?’”

Now He said to the whole gang of disciples, “You go and feed them.” Now He singles out Philip. “Philip, come here a moment.”

I don’t know why He picked on Philip. “Philip, where will we get bread for these people to eat?”

I love the next verse where John says,

“Jesus asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.”

So He wasn’t looking for advice. “Philip, come up here. How are we going to feed these people, you know, have you got any ideas because I’m stuck?”

No, Jesus knew what He was going to do, but He was testing Philip. Not to embarrass him, not to humiliate him, not to put him in front of a crowd and show his utter bankruptcy of ideas and thoughts and possibilities, but to teach Philip something.

I can imagine He said, “Philip, it’s a big crowd out there.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“About 5000 people.”

“Yeah, I hadn’t counted them but I guess that’s about right.”

“And they are hungry.”

“Yeah, so am I.”

“And they are wondering where the food is coming from.”

“Funny You mention that; I am wondering the same thing myself.”

“Well, Philip, how are we going to feed them? How are we going to feed them?”

What did Philip do?

He looked in his pocket, “How much money have we got? Hey, Judas, how much money is in the bag? 200 denarii – is that all? Nothing else? Peter, anything in your pocket? Anybody else got any change? No? No? Is that all the money we have got?”

He came back to Jesus and said in one translation,

“Eight months’ wages would not be enough to have a bite.”

200 denarii in one translation; the King James, which was written in England says 200 pennyworth (that’s the English currency) would not be enough.

In other words, says Philip, “I’m sorry Jesus; we have no answer to this; we have no means of meeting this need.”

Now just suppose that Jesus didn’t ask Philip to come up and say, “Where are we going to get bread for these people.”

Supposing Jesus said, “Is there an atheist in the crowd this afternoon?” And somebody puts his hand up. Mr. Atheist, “Will you come up here a moment?”

The atheist comes up and He says, “There’s a big crowd of people out there.”

“Yeah, I thought it was.”

“It’s about 5000 of them.”

“Oh wow, I hadn’t counted, but that sounds a good number.”

“And they are hungry, Mr. Atheist.”

“Yeah, so am I.”

“And they are wondering where the food is coming from.”

“Yeah, I was wondering exactly the same thing.”

“So, Mr. Atheist, where are we going to get food to feed all these people?”

What do you think the atheist would say? He would say exactly what Philip said. He would say, “How much money have we got? Who is the treasurer? That lean guy over there? What’s your name – Judas Iscariot – how much money have you got? 200 denarii – is that all? That’s nothing, isn’t it? Anybody else got anything – what about you? What’s your name? Peter, have you got anything in your pocket? Anybody else? John, you got anything? No? Nobody got anything? That’s all we’ve got – 200 denarii?”

The atheist would have gone back to Jesus and said, “200 denarii would not be enough for each one to have a bite.”

He would tell Him exactly what Philip had told Him.

What does that tell us about Philip? It tells us Philip was a professing disciple but a practising atheist.

In other words, Philip could have his understanding of who Jesus Christ was right. He was beginning to formulate his Christian doctrines. He had sat under the teaching of Jesus day in, day out, week in, week out, had seen Him in action.

But in terms of how this works out in his life, how this works out in practical situations, how what he hears translates into life, Philip has nothing more going for him than the atheist who doesn't know anything how it is going for him.

It is possible to be a disciple, a believer in name, genuine disciple, genuine believer, not believing with your fingers crossed but believing because you see it and you understand it and you really believe these things.

And yet to live with no resources that the man next door doesn't have, to live with as little to cope with the issues and problems and difficulties and hardships than an atheist has.

So that was Philip.

The next attempt to solve this problem comes from another disciple called Andrew.

And in Verse 8 of John 6 it says,

“Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. ‘Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish...’”

That of course was probably enough for his own lunch when he left home that morning. I don't know where he was going, but he got caught up in this crowd. But presumably his mom had said to him, “You'd better take some lunch with you - five little barley loaves, and two little fish, a couple of sardines.”

And somehow, somewhere, this little boy has come to Andrew. I like Andrew because you find the few times Andrew appears, he is always approachable.

When Andrew met Jesus the first thing he did was run and tell his brother Simon Peter. Andrew was one of these guys who didn't keep things to himself. He was kind; he was generous.

And I imagine Andrew was standing around. This boy looked at him and thought, “That's the man who will be kind to me. That's the guy who will understand me.”

He came up and said, “Mister, I know people are hungry. I know they are talking about it up there. I have got five loaves and two fish – would these be any use?”

And Andrew, because he was kind, said, “Well, I will tell you what – I will take you to Jesus.”

But when he did so, Andrew was embarrassed about it; he was apologetic about it, because he said,

“Here is a boy with five barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

In other words, “Jesus, I am a bit embarrassed to even mention this because I know they are totally useless, but he is a lovely little boy and I just wanted to help him.”

So for Philip, the problem was the money available or the lack of money available. For Andrew, the problem was the food available or the lack of food available.

And now having exposed the disciples were unable to feed them themselves, exposed that Philip had no remedy, that Andrew had no remedy, Jesus then took the matter into His own hands.

And I want you to listen very carefully to this and watch very carefully. This is not Jesus doing something that the disciples would not be able to do – that would have been humiliating to have asked them to do something if there were not the resources for them to do it.

What did He do? Well we know He fed the 5000. We know He took the five loaves. We know He began to break them. He took the two fish and He began to distribute them.

And we know that as He distributed them, all 5000 people had enough to eat. And we know that at the end of it there were twelve baskets of fragments left over they picked up so that the place was clean at the end of the occasion.

We know this remarkable miracle took place, but how did this miracle take place? What is the explanation for it?

Now the simple but the wrong explanation is well, Jesus was God. And because He was God He could perform miracles.

That is the way so many of us think about these events, but that is not the right explanation. If we say the miracles prove that Jesus was God and He could do them because He is miraculous, what are you going to do with Moses who performed miracles? He wasn't God.

What are you going to do with Joshua who performed miracles? He wasn't God.

With Elijah – he wasn't God. With Elisha – he wasn't God. With Peter – he wasn't God. With Paul – he wasn't God.

If you say the miracles are because He was God, you have got a problem with these other men who performed miracles.

And if we had time to look back in Chapter 5, which we don't, but Chapter 5 comes before Chapter 6, so if you are reading through John, these are all connected. Jesus just denied having the ability to heal a man. He had said, "I myself can do nothing" in John 5:19.

John 5:30, in case they hadn't got it:

"By myself I can do nothing."

He is saying, "As a man I am as dependent on God as you as men and women are dependent on God. I myself do nothing. I don't draw out the God card when I am in a problem – phew, and then everything is fixed."

No, as a man, Jesus Christ performs this miracle, and I want to show you what happened. And I want you to listen very carefully to this.

Verse 10:

"Jesus said, 'Have the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them.

"Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish."

And by the next verse it's all over, because it says,

"When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.'"

And they gathered up twelve basketfuls of stuff that was left.

Now what actually happened then? Did you notice what happened?

Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted.

You know the hand is quicker than the eye here. Most of us would say, "I don't know what happened there; I didn't get it."

But reading very carefully: "Jesus took the loaves and gave thanks and distributed to those who were seated."

He gave thanks.

You say, "Is that it?"

I don't mean He said a grace before the meal, "For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful, amen" and distributed it.

There is something profoundly important here. Faced with a dilemma that baffled the disciples, that baffled Philip, that baffled Andrew, Jesus resolved it with something extremely simple, saying to His Father, "Thank You."

What does that mean? To say thank you is to acknowledge dependence upon someone else.

If you open a door for me and I walk through, I will say thank you. What am I doing? I am saying you have done something for me.

If I pass you something you need you will probably say to me thank you. What are you saying? "I acknowledge I have been dependent upon you as you have given this to me."

Thanks is acknowledgement of dependence on someone else. And in this situation Jesus is saying, in effect, this problem we have – 5000 hungry people, only five loaves and two fish at the most, no money to do anything with that is worthwhile; in this situation which is bigger than the disciples and bigger than Andrew and bigger than Philip, and is equally bigger than Jesus as a man, is not bigger than His Father.

So, "Father, living as men" (and Jesus became a real man) "men and women on this earth, in this situation, the natural physical laws do not allow us to produce food out of nothing and feed these people. So Father, thank You that You are alive. Thank You that You are in action. Thank You that You are capable."

And so turning to His Father, He gave thanks and then began to distribute the food. In other words, He passed the buck to His Father.

And do you know how I know this is the key, that I am not just making this up or exaggerating something?

Because in Verse 23 of John 6, after Jesus has walked on the water, they came back to the same area and it says,

"Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten bread after the Lord had given thanks."

Notice that? They came back, you know, the next day. They came to the place where people had eaten the food after the Lord had given thanks.

If I was writing this, I would have written it differently. I would have said, "They landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had fed the 5000." That's what I would have written because that's what would have impressed me.

Or, “They landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had performed a miracle.” That’s what I would have written because that would have been the issue for me; that would have impressed me. That’s the issue.

But no, John says,

“They landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks.”

Why? Because that was the issue. He had passed the buck to His Father.

Hilary and I have been in the United Kingdom for the last two months or so and we will be there through December as well.

And so we are driving not only on the opposite side of the road to what you drive on in Canada and U.S. but we are driving what I think you call a stick shift car.

It has gears – standard – is that what you call it? Yes, standard.

Most North American cars, I realized when we went to live there, have two pedals – a stop and a go. But you have got to navigate three in a standard.

And the task – let me put it this way – you have the engine under the hood that might be full of gasoline, ready to run. You have the wheels on the ground that are greased and ready to turn and move down the road, but to engage the engine with the wheels, you have got to apply what we call a clutch.

And the clutch is a mechanical device that engages or disengages power from the driving shaft to the driven shaft. The driving shaft is the engine and it is engaging the clutch that connects it to the driven shaft, which are the wheels, which in turn enable the car to go down the road.

Now you can sit behind a car of a standard with the engine turned on. You can put your foot on the gas pedal and you can rev it up, and you have got every window in the neighborhood rattling because you have revved it so high, and go nowhere because you haven’t allowed the clutch to engage the engine to the wheels.

Now listen, in the Christian life, what is the clutch? If we have all the resources of God, the engine, all the driving force, all the power of God that we believe in and trust. And incidentally, the word for the Spirit of God in the New Testament is Ruach which means the wind of God and we have seen it illustrated now here today – the wind blowing around us. The Spirit of God out on the Day of Pentecost, like a mighty roaring wind.

But how does that wind of the Spirit, the power that God has made available to us, get to the wheels to move the car down the road? What is the clutch that engages God in our circumstances, in our situations, in our problems, in our difficulties?

And I suggest to you this: that the clutch is giving thanks, which means transferring the responsibility over to God and saying, “Father, thank You for Your sufficiency, for Your resources and I am going to trust You, so thank You.”

And in this story, all the resources of God, the engine, are released and transferred to the wheels. That’s why there is so much in the New Testament about giving thanks.

Paul says in 2 Thessalonians,

“Give thanks in all circumstances...”

Why?

“...for this is God’s will in Christ Jesus for you.”

Not give thanks *for* all circumstances. There are some terrible, wicked, evil, bad circumstances. We don’t thank God for those.

But give thanks *in* all circumstances.

And Paul tells us how to do that in Philippians 4:6, 7 where he says,

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

If you like, there is a formula here. He says don’t be anxious about anything. And there are things that humanly do make us anxious. That is part of life’s experience.

We go to the doctor and we get a diagnosis and we come home full of anxiety. I have been there. I have had a doctor tell me that my heart is in such a poor condition that I have a five year life expectancy unless we do something.

You think that doesn’t create anxiety? Of course it does. Anxiety is part of life.

You have got kids, some of you, and they are kicking over the traces, not living the way that you long that they should live. And do you go to bed at night and not care about that? No, there is anxiety that fills your heart.

You go to work one day and you are told your services are no longer needed. Do you simply shrug your shoulders? No, there is anxiety.

Anxiety is part of life. Anxiety was in that story of the feeding of the 5000. Philip, anxious about the amount of money, Andrew anxious about the amount of food – we don’t have enough.

But then Paul goes on to say this in this verse in Philippians 4:6: Don't be anxious, but,

“In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

Now he says the things that would make you anxious, here's what to do with them: by prayer, petition with thanksgiving, give them to God, present them to God.

Now that is a lot more than just pray about them.

Many of us pray about things but don't actually give them to God. We are as anxious after we have prayed about it as we were before which means that we have not given them to God. We have kept the burden on ourselves.

And we can spend time talking to God about our problems without ever giving them to Him.

How do you know when you have actually given your situation to God? When in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving we present it to God.

But thanksgiving means we say, “Father, this is my need. This is the problem. This is the situation. This is the difficulty. This is the hurdle. And I give it to You and I thank You that You are sufficient for this.”

Yesterday I talked to somebody here about something that needed some attention and we just discussed it for a couple minutes and then his response was, “Consider it taken care of; consider it done.”

And I said thank you.

What was my follow up to that? Did I go and pester him again ten minutes later or an hour later – “did you do it, did you do it, did you do it?”

No, “I told you; consider it done. It is taken care of.”

And he said, Thank you, so forget it; it's not your responsibility anymore.

There are bad things that come into our lives, of course, painful things.

There was a craze some time ago to thank God for everything, including the bad things. The craze didn't last long because these crazes don't last long – they just come and they blow away again because they don't work and they are not realistic.

It is thanking God in the situation. Thanking Him for what? “Thank You for Your presence. Thank You for the security of Your presence. Thank You that You have a mind and a will about this. Thank You that You have a purpose in this situation and I trust You and I say thank You.”

Our daughter Laura – some of you met her earlier this week as she and her husband are spending a few months in Bethlehem. And when Laura was much, much younger, about 4 or 5, she was asleep in her bed one night. And I was in the lounge of our home, Hilary was there, the other children were in bed – we have three. And suddenly from Laura’s bedroom I heard a scream. It wasn’t a cry; it was a scream.

I got up and I ran to her room. I opened the door. I switched on the light. Laura was half-sitting up in bed. I went over and I sat down next to her and I put my arm around her and I said, “Laura, what is the matter?”

And she said, “There is somebody in the closet.”

I said, “No, Laura, you have had a nasty dream.”

“No, no, no, there is somebody in the closet.”

“Laura, Laura, calm down. There is nobody in the closet.”

“There is! There’s somebody in the closet!”

“Laura, you have had a nasty dream.” And I held her in my arm and she quietly quietened down. And as I held her in the quietness, I suddenly heard a noise in the closet. I looked at Laura – her eyes were the size of saucers.

I said, “Laura, you stay there.” So she stayed there and I got up. I went to the two doors of the closet, put a hand on each handle, looked back at Laura. She was looking up, eyes wide open. I pull open the doors and there was the cat locked in the closet.

So I took the cat and I sort of put her head through the window, went and sat down with Laura and I said, “Laura, that was a nasty fright, wasn’t it? Naughty cat! Who put the cat in the closet? Now you settle down and go back to sleep.”

She said, “But I’m scared.”

I said, “Yes, I know, you had a fright. But it was only the cat, and the cat is gone. You saw it go. It should be landing shortly. Now you snuggle down and go back to sleep.”

And she said, “Will you stay with me?”

And I understood exactly what she needed. She had been fearful. “Will you stay with me?”

I said, “Why?”

She said, “If you stay I won’t be afraid anymore.”

And so I sat on the seat in her bedroom, tucked her in; she was asleep very quickly.

What she was saying was this: there is something that is bigger than me that frightens me, that scares me. You can rationalize it and tell me it's the cat and not a person, but my heart is still fearful. But if you are here I will be okay."

And when Paul says, "Present this to God with thanksgiving" he is not saying your problems will all disappear.

Yes we talk about the time Jesus calmed the storm – we are going to talk tomorrow about a time when He didn't calm the storm – there is not a standard way in which He works. But we thank Him that in the situation for His presence that He is bigger than us, bigger than our problem, bigger than our need.

It doesn't mean when we give thanks our problems evaporate. I'll finish with this. One of the most remarkable times that Jesus gave thanks was in the Upper Room with His disciples the night before His crucifixion.

At the end of the meal He took the bread and He broke it and said, "This is my body, broken for you," and He gave thanks.

He took a cup. "This is my blood which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." And He gave thanks. "My broken body, Father, thank You. My shed blood, Father, thank You."

Does that mean everything was then okay? Does that mean He was then waltzing and whistling down the road? No, because in that same chapter when we are told that in Matthew 26, He went down to the Garden of Gethsemane where we visited a few days ago.

And going alone under one of those trees that were there in those days, He said,

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death."

"Yes, I have said thank you; I trust My Father, but My soul is overwhelmed to the point of death."

"And going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.'"

"Father, if there is any other way that men and women and boys and girls can be reconciled to a Holy God, please let that be the way.

"Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

"Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping."

"He went away a second time and prayed, 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.'"

When He had broken the bread and poured out the wine and gave thanks for both – “My body, My blood; thank You Father” – He didn’t then waltz His way up to Calvary.

No, He went through this agony of soul, this sorrow, this crying out to His Father, “If it is possible let this cup be taken from Me.”

And then when He hung on the cross, as you know, one of the things He cried out was, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

But at the end He could say, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

Of course the Lord Jesus Christ knew His destiny was to be the cross. But as He approached the cross, His disposition towards His Father was, “Father, thank You, thank You, thank You. It doesn’t mean anything goes away, but it means I can trust You. And at the end of it all, in My last breath, into Your hands I commit My spirit. That is the only place I am safe.”

And that principle works out in your life and mine as well, where with thanksgiving we bring all our needs and situations and we say, “Father, this is the battle I am raging in. It is raging around me. This is the trouble I am dealing with. These are the problems, these are the obstacles; this is my failure, this is my sin and I don’t know what to do, but thank You that You are present in this. You are not on the side mocking me; You are present. Thank You.”

“I may not have enough money – 200 denarii; I may not have enough food – five loaves and two fishes; everything may look impossible but thank You, thank You, thank You I can trust You.”

The language of faith is not please; the language of faith is thank you.

You know Jesus never said please to His Father, but many times He said thank you.

Paul never said please to God, but many times he spoke about giving thanks to God.

In the Psalms where you have the heart cry of David who wrote half the Psalms, and the other people who wrote the other half; they never once in all those psalms say to God, “Please” and then ask Him something. They say right through the Psalms, “Give thanks to the Lord.”

What are they saying?

They are saying in the situations that you might want to plead and beg for God to do something, you simply say, “Thank You, thank You; You are sufficient for me.”

This is the sign that this story was designed to point, this miracle was designed to point to. The sign was not the feeding of the 5000; that was the miracle but that is not the end. It’s not just now a story for Sunday school classes or someone to put in picture books. This is now a sign; where is it pointing?

That in whatever situation you face, no matter how big, no matter how desperate, no matter how difficult, you say, "Father, Thank You that You are sufficient in this, You are enough in this. Thank You."

And if it so happens that you see it resolved, there's that case resolved, praise God for that. If it so happens that you have to go through the agony of Gethsemane, you go through the agony of the cross; you don't go through anything that resolves and makes it all nice, then thank God for that. He is doing something and working something out.

So that's the sign. Give thanks. And if we don't live with that disposition of saying thank you, thank you, we will be like Philip who was like the atheist; we have no resources of the real issues of life; we just take all the burdens on ourselves and become bowed down them instead of saying, "Thank You I can trust You."

I don't know where you are this morning. There are those of you listening to my voice in many different places this morning. I don't know where you are spiritually. I don't know what your relationship with God is at this moment. But the sign that you need to follow is the sign of bringing everything in your life, instead of anxiety, present it to God with thanksgiving, saying thank You. This is the clutch that will get the engine driving the wheels down the road.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You this morning that Your Word is not just a book of history tales and we extract one here, one there because they are enjoyable to us and because we look back and say, "Wasn't that wonderful for them." But these are messages for us today to receive, to enjoy, to live in, that our lives are not just believing in a God who is remote and detached in somewhere, but the God who lives in our hearts, that Christ Himself is the focus of our dependence and our gratitude.

And I pray Lord Jesus that You will make this increasingly real in all of our lives and experience. I ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.