

Peter Robinson - John 6

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 July 2014

Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] chapter 6. If you've got one of the church Bibles, that's page 1069. Page 1069, John chapter 6. We're going to begin reading at verse 1 and read through to verse 15. In the Gospel of John, there are seven signs, seven miracles that Jesus performs to prove, to show, to display the reality of who he is, the Son of God, come into this world, but also to teach us aspects not only of his character and nature, but also of how he deals with us in salvation and the blessings of salvation as well. And so we're going to look at one of the probably most famous of Jesus' miracles, which is the feeding of the 5,000.

As it's related here in John, it's in all the other Gospels as well, but it's John's that we're going to pick up on and think about, especially this morning. So let's read God's Word, and it's from John 6, verse 1.

Sometime after this, Jesus crossed the far shore of the Sea of Galilee, that is the Sea of Tiberias. 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 sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover feast was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards 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.

He is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many? Jesus said, Make 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.

[2 : 34] After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world. Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. Well, let's read just a few moments ago those first fifteen verses.

When I was preparing this sermon, I came across this realistic job advertisement for a mother. This is how it goes. Long-term team players needed for challenging permanent work in an often chaotic environment. Candidates must possess excellent communication and organizational skills, be willing to work variable hours, which will include evenings and weekends and frequent 24-hour shifts on call.

Responsibilities to last the rest of your life, must be willing to bite your tongue repeatedly, also must possess the physical stamina of a pack mule, yet be able to go from zero to 60 miles an hour in three seconds, in case those screams in the back garden are not someone just crying wolf. Must have the ability to plan and organize social gatherings for clients of all ages and mental outlooks. Must be willing to be indispensable one minute and an embarrassment the next. Must handle assembly and product safety test a thousand cheap plastic toys and battery-operated devices. Must always hope for the best but be prepared for the worst.

[4 : 16] Possibility for promotion is none. Your job is to remain in the same position for years without complaining, yet constantly retraining and updating your skills so that those in your care can ultimately do better than you did.

Experience not required, but on-the-job training offered on a continually exhausting basis. Wages, actually you pay them, offering frequent raises and bonuses.

Increased payments are due when they turn 18 because of the assumption that university will help them become financially independent. When you die, you give them whatever you've got left. The honest thing about this reverse salary scheme is you actually enjoy it and wish you could only give them more.

Sounds pretty tough, doesn't it? Those of you who are mums know that it's only too true. But it don't have to be a mum, of course, to recognize that life is one of constant challenge of attempting to come up to the expectations of others.

From the moment that we're born, we are subject to the expectations of those around us. We're expected to have our father's eyes and our grandmother's nose. We're expected to walk by the time we are 12 months old, to talk by the time we're 24 months old, and by the time we're 36 months old, we're expected to feed ourselves and be fully potty-drained.

[5 : 38] As soon as we attend school, we should almost immediately be able to read and to solve basic math problems. And so our life is set on this course, isn't it?

We are loaded down with expectations. Once we achieve those expectations, then new and higher goals are instantly placed upon us. Like a high jumper, we're always having the bar just raised beyond our reach.

Now that practice of setting expectations upon ourselves or others upon us can be, of course, very damaging. I know somebody whose mother put him under immense pressure to pass his 11 plus so that he could get into grammar school.

When he failed to do so, she sulked and didn't speak to him for weeks. This had the effect of hardening him towards her, and from then on, their relationship was irreparably damaged.

Sadly, he in turn then looked to his own son to get into grammar school and placed great expectation upon him to succeed where he had failed. I was the son of the man whose mother sulked at him.

[6 : 46] If we are raised on unrealistic expectations, we will carry them into our marriages, we'll carry them into our workplaces, we'll carry them into our churches as well. And, of course, the hardest expectations of all are those we have upon ourselves, not just the ones that people set for us.

We never seem to measure up to the people we think we should be. We're constantly a disappointment to ourselves. And we long, many of us, that we were just somebody else.

Now, why have I introduced this event in the life of the Lord Jesus in this way, this event in John 6 where Jesus feeds the 5,000?

Well, you see, because our view of life, if it's one of expectation and failure, will affect our view of God and our relationship with him as well. Many people view God in this way as one who sets unrealistic expectations for us.

A God who puts before us a bar we can never jump, and then who tells us how bad we are when we fail. In one sense, Jesus' words to Philip seem to be exactly a case in point.

[7 : 56] Here are 5,000 plus people, and who does Jesus turn to? He turns to Philip and he says, where are we going to find food to feed him? He lays before Philip this great expectation.

In fact, in Luke's account of the same event, it's Jesus turns as well and says to the rest of the disciples, you give them something to eat. It isn't because John and Luke are recording different events.

They are witnesses of the same thing, but of course picking up different viewpoints. So Philip, of course, felt it very personally. But you give them something to eat. Here's all these people, these thousands and thousands of people.

You give them something to eat. And it's not surprising that poor old Philip reacts in the way that he does. How on earth can Jesus expect so much of these disciples?

Why is he burdening them with something which is so unrealistic? Feed 5,000 plus people with nothing. But that's typical of the Bible, isn't it? The Ten Commandments, when you think about them, how are we supposed to live up to them?

[9 : 01] Especially when, of course, we realize that Jesus tells us that these commandments are not just about the things we do, but about the attitude of our hearts as well. He says in Matthew 5, you've heard it said, do not murder.

And anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. I tell you, anyone who's angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. How on earth can we do that? And then he speaks about another commandment. You've heard it said, do not commit adultery.

I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart with her. Well, how on earth can God expect us to keep those commandments in that way? And those Beatitudes of Jesus, which are so lovely, but they're crippling, aren't they? The meek, the humble, the pure. Does he really expect anybody to be like that?

We've not even begun to mention the rest of the New Testament. And the instructions that we have in the letters of Paul and Peter and James and Jude and others. To love.

[10:05] To forgive. To endure suffering. To pray. To serve. And on and on. These demands upon us as Christians. They lay us down.

Why on earth does God give us these things? How can we ever hope to meet these expectations of God? It's not surprising, is it, that like Philip here, there's a sense of disbelief.

Where on earth, in one sense he's saying, where on earth are we going to get enough money to buy these things? He says eight months wages. Thousands and thousands of pounds would not buy just a bite for each person to eat.

Some of us perhaps have come to think, if that's what God expects of me, I might as well give up trying.

If that's what God expects of us, to do these impossible things, to live this impossible life, to measure up to his impossible commandments, I might as well just stop trying. I might as well resign myself to living below expectation.

[11:11] Just resign myself to accept that I just can't do these things and my life will never be what it should be. I think many people who are not Christians see the Christian message in that way.

They see God as being someone who they have to live up to. Perhaps many people will say, well, I'm good enough. I'll go to church. And as Christians, I think there's many of us who live substandard Christian lives because we think the same.

We think that God expects of us too much and we just can't do it and therefore we just say, well, I'm just going to accept that this is how it is. And I'm just going to be a failure. I'm not going to be what I'd love to be.

Now, should we think that way? Is that right? Is that appropriate? It's definitely not appropriate. It's definitely not right. It's definitely not the way that we should view God and his word and it's definitely not how we should view the Christian life.

You see, in this wonderful example of Christ's glory being displayed in the feeding of the 5,000, not only do we see him as the one who provides and meets the physical needs, but we learn something especially about how God expects us to meet his expectations.

[12:27] We learn about Christ's expectations of us. We learn about Christ's dealings with us as Christians and we learn something which I believe, dear friends, we need to and must grasp and understand, either that we might come to faith in Christ or that we might live the Christian life.

And the first thing that we need to recognize here is this. Christ expects that we cannot do what he asks. Christ expects that we cannot do what he asks of us.

Jesus, not for a moment, thought that his disciples could feed these people. He didn't think for a moment that they were going to be able to provide the food for them. Look at what we're told there in verse 6.

He asked this only to test them. It wasn't to crush them. It wasn't to weigh them down and overburden them. What he wanted them to do was to respond in the right way to his request. He wanted them to respond by looking to him. He wanted them to respond by saying, that's impossible, but you can do it, Lord. He wanted them to have faith. It's one of the challenges that we see all the way through the lives of the disciples in their relationship with Jesus.

[13:32] Again and again, he puts them in very tricky situations. The sea, when it was stormy, and they thought they were going to sink. What is he doing? He's always saying to them, trust me.

Put your faith in me. When they're afraid, he rebukes them. Don't you have any faith? And so in this same situation too. And so it is with all of God's commandments.

Those ten commandments, which are really the summary of the law. And Jesus summarizes them even further in the Gospels with the two great commandments. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength.

And love your neighbor and yourself. Those commandments are really just to test us. God doesn't think for a moment that we can fulfill his law.

God doesn't think for a moment that we can fulfill his law. When he gave those commandments to the people of Israel in the Old Testament, he knew full well that they couldn't keep them. He knows only too well that it's as much possible as us to keep God's law as it is possible for the cow to jump over the moon.

[14 : 34] It's impossible. But then why does God give the law? Why has God given these commandments? Why has God given these expectations of us? Why does he set down these unattainable standards in one sense if he knows that we cannot keep them?

And the reason we can't keep them, of course, is because of sin. That's the problem. The problem is not with God's law. God's law is good and perfect and right because he is. The problem is our hearts and our lives. Sometimes we are sinful and therefore we are weak and we are corrupt and we are incapable of doing those things.

We are disabled in that way because of sin, spiritually speaking. So why has God given us the law? Ultimately and primarily, though the law has wonderful uses as well and is good, God has given us the law that he might bring us to that place of seeing our need of Christ, seeing our need of him.

Here's Paul as he writes to the Galatians. He says, what then was the purpose of the law? And he talks about it coming because of sin, but he ultimately says this. So the law was put in charge of us to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified, made right with God by faith.

That's why the law is there. It shows us that we are sinners. It shows us that we cannot do these things by ourselves. It shows us that we need a savior. It shows us that we are weak.

[15 : 51] It shows us as well that there is a God who is able to do much more than we ask or think. See, Jesus knew exactly what he would do, didn't he, when he asked the disciples there.

He asked this of them, verse 6, only to test them, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. He knew he was going to miraculously provide for the crowd. He knew that he was going to give all these people more than enough to eat.

And there was 12 baskets left over. Here's a God who is more than able to meet your needs than mine. A God who is abundant. Who is lavish in his grace and goodness.

And so it is with God. He knew that when he gave those commandments and gave the law, as we have it in the Old Testament, and he gave the commandments, he knew that he would send his son into the world to fulfill those commandments for us.

To fulfill the law on our behalf. To do for us what we could not do for ourselves. In that perfect human life that Jesus lived, and particularly in his death upon the cross as our substitute, Jesus kept God's law on our behalf and fulfilled it for us.

[17 : 02] Again, Paul writing to the Christians in Galatia, says to them, When the time had fully come, in other words, God's perfect timing, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

That's why God gave the law. Because he knew his son was coming to rescue and to save us. To bring us into a place of forgiveness. You see, when we sin, what are we doing?

Ultimately, we are falling below God's expectation. In Romans 3.23, all have sinned and fallen short. God is holy and perfect. It's right that he should require of us that which is holy and perfect too, if we are to be in relationship with him.

But we all fall short. We all sin. We all break his commandments. We all get it wrong. Not one of us is good. But Christ came to do what we could not do for ourselves.

He came so that those who put their faith in him and trust in him are made right with God, are brought up to God's standard, are made acceptable, because Christ does it on our behalf.

[18 : 17] He pays it into our account. He clears the debt of our sin by his death upon the cross, and his perfect life is transferred into our lives so that we are accepted by God and perfect in his sight.

Romans 3.23, Paul is writing to the Christians there and explains this to them in this way. This righteousness from God.

In other words, this perfect righteousness, this 100% fulfillment of God's law.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There's no difference. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption.

That's the price Jesus paid that came by Jesus Christ. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. You see, it's all been done for us.

[19 : 22] God doesn't expect us to keep his commandments because Christ did it all for us. And that's not just true of our salvation. That's not true of our coming into a relationship with God. It's true of the Christian life from then on.

It's not as if God says, right, up till this point, you can't do anything for yourself. As soon as you become a Christian, it's all up to you. You've got to get on with it by yourself. No. Here's the second point.

Not only that Christ expects that we cannot do what he requires of us, but secondly, Christ expects that we should receive from him everything we need to do all he asks of us.

Everything we need. On that day when those 5,000 were fed, it wasn't Jesus who took the bread around and gave it to them. When he said to them, you give them something to eat, that's exactly what happened.

The disciples gave the bread and shared the bread and shared the fish. They fulfilled what Jesus required of them. But it was him who gave them the bread in the first place. And even those two little loaves and five fish didn't come from the disciples.

[20 : 25] It came from a little lad. Christian life is only lived out, dear friends, by the power, by the enabling of Christ working in us and through us.

Christian life is never about you or I struggling, doing it in our own strength or power. Peter, as he writes to the Christians who were going through hard times, reminds them of this.

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

His divine power. That's why being a Christian is not simply about following guidelines or rules or going to church or doing certain things or fulfilling certain rituals like baptism and so on.

Being a Christian is someone who has been empowered by God. Somebody who has known the very power of God coming into their soul who is born again of the spirit of God.

[21 : 29] A transformation has taken place. A change has taken place. So they no longer struggle and strive and think they can please God by the things they do. They know that it's only God at work in them. Something has happened.

A switch has been turned. A change has been turned.

Pride. That's why many people won't put their faith in Jesus Christ as their saviour. Pride. Pride that says I'm a good enough person as I am. Pride that says I'm good enough for God.

I know I haven't done everything right. I know I make mistakes. But really I'm not such a bad person. God will accept me and receive me for who I am. And I give a bit to charity and I sort of go to church at Christmas or for weddings and so on.

There's pride as well in us, dear friends, as Christians. Pride that says I've got to do it myself. I should be better than I am. I should do this and I should do that.

[22 : 51] And yes, we can have others lay expectations upon us. But ultimately the expectations are of ourselves. But Jesus says you can't do anything. You can't pray and you can't read your Bible and you can't serve me and you can't do evangelism and you can't worship me.

And you can't live the Christian life and you can't be that witness for me. Accept that I am working in you. And once we accept that, it's a setting free.

It's a liberating. It's a glorious thing. And the reason often, dear friends, why we don't even bother trying to pray or serve or evangelizing or whatever it is, is because we think it is up to us.

We think it is in our strength. We read the New Testament and we read about men and women of God and we think, it's up to me. I should be like this. And if we could get rid of that misconception that it was in our strength, then we would be free to do great things for God.

Great things in his service, for his glory, for the blessing of others. So what do we do? What should we do? How should we approach God's word?

[24 : 00] How should we approach the expectations of the Bible? How should we approach the areas of morality, of witness, of service, of worship?

Well, first of all, we have to acknowledge and accept that we cannot do it in our own strength. We have to take Jesus' words. Apart from me, you can do nothing. We have to take them as true. We have to say, in one sense, to ourselves, no, I can't do it.

I can't do it. It's not about beating ourselves up and saying, I'm an awful, terrible, hideous person and squashing ourselves under a great pile of our sin and saying, what an awful.

It's just acknowledging a reality and a fact. I can't do it, Lord. I can't. And that's freedom. Without me, you can't do it.

But, dear friends, it means in the same hand and in the same way believing and trusting that with Christ, it is not just possible for you to live this Christian life or to be this sort of person, but it's actually achievable.

[25 : 02] You can and I can live for Christ, a life which honors and glorifies him and follows his word and keeps his commandments. We can do it by trusting and looking to him for the strength we need.

Here's Paul. Paul the Apostle, Philippians 4.13. What does he say? He says, I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Paul doesn't say, I can do all things because I'm a great apostle and I'm the greatest Christian ever lived.

No, elsewhere he says, I'm the chief of sinners. But here he says, I can do all things through him who gives me strength. And he did great things, didn't he, Paul? Not because he was greater than you and I.

Even this week, in the Bible study, we looked at the life of Elijah. James tells us Elijah was a man just like us. Hold on, this is Elijah on Mount Carmel, calls down fire from heaven upon these sacrifices.

This is Elijah who can run faster than a chariot. How could he do those things? Because Elijah was such a great man. No, he wasn't. Next week, he's a man who's hiding under a tree and he wants to die because he's so scared of Jezebel.

[26 : 04] Now, I can do all things through him who gives me strength. With prayer, dear friends. Therefore, go up and do what God has called you to do.

See who you are. See who Christ is. And then get on with it. But get on with it in prayer. Get on with it looking and asking him for help. Lord, I can't pray. Help me to pray.

Lord, I can't witness for you in this situation. Help me to witness for you. Lord, I can't read my Bible and understand it. Help me. Isn't that one of the problems? And I say this to myself. We pick up the Bible and we begin to read it.

We don't even pray about asking the Lord to help us to read it. I confess that that's me. Let's draw upon the grace that he gives us.

Here's Paul, again, writing to the Christians, encouraging them. This is what he says to them. He says, Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

[27 : 03] Now, if it was to stop there, that would be hard, wouldn't it? If it was to stop there, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, we'd say, well, how do we work it out? It's up to us. No. Listen to what he says.

Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good pleasure. That's how we work it out. That's how we live the Christian life, by dependence and reliance upon Christ.

God is at work in you. If you're a Christian, again, you're not doing it just some religious outworking of your life. You're doing it because the Spirit of God lives in you and there's power and energy and life flowing in you.

The life of God who created the heavens and the earth is in you and me. Hallelujah! Sorry. I don't do that very often. In fact, I think that's probably the first time I've done it.

I won't do it again. Prayer. Get up and do it. And give him the glory. This is the thing. Give him the praise for the honor. When you look back and see what God, and you say, well, it's just a tiny little thing that God has helped me to do this week.

[28 : 09] It seems so insignificant. But if he's allowed you and helped you to do that, then give him the praise and the glory. Again, it's our pride, isn't it? Something happens. Something goes well. Oh, what a good guy I am.

What a great Christian I am. No, you're not. No, I'm not. It's him. 1 Corinthians 1 and verse 31. That all the glory may belong to God.

Therefore, as it is written, let him who boasts boast in the Lord. Our boast is in the Lord. Not in what we've done ourselves. And then finally, dear friends, let's look expectantly.

Again, because we've been disappointed in ourselves, and because we feel we've been a disappointment to others, instead of the bar being there, the bar's down there. And we've just lost expectancy.

And this is true of us as Christians, I think, in the United Kingdom. We've lost the expectancy that God will save sinners. We've lost the expectancy that God will build his church. We've lost the expectancy that God will send revival.

[29 : 05] We've lost the expectancy that the church will be a glory and an honor to Christ until the day he comes again. We've lost it. We've allowed ourselves to be pushed and down and discouraged in such a way that we've lost sight of who he is.

We had a lovely brother in our previous church. He's now with the Lord. His name was Roland Fidge. Whenever he used to see us, he'd say, keep looking up. Keep looking up. He didn't mean just keep looking up, being optimistic.

He meant keep looking up. Look to Jesus, the right hand of the Father, the one who has conquered, the one who's coming again, the one who provides and meets all our needs. Look forward, dear friends, with expectancy.

Look forward for God to raise the bar a little higher. And when he raises the bar a little higher, don't be afraid. But see it as another opportunity to prove his faithfulness to you because that's what God is doing.

Whenever he's setting us challenges or trials, he's wanting to prove to us just how faithful he is, just how faithful he can be. The Ten Commandments, Jesus' Beatitudes, the New Testament instructions, all these have been given to us not to crush us into self-despair and not to cause us to settle for zero expectation way of living, but to test us.

[30 : 24] To test us. How will we respond? How will we react? With acknowledgement of humility. With faith in Jesus, who met the needs of 5,000 so he can meet our needs too.

With prayer and with action. Or will we turn away in defeat? I like the words of William Carey. I think it was him, but maybe another missionary and somebody will correct me afterwards.

Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God. Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God. Let's just take a moment, quietly in our own hearts, to respond to God's word in prayer before we sing our final hymn.

I'll raise your sous-reza■ily. Be well. If it feels great, give it a moment, I'll raise your intention of being, you wanna hear that, your soulmate in prayer. And we'll need the first time. add soulmate in prayer.ends inside online.

And then connect at least after we put your soulmate down, we hit the door, let's think we down inside the wall, flow router that comes in there. In this era, better than when we did it right now, we'd say, it's in the Gerda.

[31 : 27] go with their hair. So, as you can ask me, for one minute. We'll have perfect timing, correct me, with my husband back and yes, correct me Philip.