

One of the many, many blessings we have as Christians that those who follow false religions lack is confidence in our Lord's providence, His love and care for us.

Someone sacrificing to Zeus could never be sure that his sacrifice was enough. A Muslim praying to Allah can never be completely sure of having Allah's favor, because Islam is about obedience, and no one obeys perfectly. A white, heterosexual male, or any member of a so-called "favored class," trying to appease the powers of wokism can never know if he's grovelled and apologized enough, because wokism has no room for forgiveness and true reconciliation.

But as Christians, we can know for certain that our God loves us and will take care of us, even though we fall short of His glory. Our Gospel lesson today shows us that our Lord has compassion on us and will provide for us.

That our Lord will provide for His people is a basic truth of the Christian faith. Why then do we need to be reminded of it? Why do the Psalms tell us "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits"? Well, we need to be reminded of it because our sin leads us to doubt it.

That, I think, is what we hear in the question from the disciples. Looking at the huge crowd gathered, they ask, "How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?" Who could possibly take care of these people?

Now, if we go back just two chapters in Mark's Gospel, we see that Jesus has already done such a thing at the Feeding of the Five Thousand. And this time, there's a thousand less people, so this should be a piece of cake!

And what's more, satisfying thousands of people with bread in the wilderness is nothing new to God. Growing up, the disciples would have heard how God fed the thousands and thousands of Israelites with bread – manna – in the wilderness, satisfying their hunger for forty years. But despite all this, still the disciples ask, "How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?"

I think there are two reasons we could give for the disciples asking this question, and these happen to be two reasons that we doubt God's providence as well. The first is that the disciples simply forget. Now, maybe this seems crazy at first. How could they forget such a great miracle, one they actively participated in by handing out the bread and fish to the five thousand?

This, though, could certainly be the case because of their sinful flesh. Not only does sin cause our mind, like our body, to suffer breakdown as we age, but it also causes us to forget things or develop tunnel vision in the face of a big problem or stressful situation. Something big happens, and suddenly that's the only thing we can think about. Faced with thousands of people who urgently need food, the disciples might have nearly panicked, the worry overwhelming their minds.

One other thing must be said about such forgetfulness. God's Word tells us that our flesh isn't neutral; it's corrupted by sin and therefore opposed to God. As such, what sort of things would be forgotten in times of trouble? God's promises and previous instances of care for us! Our memories

don't necessarily blank out at random. No, the sinful part of us tries to keep us from recalling God's goodness and love, so that we're led into doubt and despair.

Again, this isn't unique to only the disciples. We see it happen in God's people throughout the Bible. And, we see it in our own lives.

Take a moment and reflect honestly. When concerns arise, when problems come up, especially serious ones, what is your first response, your gut reflex? Do you immediately remain calm and assured, perfectly trusting in Jesus? Or do you immediately start wondering how you'll get through this, or how terrible this is going to be, or why does this have to happen to you?

I know which way my thoughts often go, and shamefully it's often my sinful flesh getting the first word in, a word of doubt, blocking out the countless times that the Lord has been good and gracious. That sinful flesh – yours, mine, the disciples' – it constantly strives to have us forget God's goodness toward us, so that we might be filled with fear and doubt.

Our sinful nature leads us in another direction as well, another path away from the Lord. This is the path of dismissiveness. The disciples ask how anyone can satisfy such a crowd. Now, maybe they have remembered the previous miracle, or the manna in the Old Testament.

But then, perhaps, their flesh, aided by the whispers of the father of lies, says, "But this time it's different." The previous instances of God's care are dismissed with the words, "But this time it's different."

Yes, Jesus has miraculously fed thousands before, but now they're in Gentile country. Can Jesus still do the miracle there? Or last time they were in a place with lots of green grass, but now they're in the wilderness. Or maybe this time it's going to go poorly because the multitude has been there for days, and what if they can't get food to them in time and they start fainting, or maybe they'll get so desperate that they'll start rioting the moment word of food gets around. This time it's different!

In our ears, those probably all sound foolish, as do the other times God's people doubt Him in the Scriptures. But what about all the times we doubt and worry when confronted by problems? How many times have we thought "But this time it's different!"?

We worry about our jobs and what will happen if we lose them, knowing that God gave us our job, and all the jobs and positions we've ever had, but this time it's different. Or we worry about our government and elections and corruption and violence. We know that God has sustained His people through countless other corrupt governments and power-hungry individuals and episodes of violence, but this time it's different. Or a new disease starts to spread, and even though God has preserved His people through countless outbreaks, plagues, and pandemics, we're now in "unprecedented times," because this time, it's different.

Our flesh wants to justify our doubts, so that even when we read about God's preservation of His people throughout the pages of the Bible, those were Bible times, not modern times, and these times are different. Ironically, in those pages, the Lord tells us that "there is nothing new under the sun."

Like the disciples, we often doubt the Lord and His provision, letting our sinful flesh govern us. Yet our Lord has mercy on us, as He had on His disciples. In love, He counters our doubts and works in us so that we believe that, because of His compassion, He will never fail to provide.

The chief way in which He does this is by His Spirit, working in us through His Word. In that Word, our God reminds us that He knows our troubles. He shows us His love for us. And He displays His power used to rescue His people, that no matter how different we might think a problem is, it is still under His power and authority.

So again, our sinful nature would have us forget the love and goodness of God. Yet as our Gospel shows, He never forgets our needs.

Note that here, Jesus calls the disciples to Him, not asking them how things are going, but telling them the situation. He says, “They have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar.”

Nothing had escaped His notice – not how long it had been, not their lack of food, not the severity of their hunger, and especially not the fact that there was no earthly way that they could be cared for. Jesus knew their troubles perfectly.

He likewise knows your troubles perfectly. He knows how long you’ve endured them, how severe they truly are, the exact way in which you are troubled by them. And especially, He knows exactly when to take them away from you and how.

Perhaps He knows that working through an earthly way is best. Perhaps He knows that working in ways that can’t be explained, even miraculously, is best. Either way, the Lord Jesus never forgets the people whom He has created, nor is He ever at a loss for what to do. He knows, perfectly.

In addition to knowing, the Gospel account also shows us what guides our Lord as He uses His perfect knowledge, namely, His love. When Jesus sees the crowd and their condition, what is His response? Does He get mad at them for being under-prepared? Does He figure that, if they need food, they should go get some – not His problem? Does He get irritated, having more important things to do than be a divine buffet provider?

No! Jesus has compassion on the multitude. His heart goes out to them, desiring that they not suffer in this way. He has endured extreme hunger, fasting forty days in the wilderness, and He doesn’t want them to needlessly experience such suffering. He knows that letting them wait until the third day is best, and He desires to deliver them from their great need.

Compassion is what guides our Lord’s actions toward us as well. He loves all those whom He has created, and desires the best for each and every person. Like He knew that it was best to not feed the crowd until the third day, He knows that sometimes it’s best for us to remain in our troubles for a little while. Perhaps He’s calling on us to repent. Perhaps He is exercising our faith in order to strengthen it. Perhaps He’s using our example of enduring suffering in faithful patience as a witness to others. We may not know, but He does.

We do know, however, that He loves us perfectly and has compassion on us. He never desires us to suffer needlessly, as He Himself knows all about suffering, having suffered for us and still suffering with us. When He knows the time is right, His love and compassion will cause Him to deliver us.

When that time comes, nothing will be able to keep Him from that deliverance, no matter how “different” it is this time. It didn’t matter that the crowds were in Gentile lands, not Judea. It didn’t matter that it was the third day instead of the first. It didn’t matter that they were in the wilderness.

Jesus knows they are famished. Jesus loves them and desires to satisfy their hunger. And so, by His almighty power, seven loaves and a few fish become food for thousands. And it’s not just enough food to get them by, either. Everyone is satisfied, eating as much as he desires.

And then, to show the Lord’s overwhelming generosity and power, seven baskets of leftovers are collected. These aren’t small baskets, either. One source I found said that each one of these kind of baskets could hold around fifty loaves of bread. They started with seven loaves. They end with around three hundred fifty loaves’ worth. This is intentional. Jesus didn’t accidentally overshoot. No, He deliberately caused such an abundance to show how abundantly He fulfills His peoples’ needs.

That power is the same power which the Lord uses to provide for us today. It doesn’t matter what our troubles are, what need we find ourselves in, how different or impossible it seems this time.

Our Lord will give us what He knows is best for us, and nothing in the world can stop Him from doing that. Not economic forces, not government policies, not unbelievers, not the devil himself. We may not understand His timing, we may not understand the way in which He is working, we may not understand what is truly best for us. But it isn’t dependent on our understanding. It depends on the Lord’s knowledge, love, and power, all of which are perfect and unlimited.

The cross of Jesus is the perfect example of this. The Lord knew our sinful condition, that we were doomed to death and hell, unable to save ourselves from the just consequences of our sin. Yet the Lord loves us, having created us to be with Him in paradise for eternity, not desiring that any should perish. And so, by His power – power shown in seeming weakness – He conquered death for us by dying in our place and then rising again in glory.

Our Savior would not have done all that for us if He just intended to let us be overcome by the troubles of this world. No, He has died and risen for us, and He will not fail to care for us every moment of our lives.

When the devil would send doubts about God’s goodness your way, drive Him back by the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Be constantly in your Bibles, so that when your sinful flesh would try to forget God’s care for His people, the Holy Spirit might answer with example after example of God’s unending faithfulness.

When Satan would try to feed you the lie that this time it’s different and beyond God’s ability or His love, then let the Lord speak to you in His Word that His arm is never shortened, His power never insufficient, His love causing Him to give up even His own life for you.

As you dwell in the pages of the Bible, God the Holy Spirit will use them to grow your trust, that you have the comfort of knowing that, just as He provided for and protected His people of old, He provides for and protects His people – you – still today.

In the name of Jesus, amen.