

If I asked you how much does God take care of us, what would you say? I mean, yes, we would probably say here on Sunday morning that he takes care of us in everything, in theory, right? He is the one who gives us all that we need. But I'm not talking about what God does in theory or what we think in theory. I'm talking about our day to day lives. How far does the care of God go in the things that we do every single day? We'd probably be willing to say, pretty readily, God takes care of us in spiritual things. God's concerned about our souls, after all, and our salvation, and so he would tell us the things that we need to know and to tell us what it means to live with one another. Okay, God takes care of us in that. And we'd probably even be willing to say that God takes care of us in the things that we can't control. I have a body from the Lord, for example. That's something that he has given to me. Or in those times when I need him, because I'm sick or because I'm struggling, then I pray to him and ask him for help. God helps us in that too. That seems pretty straightforward.

But what about those things, Christians, that we do have control over? What about those things that we do every single day as part of living or as part of our work? I mean, think of it this way. When you go home today to eat lunch, are you going to stop and think about how God has given you that meal? That he in his gracious goodness has provided even this single meal for your benefit and the benefit of your physical body? Or are you more likely to think about how you have bought this, you have prepared this, and frankly, I'm hungry, so that's the reason why I am eating. We forget that it was God who gave it to us in the first place. Or when we go home and we see our house, for example, are we going to think about how that house is standing because of God's mercy to us? That he is the reason why we have a place we can call home, a place where we feel secure, a place where we find comfort from the heat of summer or from the cold of winter? Or are we going to think about how we have repairs to make, about additions we'd like to build, and how we have built this house with our own two hands? Or even, let's say, when you go to work tomorrow morning. Will we stop and think about how God has given us an opportunity to work? How he has given us good health and another day in which we can be a benefit to other people, doing good for the good of society? Or is it just another day, another dollar, another grind that we have to get back to? Because Christians, I think we do very easily think of God helping us when it comes to matters of the spirit and matters of things that we don't have any control over, but unfortunately it's very easy to forget that God is also concerned with the things that we do every single day, that God provides for us even the food which we eat.

What we're talking about today is called God's "providence," that he provides for us the things that we need. And that word providence means just that, that God gives us things. You can see it in the word itself. You spell the word "provide" and you add an NCE, and you have the word "providence." God gives us all that we need both in the spirit and also in the body, because God in his providence takes care of his creation. He cares for us and he wants to take care of us, because he loves us.

I mean, let's look at our Gospel lesson for today. Jesus sees a great crowd before him. We're told that there are at least 4000 people in this crowd. It might've even been more than that, because sometimes it's translated as 4000 men, so it could be 4000 plus a whole bunch of other people like the women and the children. We're not told explicitly, but at least 4000 people. And these people haven't been very smart, have they? They've been following Jesus for many days and now they've run out of food. They don't have enough to eat. And Jesus, he says, has compassion on them. He sees them in their plight. He sees them in their hunger, and he wants to give them the

very thing that they need, the very food that they need to survive. Because Jesus doesn't send them away and say, "Well, they'll just have to figure it out on their own. They can go to some town or village nearby and buy enough to eat." No, that's not what he says. He says, "Where are we going to get enough food for all of these people?" The disciples don't know. They're out in the wilderness, after all. How are they going to find enough food to feed 4000+ people and to give enough for everyone to eat? "How much do you have?" Jesus says. Seven loaves. That's it. Seven ordinary loaves of bread and three fish. And he takes this food and he blesses it, and with those seven loaves and those few fish, that small amount of food in our eyes, he feeds 4000+ people, because God in his compassion provides everything that we need, even the very food that we need to survive.

I think there's a couple of things we can learn from this, Christians. And the first thing is that God does in fact want to take care of us, that he wants to have compassion on us, to give us the things that we need and to help us in our daily lives. Everything that we have--house, home, food, job, everything--comes from his gracious hand. And because he gives us these things, he is also helping us in our souls too. Because when we recognize that all of these things come from his hand, we are built up in faith, so that we can say, "Thank you, Father! Thank you for giving me the food I have today. Thank you for giving me the home in which I live. Thank you for giving me all that I have to survive." Because it's all his gracious will. But when we recognize that, too--that the physical things which God gives us also helps our faith--it will help us in those moments when we don't fully understand. In those moments when God doesn't give us the things which we need. Because sometimes God holds things back in his providence in order to save our souls. Let me explain what I mean using the example of money. If we have money, for example, it's very easy to want more money, isn't it? Because it never seems like it's enough money to cover everything that we want to cover, and so we say, "If I just had a little bit more, that would take care of it." But then you get a little bit more and pretty soon that's not enough either. And you start wanting more and more and more, until you become so wrapped up and involved in getting more that you forget that it came from God in the first place. So God sometimes holds things back, like money, in order to teach us to trust him, to teach us to rely on him, so that we don't get wrapped up in the things of this world, but instead remember the one who gave it to us in the first place. God uses the physical things of this life which he gives to us as a way of teaching us to trust in him.

But the other thing that I think that this teaches us, Christians, is this. That God also is not limited in the things that he can do. God is powerful. God can do all things, and God will take care of his people, even when it seems impossible to do so. I want to use an example today, one that comes from history. In the year 1572 in France, there was a bunch of Protestants who lived there, who were called the Huguenots. Now, the king of France at that time was a Roman Catholic, and he really wanted his nation to all be one religion again, because there was no division of church and state in those days. It was going to be one society, one religion, because that was the ideal and what he wanted to uphold. But unfortunately, this king, instead of trying to convince the Protestants who lived among him, to come back to be one religion again, the king resorted to violence. He was going to force the issue and make everyone either get out or convert, because that was the way that things were going to be. And so in August of 1572, on the 23rd, just before St. Bartholomew's Day, there broke out in France a great persecution, which we

call the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Thousands of Protestants were either driven from their homes or killed during that massacre.

Now, I'm not trying to focus on that whole thing. But there is one story in there in particular that I think illustrates our point. A man by the name of Pierre Du Moulin--he was a pastor, a Protestant minister--was fleeing from the soldiers who were trying to capture him. And as he was trying to find this way and that, trying to find a way to get away so that he could survive, he came across an oven. Now, you have to understand, ovens in those days were not like our ovens. Ovens were much larger. These domed, stone and plaster things, kind of like a pizza oven that you sometimes see in restaurants. Big enough to hide in, for sure, but not for very long. This was the best that he had. And so he crawled in and hoped for the best.

But in that moment, an amazing thing happened. A spider began to weave a web across the opening of that oven. And as the spider finished its work, there was a slight breeze that blew some dust over the front of it too. So that the soldiers who were pursuing Pierre, when they came to that spot--and they did--when they saw that web and they saw the dust that had been blown in, they said, "Well, it's obvious, isn't it? No one's been in here. This web's been here. It's been empty for several days." And so the soldiers left and Pierre escaped with his life. That was not an accident, Christians. God in his providence used a spider to save the life of one who trusted in him. God is not limited in his power.

There was also another minister at that same time by the name of Merlin who hid up in a hayloft for several days trying to escape his pursuers. And he would've died, except God sent a chicken to lay an egg by his head every single day, so that he had something to eat and survive those many days. And we think also in the Old Testament of Elijah who survived by the brook, because ravens brought him bread and meat from God. We think of the widow of Zarephath who had her flour and her oil multiplied beyond belief so that she could pay off her debts and support her son and Elijah. We think also of Elisha who himself multiplied bread in the wilderness to feed the soldiers who were with him. But above all, we think of Jesus in our Gospel lesson for today, who with seven loaves and three fish fed more than 4000 people. Because God is not limited in how he can take care of his people.

And so Christians, today, even though we live in an age of fear, an age where we wonder what the virus is going to bring, an age in which it seems like our economy is on the brink of collapse and our jobs seem uncertain, an age in which violence tears apart this nation, do you think that God cannot help you? If God can support his people in the wilderness with bread and fish multiplying them beyond belief, God can take care of you too. And God is not limited in his power. If he can support his servants with a spider, with a chicken, with ravens, or with bread that multiplies according to his will, he will not forget you. And he will take care of you in the days ahead.

Christians, trust in him. No matter what comes, trust in him. He is the one who can do all things. He is not limited in his power, and he will preserve you, even when it seems like all earthly help has failed. God will take care of you, and God will provide for you no matter what.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.