

Father God, we are so appreciative of the opportunity to be together today as a congregation in Christ. We come to worship You, Lord, to lift our eyes to You, to open our hearts to You, open our minds, and we pray that You would honor us as You lead us in prayer, as You lead us in Your word, as You lead us in song. Every breath that we take worships You and You alone. Father God, we thank You for Your provision which we will be looking at today of all kinds. Your sovereignty over our lives and Your provision for us as Your creation. So Lord Jesus, we pray that You would take Your rightful spot as the pastor, as the teacher of this church. In Jesus' name, Amen. The opening word is the Psalm of Ascent. Do you remember when we looked at the Psalms of Ascent? The Psalms that were traditionally sung as the Jewish people would walk up the hill to Jerusalem as they were celebrating the very facets of, many facets of God's provision for them in their lives. Psalm 126 is very specific about this. When the Lord brought back His exiles to Jerusalem, it was like a dream. We were filled with laughter and we sang for joy and the other nations said, "What amazing things the Lord has done for them." Yes, the Lord has done amazing things for us. What joy! Restore our fortunes, Lord, as streams renew the desert. Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy. They weep as they go to plant their seed, but they sing as they return with the harvest. Amen. Every one of these songs, there is provision. There is provision of God in every one of these songs and the songs are very different and much like the readings from Scripture today, but we're going to pull out the different provisions from each song as well. Provisions! It's the right time of the year to talk about provision. I look out and you see all the fields being harvested. You see some corn still on the stalk, a lot of corn being taken down. You see soybeans still there drying out. Some soy has already been harvested. So it's the right time of the year to talk about provision. We know what provision is and you're going to put it in the context of Scripture and how the Lord provides totally from a few different angles today. Maybe something that you have never thought about. So we went from the Song of Ascent and we're going to go into the Prophet Joel of all places, but you're going to hear the provision of restoration. I've been talking a lot with a lot of people about restoration this week. People who have damaged bodies and damaged spirits. And the Lord is in the business of restoration as we see all the way throughout Scripture. Joel 2 beginning with verse 18. "Then the Lord will pity his people and jealously guard the honor of his land. The Lord will reply, 'Look, I am sending you grain and new wine and olive oil enough to satisfy your means. You will no longer be an object of mockery among the surrounding nations. I will drive away these armies from the north. I will send them into the parched wastelands. Those in front will be driven into the Dead Sea and those at the rear into the Mediterranean. The stench of their rotting bodies will rise over the land. Surely the Lord has done great things. Don't be afraid, O land. Be glad now and rejoice for the Lord has done great things. Don't be afraid, you animals of the field, for the wilderness pastures will soon be green. The trees will again be filled with fruit. Thin trees and grapevines will be loaded down once more. Rejoice, you people of Jerusalem.'" We heard that in the Psalm. "Rejoice in the Lord your God, for the rain he sends demonstrates his faithfulness. Once more the autumn rains will come, as well as the rains of spring. The threshing floors will again be piled high with grain, and the presses will overflow with new wine and olive oil. The Lord says, 'I will give you back what you lost to the swarming locusts, the hopping locusts, the stripping locusts, and the cutting locusts. It was I who sent this great destroying army against you. Once again you will have all the food you want, and you will praise the Lord your God who does these miracles for you. Never again will my people be disgraced. Then you will know that I am among my people Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and there is no other. Never again will my people be disgraced.'" Going into now the Gospel. We went from a Psalm to a prophet, now to the last prophet, Jesus Christ himself. This is going to be a familiar scripture, I hope, for you from Matthew 6, beginning with verse 19. "Don't store up treasures here on earth where moths eat them and rust destroys them and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven where moths and rust cannot destroy and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be." I want to stop there for a second because I want to relate that back to the Psalm that we read and the

rejoicing of the Hebrew people on their way up the hill to Jerusalem. Where their treasure is, that's where your the desires of your heart will also be. The desire to go there at least three times a year during the three big festivals and to make that pilgrimage, if you will, and to be so joyful and so communal that you're singing songs together, you're speaking together, you're speaking the word together and sharing the word with each other, which is the word of the law and the prophets at that time. And so nothing is changing here. Their desire is to be in the presence of God, which at that time dwells within the temple on the mount. Their desire is to dwell with the holy God, Yahweh, as he says, "the only." So when we talk about provision, God has been providing a way to be with Him, to go to Him, to go towards Him, to be near Him from the very beginning of the actual break, if you recall. We were with Him in the Garden and all was well. And then from the moment that the break occurred, He had began to provide different ways to be closer to Him. Just a closer walk with Thee has been the cry, if you will, of humanity since the fall. God has been seeking that. His creation, His very special creation, human beings have been seeking that since then. He goes on to describe human beings, "Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light. But when your eye is unhealthy, your whole body is filled with darkness." And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is. Now let's go back to the Joel scripture. We love to read the part about the restoration of everything that the locusts took away, but did you read the part when God said, "For it is I who brought this destruction upon you." When we talk about the provision of the Lord, many people want to reach in and dig in and lean into this, what I guess is the prosperity, gospel, if you will. The Lord provides the storehouses of heaven, the restoration from what the world takes. The world didn't take it, God did. Now I'm not going to make a particular theological point on that, other than the fact that God is sovereign overall. Does God cause everything, all that different stuff? We can talk about that until we're blue in the face, but Joel specifically states in order to complete His purposes, according to His will, He first created the darkness and the scarcity. Now He will demonstrate His power for the completion of His purposes by restoring and providing all that they will need moving forward. That's a very thought-provoking passage of scripture, and we see it in other places of scripture. As a matter of fact, it's not uncommon for the Christian to say, "The good Lord taketh, the good Lord giveth, and the good Lord taketh away." We've been saying that probably since we were aware of our own Christianity, and we see that throughout from Joel and from Job in all different manner, but it is to, I want to be very clear on this, it is to complete God's purpose that He will do that. If His plan for you, or your group, or your people, or your family, or whatever the case may be, according to His will, is to expand your knowledge of Him, to expand your love of Him, to impress upon you His sovereignty, He will first make you recognize how poor in spirit you actually are. Remember the Beatitudes, the very first one. Blessed are those who know that they are in desperate need of a Savior. There's not a soul in here on your Christian walk that, and I won't ask for you to raise your hand, I never do, I'll raise mine every time, that you don't feel that the good Lord has taken you and knocked you down a few beds. And we hear that testimony all the time, "There I was cruising along, everything seemed to be wonderful, I was high and mighty, and I was doing all the great, and then boom boom boom boom. The Lord reminded me how desperately I need Him." And so it's not an uncommon thing to say, "Oh my goodness, the Lord did all of that, like negativity?" Well we see those examples and reflections of it in our own Christian lives, and we will openly say that. And I know for a fact that means spiritually the Lord has brought me to my knees physically and spiritually knowing how desperately I need Him as a human being, as His Son. And that again, I'm probably speaking with and for, upon my side, I actually see the bed shaking. So it's not an absurd concept, and it's been taught throughout Scripture. So let's go forward from this, because now we're going to talk about some of our own decisions here. "No one can serve two masters, for you will hate one and love the other. You will be devoted to one and despise the other." These are your actions now, these are your decisions now, not God's. These are the decisions, these are the things that are presented to you right now. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money. And money can very, very specifically be money. People are greedy and they want money. And you could expand that

word to mean the material things of this world. You cannot serve a holy God spiritually as a living sacrifice and be devoted to the things that you own or possess, even if you're thinking in your head that is people maybe, whatever the case may be. You cannot serve two masters. Paul talks about this very clearly in terms of you are going to be enslaved. You are built to give your devotion. You are built to worship and you will worship sin and idols and self or you will worship God and spirit and be grateful for your salvation. You will be a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness, but you don't get to live in some sort of gray area where I'm so special I don't need to decide. I am an island unto myself, if you will. That just means that you've decided to worship yourself and to worship the things of the world. So just say that from that point on. So you see that God in his sovereignty, just as a parent over a small child, sometimes intervenes and teaches us a very direct object lesson. Right? We're always like, "Let them touch the stove. They'll only do it once." Right? That sort of thing. People are laughing, but you're like, "Okay, I guarantee they'll only do it one time." Well, Justice did it like eight times. He was fascinated. I was like, "You've got to stop doing that. I told you to do that so you wouldn't see." Anyway, that's a whole different story. But you know what I'm saying. There are times when God in his sovereignty to serve his purposes, don't ever think that this is random or because you were bad or whatever the case may be, to serve his purposes will intervene and, as we said, for lack of a better way of saying it, knock us down a few pegs, make us realize how desperately we are in need of our Savior. And there are times every day when you're moving through this world, when you're confronted decision after decision after decision after decision, whether to serve God or serve man. And we've talked about that. We've talked about that extensively. We talked about how people say, even Christians will say, Christians who don't even want to even worry with the Old Testament, let alone the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments could not be more relevant to a modern Christian. The first four honor God. The last six honor his creation. It makes part of it. What does the military abuse look like? Like a decision-making matrix or something like that? Something of that nature? It gives us a framework in which we can make our decisions. Is what I'm about to do or say, does it honor God? Does it honor his creation? It couldn't be more relevant to a modern Christian. It gives us that framework of decision-making into which all of this then is poured. So we see, again, God and his sovereignty to serve his purpose, his intervention in your life, him breaking you down, making you, and you could because you have probably professed your faith to him, you have professed your worship of him, and now you're doing X, Y, Z. And he's like, okay, you can't be professing your worship of me over here and then doing X, Y, Z. So we're going to make X, Y, Z and your faith clash and you're going to pick one. So we've all been there. And then, like I said, your everyday decisions. Do your decisions honor God? Do they honor his creation? These are verbs that people do. Serve. You will hate. You will love. You will be devoted. You will despise. You serve. You will be enslaved. Those are verbs that humans do. And finally, down in verse 25, this is the part that we like. This is the part that we like. And I hope that through this you've seen, maybe there is a little bit more to this than just what I thought of before. When you think, again, of God's sovereignty over you, that is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life. Whether you have enough food and drink or enough clothes to wear, isn't life more than food and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your Heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable than they are? And that's why I highlighted that scripture from Joel that said, "Beasts of the field, I take care of them." What are they worried about? We can probably learn a pretty good lesson from the beasts of the field. They're not worried about that. And if the good Lord chooses to take away, then they dwell within that. Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Where is your faith? I hear Jesus Christ saying, "Oh, you of little faith, where is your faith?" And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. Don't they work? They don't work or make their clothing. Yet Solomon and all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wild flowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, He will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? There is again. So don't worry about these things saying, "What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?" These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your

Heavenly Father already knows all of your needs. Seek the kingdom of God above all else and live righteously and He will give you everything you need. Now, you can say, "Well, there is poverty around the world. There's poverty in Christian nations and all of those things." Yes. Have you seen the state of the world and what people have done to it? There's a reason why there's poverty around the world and there's a reason why there's poverty in Christian nations and that's because even Christians who have plenty will not share. There's enough for everyone in the world to go around, but we're just too messed up. We're too tribal. We're too screwed up to make sure that we're taken care of. And in the meantime, as we see the poverty and we see the despair of other people and other nations, perhaps, maybe it should serve as a reminder to take us back to this scripture. One, being grateful for God's provision for us because no, that's not a guilt trip on you. Like, go and send everything you own to a different country. No, the human race, I'm speaking of the human race as a whole, but we can certainly look at that personally and say, "Thank you, Lord, for the provision that you have given for me." As we look collectively as families, as we look collectively as a congregation, thank you, Lord, and we do. We open up every prayer. Thank you, Lord, for the provision. Thank you for the opportunity to be together in this place, bound by your Holy Spirit. It is amazing and we want to first thank you. Make sure that we thank you for that. It's important. And the other aspect that we are reminded of whenever we hear these scriptures and we look back in the Old Testament in the way that God provided, we look back at the salvific, what we call the salvific history of humankind, the plan of salvation unfolding from Genesis, which speaks to Psalm 126, going to the temple to the presence of God, which speaks, of course, to Christ on the cross and the way to be in relationship with him. We think about the provision of God's Spirit indwelling us so that we may be the son or the daughter that he sees, that he wants, the disciple that he wants, so that we may serve his purposes. That very well may be going to a different nation and serving in the poverty-stricken areas. It may be, I don't know. But what I do know is that his will is meant to be completed in your life and what that looks like is as unique as you are. As mothers and fathers and grandparents and all the different jobs that you have and all the different venues that you go to and all the different places and all the different people that you see. His will. And you can't do that if you're living outside of his will. There's that Christian saying that if you have to go outside of God's will in order to get something, you have to stay outside of God's will in order to keep it. And that makes a lot of sense. If you know you're moving outside of God's will to get something, and that can be something, it can be anything, relationship, affirmation, or a physical object, you're going to have to remain outside of God's will in order to keep it. And that's not good. And he will then intervene and make every effort to bring you back into his will, as we see through scripture. But ultimately, you are going to decide which master you will serve. The master that is calling you from outside of God's will, or the Lord God himself who calls you to his will. And the final piece, seek first the kingdom of God. How is any of that possible? This whole big picture. This whole big picture. I got to think about all of it. No you don't. How about you submit yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ and you pray. And you seek his will in prayer. You seek his will in his word. You seek his will in godly conversations. You discern his will for you by actually living and dwelling in his will and allowing him to teach you, allowing him to guide you, understanding that if you are in his will, there's no coincidences when you get to speak with another individual about your faith or you're given an opportunity to demonstrate your faith, whatever the case may be. When you seek first the kingdom of God, now you can rest in the gospel. You rest in the knowledge of salvation. You rest in the knowledge that you were indwelled by the very power that raised Christ from the dead. You are not afraid of circumstances. You are dwelling within the kingdom of God. This goes for every aspect of your life. This is why it's one of the aspects of this church that we try to bring forward. Seek first the kingdom. Seek first his will. Whether it is in our generosity of giving, which I alluded to in the weekly, I mean it's just amazing. You don't think that a group of seventy hundred people that gather together on a regular basis here can do a lot to affect a lot of people in the world? You're wrong. When you take those people that are submitted to the will of God and put the kingdom first, he'll make it happen. We don't make it happen. I remember when we talked about the hurricane relief. Our treasurer over there deals

with numbers and he said, "My earthly self says we can't, but I know the right answer to this question. And that is, we do. We haven't, so we do." And he took that thousand dollars that the church committed and multiplied it into over five thousand dollars. A tiny little place. Seek first the kingdom. That's always the right answer. And so I would encourage you, where do you go? Your circumstances seem to be overwhelming. We've all been there. I get there. Sometimes there's little things that all add up. Sometimes there's big things that you're like, "Oh my goodness, where do you go?" And you turn to the Lord. His provision will provide physical, spiritual, and emotional. We learned this from Paul. This is a Philippian schoolwork. You're going to recognize this scripture. I actually was wearing my shirt the other day, Olivia. Olivia got me a shirt that says, "I can do all things through a single Bible verse taken out of context." Right? So you're going to hear that Bible verse here. "How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing, or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength. Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty." He's content. He knows what it means to have a little. He knows what it means to have a lot. He knows what it means to be beaten and thrown in prison. He knows what it means to have a full house to do as he is preaching the word. He knows all of that, and the highs and the lows and all of the things of life God simply provides spiritually because Paul is seeking the will of God first. Why do you think so much comes against him? I'd say he would have no interest in Paul if he were not doing that. So the more things change, the more they stay the same. As we look through the Psalms and we look through the Prophets and we look at the Gospels and we look in the Epistles, we see the provision of God is for the physical, it's for the spiritual, it's for the emotional, and it begins with the choice that you make to turn to Him where we're understanding your poverty of spirit and seeking His will first. And then enjoy the ride because being a Christian is anything but boring. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word today. We thank you for the opportunity to open up our hearts and minds and allow your spirit to teach us and to lead us. Lord, we pray that we walk away with an understanding of your provision for us as your children, not just the physical Lord, not just the spiritual Lord, not just the emotional, but we as your special creation. May everyone who hears my voice turn to you, submit to you, and open their hearts to your will being accomplished on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.