

*The Miracles of Jesus*

## Miracle # 17

**"The Feeding Of The 5,000"**(Mt 14:13-21, Mk 6:30-44, Lk 9:10-17, **Jn 6:1-14**)

The miracle of the "Feeding of the 5,000" is one of the best known miracles of Jesus and is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. We are going to rely for the most part on John's account.

John tells us of the sustained ministry of Jesus (6:2) "Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased." The three verbs in this verse are all in the imperfect tense indicating continuous action. It would read literally, "A great multitude **was following** Him because they **were seeing** His miracles which He **was doing**."

A great crowd followed Jesus into a deserted (uninhabited) area. Matthew connected the Lord retreated to the desert place with his hearing the news of John the Baptist's **death** (Matt. 14:13). Mark (6:30-31) gives us an additional motive, the Disciples had just returned from their mission, and they and the Master needed time for **refreshment** of body and spirit.

So to get some rest from the crowds that followed Him and seeking time to deal with the news of the murder of John, Jesus and His disciples withdrew by boat across the Sea of Galilee from Capernaum to Bethsaida.

Yet the people found out where Jesus' was bound for and while Jesus and His disciples made the trip by boat, the people followed along the shore and actually got there before He did. When He arrived He found a large crowd to greet Him. The presence of these huge crowds entirely defeated the whole intention of making this trip. Given this situation, surely the Lord's good humor in being met by this large crowd clamoring for his attention is miracle in itself.

***The Background of the Miracle*** (Jn 6:1-9)

"After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. (2) Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. (3) And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. (4) Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near."

On the surface it might appear that there is some discrepancy as to where the concern for the needs of the crowd originated. In Mark (6:35), Matthew (14:15) and Luke (9:12) the suggestion to send the crowds away

comes from the disciples, but John tells us that it is the Lord who first puts the question to Philip.

John says (6:5-6), "Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" (6) But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do."

John tells us that Jesus said this to test Philip. Jesus already knew what he was going to do. God knows what His plans for us are, and yet He does not often let us in on His plans before hand.

He did not need Philip's advice, he wanted Philip's heart. Jesus took this opportunity to teach the disciples. We often say we believe something and really think we do in our heads but we only really know what we believe when we are forced to stand on them in real life.

The disciples were faced with three possible options. The first is seen in their initial response which was to "send the people away so they could go and buy themselves something to eat" (Mark 6:36). The disciples asked Jesus to send the crowds home, so that they could obtain food. On the surface this appears to be a request based upon the disciple's compassion for the crowds (though I doubt that it was such). It seemed a very reasonable solution. It even seemed to be the only possible solution.

How shocked the disciples must have been to hear Jesus' response (Luke 9:13): "You give them something to eat". The disciples thought that acquiring food was the people's problem. Jesus told the disciples it was **their** problem.

The second option was, take an offering. See how much money could be collected and see what might be done. We see this option in Philip's response given in (John 6:7), "Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little."

In his answer Philip says that two hundred **denarius** would not be sufficient for this need (KJV uses penny) – the denari was a silver coin that was about the normal **day's wage** for a working man at that time. So two hundred denarius would be about **eight** month's wages.

Perhaps Jesus had hoped to hear Philip say, "**Lord, You Can Get Us Through This.**" Instead Philip thought the problem was bigger than both of them and backed down. Philip's assessment was, there are not enough resources to take care of the problem, but Philip calculated without **faith**.

The third option was to expect Jesus to do something. We see this option at work in **Andrew's** response given in (John 6:8-9) "One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, (9) "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"

Andrew is also overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem but he takes a different approach than Philip. Andrew did a little better than Philip. At least he looked around to see what could be done and had the nerve to mention one resource so small that he must have been afraid that the other disciple would laugh it off.

We are not told who the boy was, or how Andrew found him. Nor are we told whether the young boy offered his lunch or whether Andrew had to persuade him. What we are told is that he had "five barley loaves and two small fish." We need to not misunderstand the word "loaves" it is not referring to the kind of loaf we might buy at the supermarket or bakery. He is talking about something much smaller like a dinner roll. We are also told that these loaves are made of "barley" which is the cheapest grain and tells us that this boy was from a poor family. Andrew reveals his thoughts when he says, "but what are they among so many?"

## Application

Jesus' command to feed this crowd reminds us that faith is seldom learned in the classroom, but is learned in the crises of life, when we must obey God without all the visible means available to do so. The disciples need to see that they can accomplish things they never dreamed of doing through their association with Jesus.

The two greatest faith killing phrases heard in the church of today is "***We have never done it that way before,***" and "***We could never do that.***" These statements have a way of limiting our vision and squashing our ability to see with faith because of practical concerns or because of traditional ways that things have been done in the past. When we are in a pressing situation we often tend to focus on what can not be done and so the disciples respond in verse nine, all we have is "five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"

Perhaps the saddest thing is that the disciples who have witnessed Jesus perform many miracles, had no expectation that he would be able to meet this current need. But they had forgotten that they were speaking to the Creator of the universe, "calls those things which do not exist as though they do." (Romans 4:17). How like us they are. We too remain dull to the power of Christ, no matter how many times he may have met our needs in the past, the next crisis always seems to cause us to question God's ability to meet our needs. How silly!!!

Jesus is not recorded as having said anything in response to either Philip or Andrew's suggestions; they appear simply to show the impossibility of meeting the needs of this situation from human resources or wisdom.

### ***The Elements of the Miracle*** (Jn.6:10-11)

"Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. (11) And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted."

Jesus and his disciples are in an isolated place with a large crowd of people. Some have estimate that the crowd that day, if the women and children were added (only the men were counted) might have been **fifteen** or **twenty** thousand.

Mark tells that Jesus then had the disciples seated the crowd into groups of fifty and one hundred (Mark 6:39-40). Jesus gave the bread to the disciples, who acted like ushers by giving the bread to the crowd.

Mark also tells us that He blessed the five loaves and two fish (v. 41) he broke them and "*gave them to the disciples.*" The word he "*gave*" is literally in the imperfect tense and means he "**kept** giving" them to the disciples. I can't prove it but I believe the miracle took place in the hands of Jesus. Jesus kept producing bread and fish in his hands with the supernatural power of the Creator. Jesus kept on creating tons of barley cakes and fish between the palms of his hands until all of the thousands were fed. The lesson is that Jesus does not demand what we cannot **supply**, he only requires disciples through whom he can work!

### ***The Effect of the Miracle*** (John 6:12-14)

#### Twelve Baskets of Fragments (John 6:12-13)

"So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." (13) There-fore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten."

Everyone ate until they were filled and even then there were twelve baskets full of fragments of the meal left over.

Is there some symbolism is the fact that there were twelve baskets? There are of course twelve key disciples; perhaps it is just a demonstration of the wonderful provision of God that there is one basket for each of the disciples.

#### Explaining Away the Miracle

Some who prefer not to see a miracle here say that when the crowd saw the little boy's lunch in the hands of Jesus they were **ashamed** for

keeping their food to themselves. Suddenly thousands of little lunch sacks that had previously been hidden, appeared and everyone began to share with everyone else. The point of the story then becomes a lesson on **generosity**, not the power of Christ to perform a miracle. Isn't that touching?

You have to feel sorry for those whose God is so small. The text of this miracle was not that this crowd overcame selfishness but that Jesus performed a miracle to prove that He was "The Bread of Life." Only a miracle would explain the twelve leftover baskets for fragments from the meal and why the crowd wanted to make Jesus a king.

### Take Him by Force to Make Him King

(John 6:14-15)

John in his account is the only one to tell us of the reaction of the crowd when they realized a miracle had been performed (John 6:14-15). The people were impressed. They may not have understood all that that is involved in what John calls a "sign," but they did see that what had happened was wonderful. So they gave their verdict in verse fourteen, "Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." They did not speak Jesus as "a" prophet but "**the**" prophet.

John tells us that Jesus realized that the intentions of the crowd (v. 15) to "seize him" and "make him king." "Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone." It seems ironic that this verse says that the people intend to take him by force and make him **king**. But knowing that the people had misunderstood his intentions and were regarding him as a **political** savior, Jesus "fled again to the mountains alone."

The tragedy of these Galileans was that they tried to make Jesus into their kind of king.

People still make that kind of mistake.

### The Bread of Life

The next day the crowd that had been fed came looking for Jesus. They were hungry again and hoped for another miracle. But Jesus read the intent of their hearts and said, "... you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. (27) Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting

life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." (John 6:26-27)

Jesus now uses this occasion to give his teaching on being "The Bread of Life" (vv. 28-40). In this sermon Jesus pointed out the selfish motives of the crowds who followed him. He told them that he is the true bread, the source and sustainer of life. He is the bread of heaven sent by the Father to give eternal life to everyone who believes in Him. He tells them that those who live only for the food that perishes will perish with it. But those who seek the heavenly bread will live forever. We see this vividly portrayed in the story of the "Rich Man and Lazarus" (Luke 16:19-31). In this story the fortunes of these two men is **reversed** after death.

The resulting rejection of Jesus conveyed in John 6:66 is surely some of the saddest in the Bible, "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more."