

The Feeding of the 5,000

John 6:1-14

John 6:1-14 - *“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. ⁵ 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.

⁷ Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.”

⁸ 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?”

¹⁰ 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. ¹² So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.” ¹³ Therefore 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. ¹⁴ 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.”

Background Notes

The “Feeding of Five Thousand” is the only miracle of our Lord that is recorded in all four gospels, other than His resurrection. Verse 10 says that the number of **men** that were fed was about 5,000. We know from the Gospel of Matthew that women and children were also there - so maybe Jesus fed as many as 12,000 or 15,000 people - or maybe even more!

Where did this miracle take place? Jesus went up a mountain, and sat there with His disciples (v3). So this miracle probably took place somewhere at the northeast end of the Sea of Galilee, on the slopes of what is known today as the Golan Heights.

John probably mentioned that *“the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near”*(v4) to explain the crowds. We know from the other Gospels that people were coming from the cities around the Sea of Galilee to hear Jesus, and probably folks from all over the Galilee area who were heading towards Jerusalem for the Passover swelled their ranks.

Why did the Lord ask Philip, *“Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?”* Most likely He selected Philip because he was from the nearby town of Bethsaida, and he would have known where supplies could be purchased. Philip responded,

“Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little”(v7). A denarius was a workingman’s daily wage; so two hundred denarii would be 8 months’ salary!

At this point Andrew announced that a boy in the crowd was willing to give his lunch to the Lord. Notice how Andrew presented that fact: *“There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?”* (v9). In other words, “The kid means well, but let’s not be ridiculous! How are we going to feed thousands of people with five pita breads and two small fish?”

Verse 13 emphasizes that what took place here was definitely a miracle. Critics of the Bible always want to come up with alternative explanations. They propose that it wasn’t really a miracle - that everybody just shared a little bit of bread, like a tiny sacramental portion in the communion service, or something like that. No! The Scriptures make it quite clear that this is a very dramatic miracle. Everyone ate as much as they wanted – and they even had twelve baskets full of leftovers!

One more background note: In verse 14 we read *“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 were probably referring to the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18, that God would raise up a prophet like Moses. The fact that under Moses the people were fed with the miraculous manna, and now the Lord was feeding them with miraculous bread – this may have promoted the connection in their minds between the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18, and what the Lord was doing here. In fact, the Lord was indeed the fulfillment of the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18!

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. The miracles of Christ were pre-designed.

The Lord Jesus was testing Philip when He asked, *“Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.* When do you think the Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God, came up with the idea that He would take a boy’s small lunch and multiply it to the blessing of so many? Do you think that was a spur of the moment decision? Of course not!

None of the Lord’s miracles were spur of the moment decisions. The miracles of Christ were **pre-designed from eternity past!** The Lord was never caught off guard. He never found Himself in a situation where He had to wonder, “What do I do now?” As God, He knew exactly what He was going to do. The Lord never did any of His miracles merely by an arbitrary burst of power. No, the miracles of Christ were pre-designed. That is why the miracles recorded in the Gospel of John are called **“Sign Miracles.”** They were designed - they were pre-designed.

The Lord’s miracles were designed not only to prove the deity of Christ, but they were also designed to teach. The Lord certainly could have snapped His fingers and produced food- even caviar or filet mignon! But He didn’t do that. He chose to take a boy’s lunch and multiply it, because there is teaching associated with this miracle. Always look for the teaching associated with every miracle of Christ.

2. Christians have a responsibility to meet social needs.

Where do we see that truth taught in this miracle? Look at verses 5-6: *“Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.*” As a follower of Jesus, Philip’s attitude about a believer’s responsibility to meet the needs of other people was being tested. Suppose Philip had said at this point, “Lord, feeding these people isn’t our responsibility. If these people were dumb enough to come way out here without any food, let them starve.” We would never think anything like that! Or would we? If we’re honest, I think all of us can identify. If Philip had taken that attitude, he would have failed the test.

As Philip and the other disciples had a responsibility to meet the social need of these hungry people, so Christians have a responsibility to help when people truly have needs. Our primary responsibility is to spread the gospel, but we also have a responsibility to meet the social needs of people with whom we come in contact – our neighbors, people in the community. Christians have a responsibility to meet social needs.

3. There should be a balance between generosity and economy.

Look at verses 11-12: *“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. So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.”* Here we see our Lord’s generosity: the people had as much as they wanted! But we also see our Lord’s economy: He made sure that nothing was wasted.

We need to follow our Lord’s example. There should be a balance between generosity and economy, but sometimes that balance is difficult to maintain. As flawed human beings, we tend to go to one extreme or the other. We can become so economy-minded that we hoard things; we can become stingy, refusing to give and uncaring of the needs of others. On the other hand, we can become so lavishly generous that we’re wasteful, and we don’t consider how to use our resources carefully and properly.

There should be a balance between generosity and economy. That balance should characterize our personal lives, it should characterize the life of the church, and it should characterize any ministry we’re involved in. There should be a balance between generosity and economy.

Practical Applications

1. Give what you have to the Lord!

The little boy gave what he had! In view of the needs of thousands of people, it didn’t seem like much - but he gave what he had. He didn’t give what he didn’t have, but he gave what he had. The Lord expects us to do the same. We may not have much to give, and we may wonder what good will it do when the needs are so great. But if we give what we have to the Lord, **He** can take what little we can give and multiply it for the blessing of many.

Notice that the boy gave all he had – it wasn't much, but he gave it **all**! You know, if I had been that boy I think I probably would have thought to myself, "I'll be really generous - I'll give three loaves and one fish." That's a pretty good gift, right? But no! He gave it **all** to the Lord!

We should be like this boy, and give all to the Lord. That doesn't mean that we have to empty our bank accounts into the collection plate at church. After all, the Lord knows we have earthly responsibilities, and He expects us to meet them. But we should place everything we have under the Lordship of Christ.

Have we dedicated all we have to the Lordship of Christ? Have you dedicated your talents to the Lord? What about your time? Give what you have to the Lord.

2. Do what you can for the Lord.

This application is taught in the role the disciples played. The disciples couldn't multiply the bread, but they could help. So did what they could! In verse 10 the Lord had His disciples organize the people so that there was easy distribution of the food. There was no stampede when the bread was multiplied. The disciples distributed the food in an organized and orderly way.

Even though the disciples couldn't multiply the food, they could be involved in working with the Lord to serve the people and to gather up the leftovers. And they were blessed as a result.

Twelve baskets of leftovers! Every disciple had a basket, and each disciple had more in that basket than what the Lord started with! Each disciple had more the little boy's lunch! Do you see the blessing as a result of the multiplication?

We, too, should do what we can for the Lord. Are you doing what you can for the Lord, or do you just attend Sunday church services? Do you do what you can for the Lord or do you say, "Well, yeah, but what can I do?" Or, "I just don't have time!"

Even if you think you're not gifted or talented for preaching or music, you can do all kinds of things. Can you drive? Any church or youth ministry needs drivers! Can you help someone who needs a ride to church, or drive seniors to doctor's appointments? Can you greet people at the church door, or give out bulletins? Can you help in the church nursery? Can you stuff envelopes and stick on stamps? In any church or ministry, mailings have to go out. (See me later if you can do that!)

There's always *something* you can do, and like the disciples, you will be blessed as a result. Do what you can for the Lord!