

The Miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand

Mark 6:30-44

Mark 6:30-44 – *“Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. ³¹ And He said to them, “Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. ³² So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves.*

³³ But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him. ³⁴ And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.

³⁵ When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, “This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. ³⁶ Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat.”

³⁷ But He answered and said to them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to Him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?” ³⁸ But He said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they found out they said, “Five, and two fish.”

³⁹ Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties. ⁴¹ And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all. ⁴² So they all ate and were filled. ⁴³ And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish. ⁴⁴ Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men.”

Background Notes

Other than the resurrection of our Lord, this is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. The deserted place where the miracle took place was somewhere at the northern or northeastern side of the Sea of Galilee. Tradition says this miracle took place at a site called *Tabga*, but that location doesn't fit in with the details of Scripture.

In verse 33, the people following the Lord would have come from the towns on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. That was the more populated area, with towns like Capernaum, Korazin, and Tiberias. The word would have spread that the Lord and His disciples were taking off in a boat and crossing the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is about eight to ten miles wide at that point, and the people could have watched and followed the boat's route. Some of them probably traveled at least ten miles, but they could see the boat all the way. In fact, some of them arrived ahead of the Lord and his disciples, and formed a kind of “welcoming committee”!

When the hour was late and the people had no food, the Lord performed the miracle. It was a great miracle! John's Gospel says that the Lord used a small boy's lunch, and from that small lunch 5000 men, plus women and children, were fed (John 6 and Matthew 14). Perhaps as many as 20,000 people were fed! A tremendous miracle!

Skeptics of the Bible want to deny the miracles of Christ. They cannot accept the idea that the Lord Jesus Christ did miracles, so they find ways to put down or "explain away" the miracles. Even liberal "Bible scholars" would like to detract from or even deny the miracles. In this case, some skeptics or scholars would say that yes, the Lord did go up to that area of the Sea of Galilee, and He gave some wonderful sermons up there. But the tale that the Lord fed 5000+ people with a little boy's lunch – why, that was no miracle, they would say. It's easy to explain what really happened - the little boy shared his lunch, and everyone was so impressed with this act of kindness that they all got out their own brown bags and shared their lunches, too. And then, the skeptics say, the Gospel writers and the early Christians took this story and exaggerated it, and by the time the final form of the Gospels were written down, it had become a miracle. They say that the early Church transformed the real historical Jesus into a "Christ of faith."

Another "explanation" that skeptics use is that Jesus and the disciples perpetrated a trick on the crowds. They suggest that the Lord and His disciples had actually stashed the bread in a cave ahead of time, and then they planned and programmed this event. Jesus somehow produced the bread by sleight of hand from beneath His robes – and all the simple, uneducated people thought it was a miracle. How ridiculous!

Don't believe the skeptics or the liberal scholars – not for even a minute! This account is not an exaggeration, and it's not "accumulated changes of what really happened." No, this *is* what really happened! This is a real miracle! The details of the Scripture refute the notions of the skeptics and the liberals. The event was very orderly. The people were sitting down in ranks, hundreds and fifties. There were many witnesses who could easily have seen if a trick was perpetrated, or if the people had shared their lunches!

This was a miracle - it was the power of God! The Lord could have done the miracle in any number of ways. He could have had bread fall down from heaven. But he chose to take a boy's lunch and multiply it. It was a miracle - and it really happened!

Doctrinal Points

1. "R&R" - with guidelines - is biblical.

Rest and Relaxation - with guidelines - is biblical. We all like rest and relaxation, and rest is necessary for our physical well-being. You can't burn the candle at both ends or you'll burn out. But there are guidelines to rest and relaxation, and here are three of them:

a. Biblical “R&R” assumes that you’re working.

Notice that they were so busy that they didn’t even have time to eat (v31)! And remember, they had just returned from a preaching mission. You can be sure that if you’re involved with Christian service, you’re going to be busy. Let’s not use the word hectic, but you’re going to be busy.

b. Biblical “R&R” doesn’t last a long time.

Biblical R&R shouldn’t be lengthy vacation time. Notice - when the “rest and relaxation” was interrupted, the Lord expected them to meet the needs of the people (v37). He told them to get busy and give them something to eat. So we’re not to be workaholics - but we’re not to be relax-aholics either! Biblical R & R shouldn’t last too long!

c. Biblical “R&R” is Christ-centered.

The disciples weren’t just going off by themselves for a fun and games vacation with no purpose. They were going on a retreat with the Lord - to talk over the ministry and to be further taught by Him. It was not just a vacation – it was biblical rest and relaxation.

2. “Let go and let God” - with guidelines - is biblical.

The idea of “let go and let God” is that believers should let go of their own striving and trying to do things in their own strength. We’ve got to “let go - and let God” do it. However, that idea can be carried to a wrong extreme. With guidelines, the idea is biblical, but without guidelines it can become very **unbiblical**.

We’re not called to sit around and do nothing, with the idea that we don’t need to do anything because God is going to do everything! The account of this miracle refutes that notion. Notice that the Lord expected the disciples to do what they could: “*But He answered and said to them, “You give them something to eat.”*” The Lord expected the disciples to do something about the situation. In fact, in verse 37 the word *you* is emphatic in the Greek language: “**You** give them something to eat.”

The disciples did go out and find the five loaves and the two fish. They did their part, and then the Lord did His miracle. Five loaves, two fish, plus God – that was all that was needed. And the disciples were told to organize the group into hundreds and fifties. And they were asked to distribute the food and collect the leftovers. So they did what they could - and let God do the miracle.

That’s the guideline. We are to do what we can - what the Lord has asked us to do - and then let God work. The disciples didn’t just sit around, “letting go, and letting God.” “Let go and let God” is biblical - with guidelines.

Practical Applications

1. Aim to include biblical R & R in your vacations.

Instead of just going on vacation that's planned just for excitement and getting away from it all, why not take your vacation at a Christian destination – at a camp, or a conference, or a retreat? There are many Christ-centered ministries that are designed to meet all kinds of family needs for a happy time, and that provide spiritual nourishment as well.

For many years I've been running an annual ski retreat for a group of men. We ski during the day, and we have Bible study and prayer every night. It's a great way to enjoy biblical R & R. It's not *just* fun and games; it's not *just* a vacation. It's combining "getting away" with meeting the Lord there, and getting centered about His Word.

2. Expect your best plans to be interrupted.

No sooner had the Lord and the disciples landed than the crowd appeared! The Lord certainly knew all about this; in fact, He had planned it. I wonder what the disciples' attitude was. They were just starting their get-away, looking forward to some R & R, and a big crowd arrives! Maybe they were bitter; maybe they were angry. But the Lord was not annoyed. His compassion was stirred when He saw the crowd of spiritually ignorant people, who were "*like sheep without a shepherd.*" Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was filled with compassion for them. He didn't send the people away - He taught them many things (v34).

What's our reaction when we're interrupted? Do we get uptight, bitter, angry, frustrated when we have to change our plans – especially our plans for our "free time"? Let's follow the Lord's example!

3. When you give to the Lord, you end up with more than you started with.

The boy gave his lunch to the disciples, and they gave it to the Lord. But the boy - and the disciples - ended up getting more for lunch than what they started out with! In fact, each disciple got a basketful of leftovers!

This can be applied in a very practical way. It can be applied to the giving of our money, or the giving of our time, or the giving of our talent. Give what you have to the Lord, and you will be blessed in so many ways.

You'll never be in a situation where you can't give **something!** Give of yourself. When you give to the Lord, you'll end up with much more than you started with!