

The Miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand

Matthew 14:13-21

Matthew 14:13-21 - *"When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. ¹⁴ And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick. ¹⁵ When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food."*

¹⁶ But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." ¹⁷ And they said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish."

¹⁸ He said, "Bring them here to Me." ¹⁹ Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. ²⁰ So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. ²¹ Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children."

Background Notes

Question: What is the only miracle of Christ, other than His resurrection, that is recorded in all four Gospels? Answer: You guessed it! It's the miracle of the "feeding of five thousand"!

After the Lord heard the news of the death of John the Baptist, He and the disciples went by boat to the northeast end of the Sea of Galilee. When the multitudes heard and saw that the Lord and His disciples were leaving by boat, they followed Him on foot along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The cities mentioned in verse 13 would have been Capernaum, Korazin, Tiberias and other cities on the western side of the Sea of Galilee.

People would have walked for as many as 10-12 miles to meet the Lord when He came ashore. Many of the folks may have hurried to arrive ahead of the Lord, because we read, *"And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick"* (v14). Notice our Lord's great compassion. Even before He performed the great miracle of feeding 5000 men, as well as women and children, our Lord healed many of the people who had hurried along the lakeshore to meet Him.

If you visit the Holy Land today, you may be taken to Tabgha, the "traditional site" for the feeding of the five thousand. It's located on the western side of the Sea of Galilee, not far from Capernaum. This, however, cannot be the actual site, in view of the geographical data given in this chapter and the parallel accounts in the other Gospels. Verse 15 says that it

was a “deserted place.” In that day, as it is today, the western side of the Sea of Galilee was quite populated. The northeast end of the Sea of Galilee was much less populated, so that area was most likely the location for one of our Lord’s great miracles. Five small loaves of bread and two fish were multiplied to feed five thousand men, besides women and children - at least twelve thousand people! A great miracle!

Skeptics of the Bible have tried to say that this was not a miracle, but rather an exaggerated story that was made up by the early Christians to make Jesus into a miracle worker. What really happened, they say, is that everyone shared their lunches with each other because of a little boy’s example! Well, the **Bible** says that it was a **miracle**! We believe this was a miracle because Jesus is the Son of God, and this was a display of the power of God.

Doctrinal Points

1. Disciples have a responsibility to feed the multitudes for the Lord.

“When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food.” But Jesus said to them, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat” (v5-16).

Can you imagine the disciples’ reaction to Jesus’ words? **“We** should give them something to eat? Lord, are you kidding? We have only five small rolls and two little fish.” The account in John’s Gospel tells us that a young boy gave these five small loaves and two fish to the Lord. Apparently he had more faith than the disciples did at this point. He certainly was generous! If you were that young boy, would you have given up all your lunch for people you didn’t even know?

There’s a great lesson here, isn’t there? The disciples thought that the solution was to send the multitudes away to the villages so they could buy food for themselves. The small fishing village of Bethsaida was not too far away from this deserted place. This was not “wrong thinking” on the part of the disciples. But the Lord had other plans. He wanted to teach the disciples (and us) a spiritual lesson.

Certainly we’re taught here that we should reach out to meet the physical needs of people around us who need our help. But what’s the **spiritual** lesson? The lesson is that if we dedicate what little we have to the Lord, He can multiply it to bless many people. To be even more specific, if you dedicate what little spiritual food you have to the Lord, He can multiply it to meet the spiritual hunger of many others.

In the spiritual picture portrayed by this miracle, what is the spiritual food? It’s Christ Himself! We can be sure that this is the spiritual truth pictured in the miracle, because the parallel account in the Gospel of John tells us so! In John 6, the Lord followed up this miracle with His “Bread of Life” discourse. **He** is the true Bread of Life. **He** is the “Food” that meets and satisfies spiritual hunger.

“And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them.” The Lord was filled with compassion for the people. They needed healing, and they needed food. The only spiritual food that can satisfy spiritual hunger is the Lord Himself. He asked His disciples (and that includes us, as His disciples today) to give the multitudes something to eat. We do this today by giving people the Christ-centered Word of God.

Now let me ask: Are we, as believers today, following the Lord’s direction? We are responsible to bring spiritual food, the Christ-centered Word of God, to the multitudes around us. To non-Christians, we bring the Christ-centered Word of the gospel of Jesus Christ. To Christians, we bring the Christ-centered teachings of the Word of God. That’s what we’re doing in these “Talks from Matthew” - we’re feeding the multitudes for the Lord.

If you’re not a Christian, you need to realize that you can be saved from your sins only through Jesus Christ. He died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins, and He offers the free gift of salvation to you. All you have to do is believe what the Word of God says, and trust in Christ as your Savior. You’ll be born again – you’ll become a member of the family of God. You’ll be saved from an eternity without God! You’ll become a true Christ-follower!

If you’re a believer, make sure you’re being fed with the true Bread from the Word of God. Then, as believers, go and share it with others. But you may say, “Wait a minute, I’m not an evangelist! I’m not a preacher! I’m just a new believer.” Learn the lesson of this miracle: **dedicate what little food you have to the Lord!** Start by sharing your testimony and the few Scripture verses you have learned. You’ll find that the Lord will bless and multiply your small efforts!

Disciples are responsible to feed the multitudes for the Lord. Don’t cop out with excuses like – “I’m too old,” or “That’s not my gift,” or “I don’t know much,” or “I’m only a new believer.” We all have a responsibility. We can all do our part.

2. Disciples have a responsibility to dedicate their abilities to the Lord.

Jesus asked the disciples to bring what little bread and fish they had to Him to feed the multitude. Then He asked them to use their abilities and be actively involved in the whole process of feeding the multitudes.

First, they were to get the people to sit on the grass in organized groups of about fifty people. *Luke tells us, “For there were about five thousand men. Then He said to His disciples, ‘Make them sit down in groups of fifty.’ And they did so, and made them all sit down” (Luke 9:14-15).* Did you ever try to get twelve thousand hungry people (including children!) to sit down outdoors in groups of fifty? (And most likely a lot of the young kids were hungry and tired and crying!) The disciples had to use all their organizing skills and administrative abilities to meet this challenging responsibility.

Then they had to get the group to quiet down while the Lord gave thanks for the food. Did you ever try to get twelve thousand hungry people to quiet down? This in itself took a lot of skill and ability. Remember, the miracle hadn’t taken

place yet, and no one yet knew what the Lord's plan was, so I'm sure there were all kinds of comments from the people such as, "What are we doing sitting around here, anyway?" or "It's getting late and my kids are starving. It'll be dark before we get out of this place."

Notice, by the way, that the Lord gave thanks publicly for the food. Let me ask you: do you thank the Lord for your food when you're eating in a public place? Or are you embarrassed and ashamed, and just do the "rub your eyebrow trick" instead of really giving thanks? I hope all of us will honor the Lord by giving thanks for our food in public places.

The Lord gave thanks for the food, and then the disciples used their abilities to take the food from the Lord and get it to each individual. I'm sure that they must have organized some volunteers to help distribute the food, and that took some organizational ability. The same was true for collecting the leftovers. There's a lesson here for us: Whatever ability you have, you can use it to help feed the multitudes – organizing, administrative, handing it out, helping -- even "picking up the pieces" (clean-up) abilities! Every disciple can do **something!** What are you doing? Disciples have a responsibility to dedicate their abilities to the Lord.

Practical Application

Let God guide you with Scripture.

When we're making decisions in life, God expects us to use our "sanctified common sense," based on biblical principles. He certainly doesn't expect us to open our Bibles with our eyes shut and just blindly point to a verse of Scripture for guidance!

However, many times as we're reading His Word, God will use a particular verse to help guide us in making decisions. I had that experience with the account of this miracle from the parallel verse in Mark 6:34: *"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."*

Many years ago, when I was considering leaving my job as a research engineer to serve the Lord in a full-time Bible teaching ministry, the Lord used this verse to guide my decision. I had great compassion on the multitudes of new, untaught, young believers around me. They were like "sheep without a shepherd." They needed to be taught the Word of God! The Lord used this verse to call me into a Bible teaching ministry. Let God guide **you** with Scripture!