

Jesus Feeds Five Thousand (plus)

This passage in Mark 6 and the miracle it contains has become known as the feeding of the five thousand for the simple reason this is the number quoted in the text. However, let us not forget Matthew enlarges this number by pointing out five thousand was the number of men and the total number was much larger. Indeed, the number could easily double when we consider, ‘they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children’.

A little becomes a lot

When Andrew surveyed the crowd then looked down on the five barley loaves and two small fishes his faith was tested and he sighed ‘what are they among so many?’ The wonderful answer is that in the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ they are more than adequate. In gospel matters modest is more and a little becomes a lot. Miracles don’t stick to the rules!

A gospel of broad horizons

It seems clear the purpose of this miracle was at the very least to teach the disciples a lesson about scale and scope. The twelve had just returned from their first taste of personal ministry and were clearly excited about what they had done and taught. But lest they rest on their accomplishments the Great Teacher was already opening to their view the possibility of going much, much further to reach many, many more and not to be content with merely a few. These paltry loaves and fishes were derisory amongst so many, and yet all would be fed and all would be satisfied. So, too, the gospel, despised by many, underestimated by most, meets the needs of multitudes, and feeds the souls of men, women and children all over the world.

Let me point you again to v. 41. Do you see what the Saviour did here? He did five things.

Ordinary means

First, the Lord Jesus took what the disciples had, though it was meagre and basic – barley was a cheap and plain cereal – and made it a feast. The disciples were common men; their natural abilities were unremarkable but their apparent weakness was their strength in the service of the Saviour. Paul calls the gospel ‘foolishness’ in the estimation of human reason but carried by sent men and delivered with divine power it satisfies all spiritual hunger.

Divine power

Second, the Lord ‘looked up to heaven’, and by so doing reminded the disciples that all spiritual power comes from above and ‘every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights’. The Saviour did not look to heaven for power, for all power was His already, but here He reminds us that for the preaching of the gospel and to feed hungry souls, God will be called upon because spiritual work needs spiritual power.

A blessed word

Third, Christ blessed the loaves. Many so-called preachers in this world carry a message to men and women that has never been blessed by the Lord Jesus Christ. A natural message to a natural man ends in a natural disaster. Christ’s gospel alone is blessed by God. Only the gospel of sovereign effectual grace and free justifying righteousness satisfies sinners. Freewill preaching has no substance, no nourishment and no value to spiritually dead souls, indeed it mocks them. The Lord Jesus Christ is Himself the bread of life to guilty sinners and except the gospel we preach has been blessed as His very own we are liars and deceivers, and false teachers of damnable heresies.

Plain food but good

Fourth, Christ brake the loaves, as He must to feed so many. This is a beautiful analogy of the purpose and reason for preaching. The Lord Jesus will be tasted, savoured and enjoyed by His people in this world before He takes them to glory. He does not save them to abide in ignorance but to live, grow, mature and develop so the gospel is suited to serve many purposes and meet many needs. It illuminates the blind, liberates the bound, comforts the distressed, nourishes the hungry, quenches the thirsty, encourages the downcast and strengthens the weak all at the hands of those who bear it at Christ’s command. Some ask, ‘is the gospel all you have to preach?’ We reply, ‘we preach what Christ has given into our hands, a food fit for purpose and suitable for the needs of all His sheep’.

Order and purpose

Fifth, Christ gave the bread and fish to His disciples that they might give it to the people. Here the disciples are sent forth with the gospel for the waiting, hungry souls of men. But they did not dispense their gift chaotically, like some frenzied throwing out of loaves to a clamouring crowd, but carefully, thoughtfully, even methodically, according to the Lord’s direction and timing, to those seated in rows, and gathered in fifties and hundreds. The calling of the Lord’s elect is a divinely managed, and meticulously arranged process. The Lord’s covenant is ordered in all things and sure. In the gathering of Christ’s kingdom no one will be missed and nothing will be overlooked.

Our hymns for today are below.

Hymn 1

Gadsby selection 462

Christ a Guide through Death to Glory. Ps. 73. 24

W. Williams

8.7.4.

1

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah!
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore.

2

Open thou the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing streams do flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through;
Strong Deliverer,
Be thou still my strength and shield.

3

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of deaths, and hell's Destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side;
Songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee.

Hymn 2

Gadsby selection 345

Christ Knows and Keeps his Sheep. John 10. 27-30

P. Doddridge

S.M.

1

My soul, with joy attend,
While Jesus silence breaks;
No angel's harp such music yields
As what my Shepherd speaks.

2

“I know my sheep,” he cries;
“My soul approves them well;
Vain is the treacherous world’s disguise,
And vain the rage of hell.

3

“I freely feed them now
With tokens of my love.
But richer pastures I prepare,
And sweeter streams above.

4

“Unnumbered years of bliss
I to my sheep will give;
And while my throne unshaken stands,
Shall all my chosen live.

5

“This tried almighty hand
Is raised for their defence;
Where is the power can reach them there,
Or what can force them thence?”

6

Enough, my gracious Lord,
Let faith triumphant cry;
My heart can on this promise live;
Can on this promise die.