

Feeding the 5000

Ignorance and Insight: Part 5

Mark 6:35-44 (Mt.14:13-21, Lk.9:10-17, Jn.6:5-13) 9/30/2018

Summary: Jesus sets up the scene with all the trappings of the Messianic Banquet, then proves he is the one who will bring it about by feeding the multitude. Our hope is in who he is. And he involves us in the first stage of that banquet (feeding people spiritually through the gospel). We offer our scraps to him and trust him to do great things with it.

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35 When¹ it was late in the day, his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. **36** Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." **37** But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take two hundred day's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" **38** "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five--and two fish." **39** Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. **40** So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. **41** Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. he also divided the two fish among them all. **42** They all ate and were satisfied, **43** and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. **44** The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

¹ The NIV says, "By this time it was late in the day." But the previous verse says Jesus *began* to teach. It is unclear why the NIV translators inserted the word "this." That seems to imply that it was late in the day when Jesus began to teach. The Greek simply says **When it was late in the day...** Jesus began teaching, and continued to do so from the time he arrived until late in the day.

Introduction

Introduction: The Importance of the Miracle

Which one of Jesus' miracles is the most important one? If we go by which one is referred to most often by Bible writers and by Jesus himself, the answer is easy. It's the feeding of the multitude—hands down.² You read about this miracle no less than 10 times in the gospels. And three different times Jesus rebuked the people for not understanding the meaning of it. Think about that—they didn't understand the miracle. We know it's important to understand Jesus' *teaching*, but a miracle—what's to understand? It happened. If I believe it happened, doesn't that mean I understand it? No, and here's why: Jesus' miracles were not just acts of power. They were sermons designed to teach us something. When Jesus healed a leper, he was teaching something about uncleanness and forgiveness of sins through the miracle. When Jesus healed the woman with the hemorrhage, he was teaching something about the intensity of his love for people who trust him. Every miracle was a sermon, *especially* this one.

And that's tricky because this miracle is easy to misunderstand. Three different times Jesus rebuked people for misunderstanding it, and all three times they had a different misunderstanding.³ So let's take a careful look and make sure we get it right.

Review

Now, just to refresh your memory: we left off last time with Jesus deciding to take a day off to escape the crowd.

So they go across the lake, but when they land, there is an even bigger crowd—the biggest crowd we ever see in the gospels.⁴

34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

So Jesus says, "Forget the day off. I'm going to shepherd these sheep." And what is Jesus' idea of shepherding? Teaching.⁵

34 ... they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

Now in v.35 Mark fast forwards to the end of the day.

² Of all the miracles Jesus performed, the feeding of the 5000 was only one that appears in all 4 gospels. And each gospel devotes a long section to describing it. Additionally, Jesus performed this miracle twice in his ministry—one with 5000 and once with 4000. The second one is recorded in two gospels.

³ The disciples failed to understand it when they were surprised that Jesus could walk on water, and again when they took Jesus' words about spiritual yeast to refer to physical bread, and the crowd misunderstood it when they thought Jesus would provide more food the following day.

⁴ Mark says they came from all the towns and villages. The initial group were the ones who outran the boat and got there ahead of Jesus. The ones who came from all the towns and villages would have presumably arrived later.

The size of this crowd is important. All four gospels make a point of it. This is a very rural part of the country. The largest nearby towns were Capernaum and Bethsaida which had between 2 and 3 thousand people each. Just imagine what an amazing thing this must have been just to have this many people gathered in one place. I doubt that had ever happened in Galilee for any reason—ever. Jesus had attracted a lot of crowds, but never anything like this. It's very likely that this is the first time anyone there—including Jesus, had seen a crowd anywhere near this size in their lifetime. Even if Jesus didn't do a miracle this would be a dramatic high point in the life of Christ just because of the size of the crowd.

⁵ This is significant. Many times I have heard people say things like, "That pastor is great at teaching, but not so good at shepherding." Jesus' example shows us that shepherding is primarily an issue of teaching. See also John 21:15-17, where shepherding is described in terms of feeding the sheep.

35 When it was late in the day⁶, his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. 36 Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

Normally the people would have left in the early afternoon to be home in time for dinner, but Jesus' teaching was so captivating that they just couldn't tear themselves away. So now there's a little bit of a food problem. Are they starving? No. They missed one meal—maybe two. Human beings can go weeks without food. They aren't starving, they aren't dying, it's not an emergency; they're just hungry because it's dinner time—not a big deal. So why is this in the Bible? Because Jesus wants to teach us something about dinner time.

The Banquet

Food Is a Huge Theme

Have you ever noticed how important food is in the Bible? Every chapter in the book of Mark mentions eating.⁷ And it's a huge topic in all of Scripture. Think of the storyline of Scripture: creation, fall, and redemption. Each one is connected to food. Creation: When God created man, what are the first words God ever spoke to man?

"You may eat..." (Genesis 2:16)

Then the fall of man, which was a sin of what? Eating. It was the misuse of food that plunged mankind into the curse.

And then redemption. At each point along the way of God's redemptive plan you have a meal. The deliverance from Egypt—the Passover meal, then manna from heaven, then into a land flowing with milk and honey. The entire Jewish calendar is built around feasts. When God describes himself, he constantly compares himself to food and drink (bread of life, living water, honey, choice cuts of meat, a whole banquet, streams of water, milk, fine wine, and on and on it goes). When Jesus arrives and he is tested in the desert, what's the first test? Food. The first miracle Jesus ever performed was to provide beverages at a party. The most important miracle Jesus ever performed: feeding the multitude. Whenever Jesus did miracles of creation, it was always food or drink. He never created houses or clothes or boats or money or animals or anything else—always food and drink. The night before Jesus died, of all the things he could have done with his disciples, he shared a meal.

Luke 22:15 ... I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

And Jesus gave us only one ongoing ritual in the Christian faith. Other religions might have hundreds of rituals; we have just one, and it's the Lord's *supper*.

Eating and drinking plays a massive role in the plan of redemption. But I haven't even told you about the most important one—the biggest one of all. It's the biggest one, and yet, you might not have even heard of it.

The Promised Messianic Banquet

It's known as the great Messianic Banquet—a giant meal that will take place at the end of the age.

⁶ Jesus preached to them all day, and then at the end of the day performed the feeding miracle. Often people point to passages like this to support the idea that we must first meet people's physical needs, then their spiritual needs. But Jesus' approach here was exactly the opposite. First he addressed their spiritual needs, and only after that did he give them food for their physical hunger.

⁷ The one exception is ch.16, if we take the short ending, which only has 8 verses.

Isaiah 25:6 On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-- the best of meats and the finest of wines.

That banquet was the end times event that God's people were looking forward to more than anything, because it will be at that banquet where God will put in place all the glories and delights of the age to come.

8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces.

Suffering, sorrow, and death are all eliminated forever starting at that banquet.

Repeat of the Provision at the Exodus

We don't have time to go through everything the OT says about that banquet, but I'll give you a couple details. The Messiah will be the one who will give this feast, and the way he'll do it is he'll transform the barren wilderness into a lush, green paradise.⁸

Isaiah 49:9 They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill.

And then, just as Moses arranged the people in 100's and 50's in the wilderness in Exodus 10:21, the Messiah will do the same thing at the Banquet.⁹

Central Point of Eschatology

Excitement about the Messianic Banquet was a huge deal for God's people back then, but for some strange reason, Christians nowadays don't talk much about it. They talk about the rapture or the battle of Armageddon or Judgment Day, but not the Banquet. But back then it was such a big topic that if you just said, "*the feast*" everyone would know exactly what you're talking about. Jesus did that in Matthew 8.

Matthew 8:11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast ... in the kingdom of heaven.

No one said, "Which feast?" For them, the phrase, "the feast" was like the phrase, "The Second Coming" for us.¹⁰

Jesus Paints a Picture

Ok, so with all that background, let's see if we can understand the meaning of what Jesus does here.

39 Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass.

Green grass? Isn't that interesting? Up to now, all we knew was this was a remote, uninhabited place. So you would naturally assume a desert or wilderness.¹¹ Now, all of a sudden, they're in **green**

⁸ Most rabbis by this time believed that the Messianic Banquet would take place in a lush paradise like the Garden of Eden. (Daniel S. Steffen, Professor of New Testament, Central American Theological Seminary. "The Messianic Banquet and the Eschatology of Matthew" Excerpt from his doctoral thesis found at the following web site: http://www.bible.org/docs/nt/books/mat/banquet.htm#P43_12984.

⁹ See in the Qumran documents, CD xiii. 1; 1QS ii. 21; 1QSa i. 14 f.; 1QM iv. 1-5 f (cited by NICNT).

¹⁰ And like the Second Coming today, the details of the Messianic Banquet were controversial and were much debated with numerous different views.

¹¹ The word for *uninhabited place* and the word for *desert* or *wilderness* are the same word in the Greek. Usually uninhabited places were uninhabited because they were wilderness or desert areas. In this case, it was a grassy uninhabited area. Using the word for "uninhabited" called to mind the wilderness setting of the Exodus, and the mention of the grass called to mind the garden paradise connected with the Messianic Banquet expectation.

grass.¹² And when Mark says **Jesus directed them to sit down in the grass**—that’s not the normal word for sitting. It’s the word **recline**, and its use of reclining at a banquet. At a normal meal, the people would sit in chairs like we do. But at a banquet, they would lay down on their side and eat. And Jesus tells the disciples, “Have all the people lay down in the grass, like they would recline at a banquet. Get them ready for a banquet.”

So Jesus comes as a shepherd and makes them lie down in green grass. What does that remind you of?

Psalm 23:1 The LORD is my shepherd ... He makes me lie down in green pastures.

And on top of all that, look how he arranges the people.

40 So they reclined in groups of hundreds and fifties.¹³

Neon Sign

Do you see what Jesus is doing? The plush, green grass in the wilderness, reclining for a banquet, groups of 100’s and 50’s. He might as well just put up a flashing neon sign that says, “Messianic Banquet.” He’s creating a scene here that mirrors all the details and trappings of the great Messianic Feast.

Can you imagine what this was like when the disciples started telling the people all this? “He wants us to do what? Lie down in these green pastures? He wants us to recline for a banquet out here in the middle of nowhere?” “Yes please, and if you wouldn’t mind, get in groups of 100’s and 50’s.” “100’s and 50’s? Who does he think he is? Moses?” “Well, since you bring it up, he’s the new Moses—the ultimate Moses. He’s the Messiah, who will spread a table in the desert. He’s the one who will gather all God’s people together and serve them at the great end times Feast and usher in the final, glorious form of the kingdom of God where there will be no more suffering or sadness or death.” That’s the message of everything Jesus is doing here to set this up.

No Food He has masterfully set up the scene to include every detail of the feast except one: the food. There’s still no food. The disciples do a little scrounging and can only come up with 5 biscuits and two little fish. That’s one biscuit for every 1000 families. Can you imagine what’s running through these people’s minds? Jesus has them all reclining for a banquet, and they’re all staring at this handful of biscuits.

Anyone can claim to be the Messiah, but what proof is there? Jesus is going to have to do a miracle—and a big one if he’s going to prove he’s the one. How about this—how about if he does something on the scale of the greatest miracle worker in the OT (Elisha)? In 2 Kings 4, a group of 100 prophets were gathered, and there was no food. And after a couple failed attempts to provide food, finally someone shows up with some barley cakes.

¹² In John’s account he makes a point of saying, **There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men reclined** (John 6:10).

¹³ Up to this point in the book of Mark, the crowds do nothing but hinder Jesus’ ministry. A couple times they almost crush Jesus—where he is in physical danger. They are clamoring, chaotic, uncontrolled, uncontrollable, and the farther you get in the book, the worse they get until it reaches a peak at the beginning of ch.6. The 12 come back from their mission, and the crowds are so out of control that they can’t even eat. And in v.31 Mark describes them as **coming and going**. They’re not sitting in rows taking notes and raising their hand if they have a question. They are milling, they are coming and going, in and out—it’s total chaos. It’s like the uncontrollable, undulating waves of the sea, which the people at that time thought of as the ultimate example of uncontrollable chaos. So Jesus and the 12 flee, they get to the other side, and the crowd is even bigger—the biggest crowd yet. So you expect this to be the worst, most uncontrollable chaos of all. But what does Jesus do? He tells them to all sit down in an ordered, structured formation and they do it. He finally tames the crowd. He’s got them all sitting in rank and file in an idyllic setting. Sitting was the posture of the Gadarean demoniac that showed he was sane. From this point on, the crowds are never a problem again in Jesus’ ministry (They do act up again at the crucifixion, but they are no longer a hindrance to Jesus’ ministry.) They still show up again and again, but you never see them cause any problems like before. From here on out, when Jesus is finished, he simply dismisses the crowd and they leave.

2 Kings 4:42 A man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing the man of God twenty loaves of barley bread ... along with some ears of new corn. "Give it to the people to eat," Elisha said. 43 "How can I set this before a hundred men?" his servant asked. But Elisha answered, "Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the LORD says: `They will eat and have some left over.'" 44 Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD.

That's a pretty amazing miracle, feeding 100 men with 20 small barley cakes and some corn. So when the disciples come up with barley cakes, and there is a big crowd to feed, everyone immediately thinks about Elisha's miracle.¹⁴ The details are all the same. There's a need for a lot of food, and someone brings the barley cakes. The miracle worker instructs the assistants to feed the multitude themselves, and they object, saying it's impossible. The difference is, in Jesus' case, instead of 20 cakes for 100 men, there's only 3 cakes for 5000 families. Jesus does that. He takes the greatest miracles of the OT and blows them out of the water by doing the same miracle in a far greater way.

So, does Jesus feed this multitude? Not yet. There's one more thing he needs to do first.

41 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks¹⁵ and broke the loaves.¹⁶

The Blessing Jesus always gave thanks for his food before eating, and every believer should do the same. But there's something else here. All of that language is a description of what the head of a household would do at a family meal. The family would sit down at the table, and the head of the

¹⁴ This is especially true since people generally didn't eat barley. It wasn't very tasty and was mostly used for feeding animals. Israel is a land very rich in wheat, so even most poor people could afford wheat bread.

¹⁵ When it says he gave thanks, literally it's he offered a blessing. But he didn't bless the food. He blessed God. There's nothing in the Bible about blessing food. No matter how much you try to bless that doughnut for the nourishment of your body, it's going to be just as fattening as ever. We don't bless the food, we thank God for the food. The Jews had a tradition of doing that before and after every family meal. Jesus purposely ignored many of the Jewish traditions. He routinely trampled on traditions that they thought were sacred. But this was a tradition he always followed. Jesus never eats any food in the Bible without first offering a blessing. And it's important for us to do that too.

1 Timothy 4:4 For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

When we give thanks for our food, it sets that food apart as special, because we recognize it as a gift from God. Thankfulness to God for our food is not a small thing. It's one of the reasons for our unity in the church. The church in Rome had been fighting over the controversy about whether or not to eat meat, and here's what Paul said:

Romans 14:6 ... he who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

If the person is grateful to God for his food, then he's honoring God so don't look down on him because of minor disagreements.

1 Corinthians 10:30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

Always thank God for your food and for everything else he provides for you.

¹⁶ People have struggled to understand the significance of this miracle in relationship with the Lord's Supper. On the one hand, there are several components that seem to point to communion.

* The two miracles of creation that Jesus performed involved creating bread and wine.

* Right after doing this miracle Jesus talks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

* In this account we see the terms, "take, break, bless" and "give." We see all 4 of those terms in every account of the feeding of the 5000, every account of the feeding of the 4000, and every account of the Lord's Supper (including the one in 1 Co.11).

So there seems to be a connection. But on the other hand, this happened before there was such a thing as communion, and so there is no way the people could have understood that to be the meaning.

So what are we to make of the similarities? I think the answer is simple. The feeding of the multitude happened first. It's not that this is supposed to remind you of the Lord's Supper. It's that the Lord's Supper is supposed to remind you of this. The reason that kind of language is always used in the descriptions of communion, is because communion is also being described in terms of a family meal. Communion is another picture of the fellowship we have with the Lord, and serves as a precursor and picture and reminder and promise of that wonderful, blessed Messianic Feast. Communion is a great picture of everything that was symbolized in this miracle. Jesus took one lunch and used it to feed everyone who partook. And Jesus would later offer himself as the infinite supply of spiritual food and nourishment for all those who will partake.

household would break the bread, bow his head, and give thanks. So Jesus is treating this massive crowd, which represents the whole nation of Israel, as a family. And Jesus is the head of the household. The only difference is he looks up for the prayer instead of down. The traditional way was to bow the head in this prayer, but Jesus looks up because he has a special relationship with the Father.

The Miracle

So here they all are, reclining for a banquet. The blessing has been given... Thousands of people ready to eat, sitting there staring at these 5 little biscuits.

41 ...Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.

It sounds like he multiplied that food enough to give a portion to each of the disciples. And then as they took their portion to each group of 50 or 100, as they passed the food down the line, it just kept multiplying.¹⁷

42 They all ate and were satisfied.

Satisfied means they were full. Everyone in that crowd, after going all day without food, ate and ate and ate until they were stuffed. Some of them are loosening their belts. And one of the disciples came up and said, “Hey, there’s some more fish...” “Oh, no—I can’t eat another bite.”

This dwarfs what Elisha did. And what about the last part? When Elisha did it, they had leftovers. How about Jesus?

43 and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.

Jesus is the ultimate prophet, the ultimate Moses, the ultimate shepherd of the sheep, the ultimate David, now he shows himself greater than Elisha. And the biggest difference between him and Elisha is that Elisha didn’t do the miracle. The power came from God the Father. But Jesus feeds this multitude by his own power. Jesus isn’t just the ultimate miracle worker; he is God himself. Jesus Christ is Almighty God in human flesh.

Provision for the Twelve

And one more thing about the leftovers. Why does Jesus have them go around collecting all the scraps? What is this? Keep Bethsaida clean month? No. Jesus is teaching another principle—a beautiful one. How many baskets of food are left over? Twelve. How many disciples are there? Twelve. These are small wicker baskets that the Jews used for lunchboxes.¹⁸ Jesus is making a statement to these men. “You’ve left everything to follow me; I’ll take care of your needs.”

¹⁷ I assume it happened that way just because it doesn’t seem like there would be enough time for Jesus to personally hand out enough food for this size crowd.

¹⁸ Jews were known for always carrying around these baskets. They carried kosher food around in them, because they had to make sure they didn’t violate their dietary restrictions.

The precision of this miracle is amazing. Jesus provides somewhere around five tons of food, everyone eats as much as they want, they pick up every last scrap of leftovers (see John 6:12), and it fills 12 little lunchboxes. At our church we have a potluck with 100 people and we carry out five huge garbage bags of trash. My brother-in-law works for Young Life and is often in charge of feeding large crowds. I asked him how many leftovers they would have in feeding a crowd this size, and he said with the tight budgets and the desire for good stewardship, they have honed their process to the point where they have what is considered essentially a one hundred percent yield – meaning they come as close as possible to no wasted food at all. In a family-style meal, Young Life can feed a large crowd and make sure they don’t run out of anything and everyone gets fed, and they still only end up with an average of four ounces of leftover food per person. They have that down to a science. Getting it that close is considered in the industry to be as close to a one hundred percent yield as it is possible to get.

But even with that kind of efficiency, if Young Life fed a crowd of five thousand families, four ounces of leftovers per person would be between three and five tons of leftover food. Jesus only has twelve lunchboxes left over. This is a miracle of incredible

Purpose of the Banquet

Let's talk for a minute about the Messianic Banquet. So why is God going to kick off the eternal age with a big feast? A few reasons.

Provision

For one, it symbolizes God's rich, bountiful provision in the age to come and represents all the blessings of eternal life.

Ezekiel 34:29 I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops.

God wants us to look forward to a time when there will be unlimited provision—everything we will ever need.¹⁹ The reason God begins the age to come with a huge, sumptuous feast is to point to the fact that we will enjoy unlimited provision of every kind—food, money, friends, protection²⁰—every kind of resource we will ever need—every spiritual need, every emotional need, every physical need, will all be spread out on a banquet table before you, and all your troubles will be eliminated forever. It's going to be a time of intensive joy. Not only will the tears of sadness be wiped away, but they will be replaced by huge smiles and laughs and tears of happiness. The purpose of mentioning the rich food and choice wine is to make it clear that it will be a time of great pleasure.

precision. Normally God does not do that. Since when is God into economy? Every time there is a cup in the Bible it is always overflowing. Almost every page of the Bible talks about God's superabundance. When God waters the ground, He does not conserve water by making the rain land only on the grass and crops. He just dumps rain all over your house and in the streets and on the lakes and everywhere. Of all the rays that go out from the sun in every direction, only one ray actually hits the earth – and heats the whole planet. Only one billionth of the sun's energy actually hits the earth. All the other heat just goes out into space and is wasted. Enough food is now grown in the world to provide each resident of the planet with almost four pounds of food per day. There is such a food glut that our government pays farmers to back off on growing crops so we aren't buried in food. When God decided He wanted to adorn the skies a little bit, He threw some lights up there. And when we built telescopes for a closer look we found countless billions of galaxies. When God provides, it is always massive, overflowing excess. So the precision of this miracle stands out as different. I am not denying that it shows the richness of His generous bounty – the largest crowd ever and everyone ate as much as they wanted and there were leftovers. That is a lot of food, but why the precision?

It is not too hard to figure out. Twelve guys collect leftovers from thirty thousand people and end up with exactly twelve lunchboxes full? Not eleven, not thirteen – twelve lunchboxes? Jesus is making a statement about His provision for the Twelve. There is no way they could miss the number twelve. Jesus is saying, "This is for you. I'm going to provide for you guys."

¹⁹ Israel is promised bountiful provisions in their land as blessings that will follow repentance and obedience (Isa 1:19; 9:3; 27:2-6, 12, 13; 29:17-24; 30:19-29; 32:1-8; 49:6-13; 51:3; 55:1, 2). This bountiful future is directly related to the coming of the Messiah (Isa 9:6-7; 24:23; 11:1-5; 42:1-9; 49:6-13) and the gathering of dispersed Israel back into the land (Isa 24:23; 26:1-4, 15-19; 27:6, 13; 35:1-10; 43:5-7; 45:20; 49:8-13; 22-23; 51:11-14; 54:7; 60:4-14). Israel is protected and fed as the Messiah leads them back into the land of promised blessings (Isa 49:10). These messianic blessings are not exclusive to Israel, but include blessings upon all the nations (Isa 2:1-4; 9:1; 11:10-12; 18:7; 19:18-25; 25:6-8; 42:6, 7; 49:6, 7; 49:22, 23; 56:3; 61:7; 66:21). The nations have a participatory role in the return of Israel (Isa 2:1-4; 49:22-23; 56:3-8; 60:10, 11; 66:21). Daniel S. Steffen, Professor of New Testament, Central American Theological Seminary. "The Messianic Banquet and the Eschatology of Matthew" Excerpt from his doctoral thesis found at the following web site: http://www.bible.org/docs/nt/books/mat/banquet.htm#P43_12984.

²⁰ Deliverance is another major theme in connection with the banquet. The clearest statement in the OT about the Messianic Banquet is the one we looked at in Isaiah 25, and that chapter is all about how God will provide deliverance for Israel from her enemies.

There was a lot of variety of opinion about the Messianic Banquet. The Jews of Jesus' time who wrote about the end times went in every conceivable direction when they wrote about the Banquet. They had as many different theories about the Banquet as we have about end times issues like the rapture. But there was one thing they all had in common. Every place where you read about this banquet, whether it's in the Old Testament, the intertestamental period, the Dead Sea Scrolls, or the rabbinic literature—every place where you read about the Messianic Banquet, you also read about the defeat and destruction of Israel's enemies and deliverance from all her troubles.

Intimacy

So that's one reason for the Banquet—to symbolize infinite provision. Another reason has to do with intimacy. Sharing a meal with someone is an act of friendship—even more so back then than it is now. Eating together was something only close friends did. And so this Banquet shows God's closeness with his people.

Revelation 3:20 I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

It's more than just enjoying great food. It's about enjoying great food while sitting across the table from the Lord Jesus Christ. You will be smiling and laughing and enjoying the conversation at the table with the Lord, and saying, "Pass the prime rib," and the Lord will say, "Wait until you see what I made for dessert..."²¹ You will be completely comfortable with him because your sins will be so long forgotten, there won't be anything between you and the Lord. Even though we will have a greater awe and reverence and fear of him then then we do now, and even though we will fall on our faces in worship before his staggering glory, paradoxically, at the same time he will embrace us as friends!

We long for intimacy with God, but it's hard now because God is invisible. We are physical beings, and intimacy with someone we can't experience through our physical senses is very difficult.²² On the day of that banquet, and from then on, that difficulty will be gone. That's why we look forward to the Feast.

Point: Jesus' Identity

So, Jesus set everything up to point to the Messianic Feast, but did the Feast happen that day? No. Jesus didn't eliminate all suffering, sorrow, and death that day. It wasn't the Feast. It was an announcement of the fact that the feast is coming, and that it's Jesus Christ who is going to make it happen. If you want to make sure you understand this miracle, realize that its main purpose is to teach us *who Jesus is*.

John tells us that the next day asking for more bread, Jesus said, "Don't you get it? *I'm the bread*. What you need the most is not physical bread to give strength to your body, but spiritual bread to give life to your soul. And that bread is me." And if you don't get that, you completely misunderstand the miracle.²³

The Wait Staff

So Jesus proved that he has both the power and the compassion to be the one to spread out the Messianic Banquet someday. But what about in the meantime—right now? Right now, in this age, Jesus

²¹ Jesus said he's going to be the one serving. **Luke 12:37 ... I tell you the truth, [the master] will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.**

²² Normally you get close to someone through your senses. You talk to the person and you can hear his tone of voice and inflections that indicate what's in his heart. You can see the expressions and smiles and frowns on the person's face. There are physical expressions like a handshake or hug or pat on the back, or kiss—all kinds of physical, tangible interactions. But how do you do that with God? It is possible. You can learn the emotions in his heart not by seeing facial expressions, but by learning of him from his Word. You can experience his pleasure or displeasure, not by hearing the tone of his voice, but by knowing from Scripture what pleases or displeases him. You can enjoy his love, not through physical expressions, but by understanding how to interpret the blessings that come your way. So you can interact with God, but in this life it isn't easy.

²³ Don't interpret this miracle to say that God will miraculously supply you with food or other resources. The unlimited food and resources come in the next life, not in this life. After this day, when the disciples were hungry they had to get food the normal way. In the years they followed Christ, how many meals did they eat? Two or three meals a day for 2 and a half years—maybe 2 or 3 thousand meals? How many times did Jesus supply food with a miracle? Four (counting the miraculous catch of fish, which he did twice). All the other meals they had to get the normal way.

The other two times the miracle was misunderstood was when the disciples were shocked that Jesus could walk on water (failure to understand who he is) and when he gave them a lesson about spiritual "yeast" and they took it as a reference to physical bread (focus on the physical instead of the spiritual).

is putting in place the first stage of that Banquet, which is spiritual feeding through the gospel. And we have a role in that.

It's not incidental that the disciples played a role in this miracle. Jesus went out of his way to involve them. And the way he involved them is instructive for how he involves us in gospel ministry. He takes them through three steps.

Tests Our Attitude

First, he tested their attitude to see if they would rely on themselves or on him.

36 Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." 37 But he answered, "You give them something to eat."

John tells us that was a test to see if they would obey and trust in his resources, or if they would trust in their own resources and be stymied.²⁴ How do they do? Not great.

37 ...They said to him, "That would take two hundred day's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"²⁵

Jesus asked for faith and instead they give him mathematics. Jesus didn't ask "How much will it cost?" He said, "**You give them something to eat.**" He was looking for obedience and faith, not a lecture on how impossible it was.

Makes us understand how little we have to offer

Another thing this did was force them to realize how inadequate their own resources were without him.

38 "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five-and two fish."²⁶

The crowd had run here on a moment's notice, and no one brought food (except for this one poor kid whose mom said, "Get back here. You're not going anywhere without your lunch!"). It must have been a poor family, because she packs him barley biscuits. The fish would have been little tiny ones that were pickled and used as a relish to help the barley bread go down. That has to be the worst job of supplying food for a crowd I have ever seen. You may think what you have to offer is so little, it's not even worth offering. Think again. God allows you to be so inadequate so that when he does his work you won't be confused about where the power came from.

²⁴ John tells us that Jesus specifically singled out Philip when he said this, and it was a test (John 6:5). Philip was from that area (Bethsaida).

This is not to suggest that Jesus expected the disciples to assume Jesus would perform a miracle every time there was a problem. When Jesus told them to cross the lake, they didn't assume he would fly them across. They got the boat ready. This case is different because Jesus told them to do something that was humanly impossible. It's not appropriate to assume Jesus will do a miracle unless he specifically tells you to do the impossible.

²⁵ If you think of a day's wage as about \$150, then 200 day's wages would be \$30,000.

Picking up the tab at a restaurant is one thing, but \$30,000 is something else—especially when your organization only has 13 people. And Philip does the math and figures out that even if they spent that much, it wouldn't be enough just for each person in the crowd to have a single bite." (John 6:7)

The financial aspect was only the tip of the iceberg. Even if they had enough money, if each person had 16 ounces of food, that would be 2.5 tons of food just to feed the men. If it's the same amount for the women and children, that's 5 tons of food. How would they even transport that much food?

²⁶ John tells us that it was Andrew (Simon Peter's brother) who found this food. And he didn't just bring the food to Jesus – he brought the boy.)

Offer what you have

Then the third step—they give the food to Jesus. The issue isn't what you have to offer; it's that you offer what you have. Do you think Jesus would have had trouble if Andrew only found 2 barley biscuits instead of 5? No. This is the way serving the Lord works: you offer what you have, and God does great things for his kingdom with it. But not until you give him what you have. Andrew thought he was just bringing a few useless scraps to Jesus. But he was wrong. What he was bringing to Jesus was material for a miracle. Your little bit you have to offer is not a little bit—it's miracle material.

If the only purpose of this miracle were for Jesus to show his power, he could have done that without any loaves and fishes. It would have been even more impressive if he would have said, "Ok everyone, look—see? Nothing up my sleeves." Then, "Let there be food!" and a huge banquet just popped out of the thin air. Or he could have had 10,000 plates full of food just come floating down out of the sky with little parachutes. But Jesus is doing more than just showing his power to provide. He's also teaching something about the role he wants his servants to play.

He wants us to do what we can do before he takes it and does great things with it. We can't change men's hearts, but we can proclaim the gospel. And so God waits for us to proclaim the gospel before he changes men's hearts. We can't bring people joy or hope or courage or strength or love or faith or anything they need; but we can encourage them with the word of God using whatever spiritual gifts we have. So God waits for us to do that before he does the work in their heart. God wants to minister to people, but he wants to do it *through you*.²⁷

Give it ... to Jesus

When Jesus asks us, "What do you have?" we can get real possessive with whatever the answer is. We can get real possessive about our plans for the weekend, or some money we have saved in the bank. And we get real nervous because we're afraid Jesus is going to ask us to give it away. And he does. But to whom? Not to the crowd. Giving 5 biscuits and two fish to a huge crowd of people would accomplish nothing. No, Jesus asks, "What do you have?" and then wants you to give it to *him*. Offer everything you have to him and trust him to do great things with it.

Attempt Great Things

There was a young cobbler in England who had a heart for the needy people in India. He was in his mid-20's and had no formal training in theology. That's not much to offer. But he wanted to reach the lost and so he presented his idea to the mission board. One of the men on that board said, "Sit down young man. If God wants to reach the heathen, he can do it without your help or mine." A few months later the young man preached a sermon in that church, and that man, in his mid 20's uttered these words that have reverberated down through history. "Attempt great things for God; expect great things from God." And that's exactly what he did. He went to India and became the father of modern missions. Only God knows how many millions of souls will be in heaven instead of hell because that humble cobbler offered what he had and trusted God.

Conclusion

²⁷ I find it encouraging that God not only starts with what you offer, but instead of adding to it, he multiplies it. He didn't take their loaves and fishes and add 5 tons of lamb chops and roast beef. The entire meal was from what they offered, which made for a strange banquet. Normally, if there is a big, all-you-can-eat banquet, it wouldn't be a poor man's food (barley). Jesus takes our meager offerings and does great things with those, not by adding to them, but by multiplying them so we can see it really is what we offered that is supplying the need. When we make our efforts to serve Christ, it's not like our contribution is like a little toddler "helping" mom do a task and actually contributing nothing. No, Jesus actually uses our contribution.

So what is the meaning of this miracle? Does it mean every time we miss a meal or get into some kind of jam Jesus will do a miracle and make everything better? No, not in this life. In this life you will have all kinds of trouble. The meaning of this miracle isn't about things working out well for us in this life.

The meaning of this miracle is about who Jesus is. He is the Messiah, the greater than Moses, greater than David, greater than Elisha who proved he has the power to bring about the Messianic Banquet when the time comes. And he is the Good Shepherd who has deep compassion on his people. And so our hope is not on our circumstances getting better in this life. Our hope is simply in knowing the Lord Jesus Christ and trusting him, because divine power plus divine compassion equals everything you need.