



John 6:1-14

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

NKJ John 6:1 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."

It's interesting to note that aside from the resurrection, this is the only miracle that is recorded in all four gospels. Now when that happens, we would be foolish not to realize that the Holy Spirit is attempting to draw our attention to it, and the reason for that is no doubt the great light it sheds on who Jesus is and what he came to do.

Now just prior to this at the end of chapter 5, you may remember that Jesus had spoken of Moses as a witness pointing to Him, and while the Jews of Jerusalem may have refused to believe that Moses was speaking out about Jesus when he said "***The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear***" these Galileans recognize that Jesus really is that ultimate prophet Moses spoke of. And indeed this whole chapter is full of clues that tell us that Jesus is like Moses, but infinitely greater.

For instance, there is no way anyone familiar with Moses' writings, can read this story of miraculously feeding a multitude in the wilderness with bread, and not think of the Manna. We see that as God

provided for the physical needs of His people, His Son Jesus is the true supplier of man's greater need. The manna that rained down daily on the people in the wilderness was called *the bread of heaven* in the OT, but that Manna was still physical bread that perishes, they couldn't even keep it without it becoming wormy and inedible. Men ate of it and it sustained their lives for a time, but it could never give them eternal life. This passage teaches us that Jesus is the true bread of heaven, who gives those who come to Him eternal life.

Well let's talk briefly about the context for this miracle. In His gospel Matthew tells us that John the Baptist has just been executed, and the Apostles have just returned from being sent by Jesus on their first evangelism trip, they have been preaching the gospel and healing throughout the towns of Galilee, now Jesus withdraws to the far side of the Lake of Galilee near Bethsaida to privately speak with them.

But a great crowd of people follows him running around the lake shore. John tells us they were more interested in His miracles than His teachings. But they still wanted to be where Jesus was, you have to remember these miracles are the most exciting thing that has happened to the Jewish people after four hundred years of silence. They had this sense that now God was going to do something big, and they wanted to be there to see.

Now please notice that verse 4 tells us the time of year, this is not just an incidental detail. It is near the Passover. That would make this year 2 of Jesus' three year ministry. John uses these Passovers as important markers in the ministry of Christ. At the first Passover in John 2, Christ identified himself as the true temple that would be destroyed and rebuilt in three days, in this the second Passover, later in this chapter Christ will identify himself as the true bread that will be given for the life of the world, and of course the third Passover comes at the time of Christ's sacrifice. So each of these Passovers point forward to the sacrifice of Christ as the true Passover Lamb. It is no wonder then that Paul is able to say in 1 Cor. 5:7 *"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."*

A huge crowd of people have come running out to the wilderness to see Jesus, but where are they going to get food? Jesus asks that question of Phillip to test him and indirectly to teach the disciples. Phillip is the obvious one to ask because he came from the nearby town of Bethsaida, he could be expected to know where bread could be bought and for how much. But Phillip utterly fails the test, he is thinking still thinking entirely in natural terms. So his answer is that this is impossible for them to achieve. Two Hundred Denari - Eight Months Wages – wouldn't give each of them a bite. He had not yet learned *"The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."*

As Mark Johnson points out *"God provides for his people in a way that defies reason. There was no feasible, natural solution to the problem of the hungry crowd; the answer had to be supernatural."* So too is the greater problem of our spiritual need of salvation, there was no *natural* way for our sins to be forgiven. The answer to that had to be supernatural.

Most of you probably know this but Liberal theologians, who dismiss the possibility of the miraculous, butcher this miracle. They assert that the miracle was simply Jesus shaming people into sharing their hidden food. *"Look this little boy is willing to give up his lunch... can't you do more?"* This is patently ridiculous, they'd come running after Jesus, the verses say "They ate as much as they wanted, they were filled" and that afterwards they took away 12 BASKETS! Imagine a ridiculous scene where men came running after Jesus with a loaf of French bread and a bunch of fish hidden in their tunics and you'll get the idea.

But it shouldn't surprise us that they make Jesus the founder of socialism on a hillside in Galilee. They do the same thing with salvation, changing from what it is – something miraculous only God can provide for us, into something we bring about through our own good works.

But what Jesus actually did is to multiply the meager lunch of five loaves and two fish carried by a little boy whose mother had no doubt been concerned that he not go out without something to eat. [This is in essence the ancient equivalent of a little brown bag with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.]

Jesus takes them and after giving thanks to God, saying grace – *and I hope you see that if Jesus thanked the Father for His food before eating you should too* – he began breaking pieces off and didn't stop.

In the end there is much more food left over than what he started with. God is indeed “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20) Why twelve baskets, well admittedly this is just conjecture but it was probably to show that Jesus as Messiah had enough to satisfy the spiritual needs of all Israel, all 12 tribes.

The miracle confirms to the crowd that Jesus is indeed the great prophet that Moses spoke of in Deut. 18:15 and 19. In these details of course, the provision of bread in the wilderness, we see one like Moses but greater than him. In a little while, Jesus is going to make the point, that Moses didn't give the people the Manna – the bread, God did. Well here, Jesus gave the people the bread in a way that showed them HE is God.

Unfortunately we'll see next week that the crowd was too happy with just bread. They failed to realize that they had greater needs that were more than physical, they would have been happy with a Christ who would give them bread, and establish a Utopian kingdom on earth.

Well what applications can we take away from this, there are many, but I want to suggest three:

First, what are you Hungry for? Is it just bread or the bread of heaven? I spoke on the phone this week to Berti Kona, our missionary to Albania, and he remarked on how hungry the people of the church were for the preaching of the word. The Christians there have so little of the word, but they can't get enough. Over here, by contrast we have so much, and yet it seems like Pastors have to do the choo-choo train trick with the people to get them to take in any at all. You know what I mean, here comes the choo-choo, open the tunnel. But we don't have to do the Choo-Choo thing to get people to eat the food the world serves. Calvin put it this way: ***“Very rarely does it happen that Christ finds us free and disengaged from the entanglements of the world. So far is every one of us from being ready to follow him to a desert mountain, that scarcely one in ten can endure to receive him, when he presents himself at home in the midst of comforts. And though this disease prevails nearly throughout the whole world, yet it is certain that no man will be fit for the kingdom of God until, laying aside such delicacy, he learn to desire the food of the soul so earnestly that his belly shall not hinder him.”***

Christians, unless you hunger and thirst for righteousness, and desire the bread of heaven more than the bread of the world, something is seriously wrong. Christ is the bread of heaven and it is only through His word that we have eternal life - “man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.”

Secondly, as Ryle points out in today's Sabbath meditation, we learn here an important lesson about ministry. Our calling like that of the apostles is merely to distribute that which Christ has provided. We do not create the word, we do not stand, as the Priests claim, between men and God, we cannot forgive sin or save anyone by our own power. We certainly can't give you a new heart and cause you to believe, that is a work that only God can and does do. We need to remember that because too often we either begin to think we are the ones who save, or worse we begin to think God's word, and God's means are inadequate. We need to think of that as being the same as if the Apostles had received the fish and bread from the hands of Jesus, chucked them away, and then stooped down and picked up dirt and pressed it together and handed that out. People can eat dirt, but lets just say that the nutritional content is lacking, and the taste leaves something to be desired. I want to suggest that one of the reasons the modern church is in such a shambles is that dirt diet.

Which brings me to my last point: The world looks at the Gospel, as the disciples looked at the five small loaves and two fishes and says it is not enough. But brothers and sisters it is that gospel and that alone as Christ multiplies it that can meet all the spiritual necessities of mankind. As Ryle said: *"It is not worn out. It is not obsolete. It has not lost its power. We need nothing new--nothing more broad and kind--nothing more intellectual--nothing more effectual. We need nothing but the true bread of life, distributed faithfully among starving souls. Let men sneer or ridicule as they will. Nothing else can do good in this sinful world. No other teaching can fill hungry consciences, and give them peace. We are all in a wilderness. We must feed on Christ crucified, and the atonement made by His death, or we shall die in our sins."*