

Feeding the 5000 John 6:1-15
(See also (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17))

Introduction: John records that this miracle took place shortly before the Feast of the Passover. Jesus had a 3-year ministry. In John 2:13 He was in Jerusalem for one Passover, this one in John 6 is the second Passover and He will be in Jerusalem for one more immediately before the crucifixion. The miracle of feeding the 5000 took place approximately half way through Jesus' ministry. This was the peak of His popularity. From here on His popularity will begin to diminish because of the demands that He will make on His disciples. Ultimately it will reach the point where the crowds will call for His crucifixion.

Setting: This miracle took place on the back side of the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is approximately 13 miles by 7 miles so those who wanted to see him perform more miracles had hiked approximately 10 miles. The crowds were looking to Jesus to perform miracles and to feed them. There was a belief in the days of Jesus that the Messiah would provide food for them just as Moses had provided manna in the wilderness.

A challenge: There are many ways to view this passage. This passage has often been used as an example of the compassion of Jesus and the importance of meeting the physical needs of individuals. We are going to look at it as a picture of the way God can meet our deepest needs, needs that physical bread can never really provide for. John selected the various miracles, so we would see Jesus and believe in Him and what He wants to do for each of us. Before John finishes this section, he will quote Jesus in verse 35 saying "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

The problem: Matthew tells us that Jesus performed numerous miracles that day and as evening approached the disciples decided that it was time to send them home. Jesus turned to Philip and asked where they could buy bread for them. Jesus probably asked this of Philip because according to John 1:44 Philip was from this region and certainly would have known if there were any shops in the area that might have a quantity of food. Jesus is asking the question of how to feed them, but Philip immediately pulls out his calculator and decides it is too expensive even if there were places where they could purchase bread. Too often the church is guided by what they think are their resources rather than by what God can do for them.

A test: John noted this was really a test of Philip's faith and along with his faith, the faith of all of the disciples. Jesus began His public ministry by turning jars of water into wine. If anything, the disciples should have learned that Jesus was able to make something out of anything He had at hand. Real faith that sees God in control of all situations is difficult to come to grips with. We often need to learn the same lessons over and over again in different settings. That seems to have been the situation here.

Andrew: Andrew spoke up and noted that a small boy had 5 small barley loaves and 2 small fish. We cannot tell for certain if Thomas was expecting Jesus to do something with this meal or

if he was trying to point out to Jesus that there was little or nothing there to work with. (It was probably another miracle that he hadn't already eaten his lunch.) This lad had very little to offer. He had the food of the poorest of the poorest. Barley was used for bread only in very, very poor homes and the small fish were probably dried sardines which were far more bone than fish.

A lesson: Jesus was able to use what was basically nothing when given to Him by only a lad. We too often look at what we have to offer and decide that God can't use us and our limited talents or meager resources when in reality the smallest meal from an insignificant boy is more than adequate to meet the needs of thousands when given to God first. Had this boy decided to simply share his lunch with someone it would not have gone far but given to Jesus his simple meal became a blessing to many. That is a truth all Christians need to learn.

The miracle: Jesus prayed, and they distribute the food to 5000. Note that Jesus gave thanks. Too few today take time for grace before eating. How can we not be thankful for all God has done for us and for all He provides for us?

The abundance: When the meal was over there was an abundance of food left, 12 baskets full in fact. We should never give to God with the expectation of getting more back but God will not be a debtor to anyone in time or eternity and no gift we can ever give to Him will equal the gift of eternal life He gave to us because of the Cross.

An important lesson: John is not content to let this miracle rest there because Jesus was not willing to let it end there. To understand this miracle, you have to look ahead a few verses to verse 25. Jesus had crossed the Sea but the crowd went around and once again found Jesus. Read what Jesus said to them in verses 26 and 27.

Jesus told them that the real issue was not finding food to feed 5000 so their stomachs would be full for a day but providing that which would satisfy forever. In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus said those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be blessed and filled (Matthew 5:6). He concluded this teaching in verse 40 with the message, "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Physical hunger is real and the God of creation is able to meet that need. Much more real is the spiritual hunger that comes from alienation from God because of sin. That deeper problem is also able to be met by God. John wanted his readers to understand that while Jesus is concerned about physical hunger His heart really breaks for the lost. For that reason He came into the world and for that need He went to the Cross. The lost are at the very heart of His love for us and if His heart breaks for the lost, should not ours also?

The biggest need in any community is not food for the hungry but salvation for the lost. All who accept Him will find not their stomachs but their lives filled to overflowing with that which

satisfies forever. Those who feast at the spiritual table our Lord has prepared for all who trust in Him and you will never thirst or be hungry again for that which is truly real.

Some say they know what to do and can't talk well and are afraid to witness for fear of not doing a good job. Take heart. The smallest and poorest of meals from a mere boy when given to Jesus was the source of a miracle. Perhaps the best you should ever hope to bring to Jesus is a poor lunch knowing that when given to Him it can and will be used for His glory. We have too many Philips in the church who count the cost and assume it cannot be done and too many Andrews who know we only have a little and are sure that is inadequate. What we need to be is like a little child who simply says, "It isn't much and it is all I have but it is all yours if you want it."