

“Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand” **(John 6:1-15)**

Jesus’ miraculous feeding of the five thousand dramatically portrays Him as our powerful, compassionate, creative God and Savior. Jesus drew great crowds because of His miracles. He cared about the physical needs of a hungry crowd, as well as their spiritual needs. Jesus produced abundant bread and fish out of a boy’s lunch. He also taught His disciples the power of faith. The only miracle apart from Jesus’ resurrection that’s recorded in all four Gospels, this miracle reminds us that only Jesus can fully satisfy our greatest needs.

Jesus knows our deepest needs (6:1-4).

Jesus, God’s eternal Son, knows our needs. This fact alone should help us face trials and uncertainties with greater hope and faith. Beyond our basic needs, Jesus also knows our deepest needs, our hunger for meaning and ultimately a relationship with God.

Many people followed Jesus because they had witnessed His miraculous healing power (6:1-2).

A comparison with the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—reveals that Jesus carried on an extensive ministry in Galilee between His healing of the disabled man (John 5:1-15) and the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-15). John picks up the record “after these things” and describes Jesus’ departure across the Sea of Galilee (also called the Sea of Tiberias). The Synoptic Gospels indicate that Jesus was seeking time with His disciples away from the crowds, but the people followed Him nonetheless. In fact, a great crowd pursued Him. These people were motivated by the miraculous signs that Jesus had performed, specifically His healing of the sick. While the motives of the crowd are understandable, they weren’t as praiseworthy as they could have been. Jesus came not only to ease physical suffering; He came also to relieve the deeper issues of sin in human hearts.

Jesus led His disciples to a place where He could teach them and the crowd (6:3-4).

Jesus intentionally went up onto an elevated hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee where He sat with His disciples. From this vantage point Jesus could address a large crowd, teaching their hearts the truths that would speak to the deeper needs of their lives. John states that the Jewish Passover feast was approaching, not only providing a time reference (springtime), but also hinting at the spiritual aspect of Jesus’ ministry. Passover celebrated Israel’s release

from bondage, and Jesus' message proclaimed spiritual freedom from the bondage of sin. Jesus knows our deepest needs. He wants to touch and transform our hearts.

**Jesus invites us to
bring our needs to Him (6:5-9).**

While Jesus is deeply interested in the deepest needs of our hearts, He cares about our basic needs as well. When He saw the hungry crowd, Jesus initiated a plan to meet that most basic need. He invites us to bring our needs to Him.

Jesus tested Philip by asking him how they could provide food for the crowd of hungry followers (6:5-6).

Jesus saw the growing crowd, a crowd that had been following Him for a considerable period of time according to the other Gospel accounts. He knew that the people were worn out and hungry. So Jesus asked Philip, one of His twelve disciples, where they could buy bread to feed such a large crowd. Apparently Jesus wanted to stretch Philip's faith. John mentions that Jesus raised this question with Philip to test him. Jesus already knew that He would perform a great miracle that would satisfy the crowd's physical hunger. Jesus knows our needs and He knows how He'll meet those needs. But Jesus also engages us in the process. Jesus wants us to pray and to trust Him.

Philip pointed out the impossible magnitude of feeding such a large crowd (6:7).

Philip immediately recognized the impossibility of feeding such a large crowd given the resources at hand. Where among the little villages of Galilee would such an amount of bread be readily available? Where would they get enough money to buy that much bread? Philip did a quick calculation and pointed out that two hundred days' wages wouldn't be enough for everyone in the crowd to get even a small taste of bread. The resources simply weren't available. The cost was too great. Philip was about to learn that the greatest resource is Jesus, who alone can do that which is impossible by all other measures.

Andrew identified a boy who had five loaves and two fish (6:8-9).

Andrew, another of Jesus' twelve disciples and the brother of Simon Peter, told Jesus that a boy in the crowd had some food. This boy's lunch consisted of five small barley loaves and two small fish. (John uses a word that indicates a small, salted fish that might be used more as a relish to add flavor.) Then Andrew poses a pregnant question: "But what are these among so many?" Andrew may have anticipated that Jesus would do something miraculous. Jesus had

invited His disciples to consider a solution to the needs of the crowd. He invites us to bring our needs to Him.

**Jesus often meets our needs in
unexpected and abundant ways (6:10-13).**

Jesus was about to perform a great miracle, one of the best known miracles of His entire ministry. He would feed the crowd by multiplying five loaves and two small fish!

Jesus instructed His disciples to have the people sit down (6:10).

The time had come for Jesus to demonstrate once again His divine power. He told His disciples to have the people “recline,” inviting the crowd to rest and be refreshed. It was springtime and the hills were lush with green grass. A more pleasant setting we can’t imagine—a grassy green hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. John states that the “men” (a specific term for males) numbered about five thousand. The total number of people must have been significantly larger than this.

Jesus gave thanks and then divided the bread and the fish until everyone’s need was fully satisfied (6:11).

Jesus took the five barley loaves and the two small fish that the boy had offered and gave thanks. His practice reminds us that we should always express thanks to God for His provisions in our lives, at mealtimes and at all times. Having given thanks, Jesus then divided the loaves and the fish and, with the help of His disciples, passed the food throughout the crowd. With our best imaginations we can barely conceive of what took place. As Jesus broke the loaves, more bread appeared. As Jesus divided the fish, more was already present. There was an endless supply of food, generated by the creative power of Jesus, the one who created the universe (John 1:3). The disciples must have been dumbfounded. Jesus must have been delighted. The people received as much bread and fish as they desired. No one went away hungry that day.

Jesus instructed His disciples to gather the leftovers and they collected enough to fill twelve baskets (6:12-13).

When the people were full, Jesus told His disciples to gather the leftover pieces of bread and fish so that nothing would be wasted. The disciples filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the barley loaves. Apparently each of the twelve disciples received a basket full of bread as a reminder to them of Jesus’ creative, miraculous, compassionate power. Jesus met the needs of the hungry crowd in an unexpected and abundant way.

**Jesus turns our needs into
opportunities to grow in our faith (6:14-15).**

Having met the physical needs of the crowd by feeding them loaves and fish, Jesus redirected the crowd's attention from a physical to a spiritual kingdom.

The people began to think of Jesus as the promised prophet who would deliver them from their physical oppression (6:14).

The people reclining on the Galilean hillside that day witnessed a miracle. Jesus fed over five thousand people by breaking five small loaves and two small fish. The people concluded that Jesus was the prophet whom they expected to come into the world. By “the prophet” they probably had in mind Moses' prediction about a coming prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). This promised prophet would perform miracles and deliver God's people just as Moses had done. With this perspective in mind, the crowd began to cast their eyes on Jesus as a political liberator.

Jesus withdrew in order to prevent the crowd from pursuing their desire to make Him into a king (6:15).

Jesus knew what was brewing in the minds of the crowd that day. The people wanted to make Jesus a king! But Jesus had a different mission. He came to liberate us from our sins. In order to defuse the situation, Jesus dismissed the crowd and left, going by Himself into the surrounding hills. Rather than let the people make Him a king, Jesus wanted the people to grow spiritually. He wanted them to recognize Him as their Messiah and Savior, a spiritual king rather than a political king. From meeting their basic physical needs that day, Jesus turned the crowd away from that which wouldn't meet their true spiritual needs—a political revolution. Jesus fed five thousand, and He went on to die for all. He is our Savior, our Lord, and our King. We can trust Him with life itself, and we can trust Him to grant us eternal life. Only Jesus can fully satisfy our greatest needs.