

Title: **CALCULATING WITHOUT CHRIST**
Text: John 6:1-14
Subject: *Feeding the Five Thousand*
Date: Sunday Morning — March 22, 2009
Tape: John #44
Reading: *Malachi 1:1-14*
Introduction:

Of all miracles performed by our Lord Jesus, the feeding of the five thousand is the only one recorded by each of the four Evangelists (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14). Of all the great works Savior performed, none was done so publicly and before so many witnesses as the feeding of the five thousand. There must be something about that great miracle that is unique and of special importance. Let's read John's account of this great miracle in John 6:1-14. The title of my message is **CALCULATING WITHOUT CHRIST**. My reason for choosing that title will become obvious as we read our text. — **CALCULATING WITHOUT CHRIST**.

(John 6:1-14) “After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is *the sea* of Tiberias. (2) And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. (3) And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. (4) And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. (5) When Jesus then lifted up *his* eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? (6) And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. (7) Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. (8) One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, (9) There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? (10) And Jesus said, Make the men 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 to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. (12) When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. (13) Therefore they gathered *them* together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above

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unto them that had eaten. (14) Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.”

“*After these things*” (v. 1). — “*These things*” refers to those things mentioned in chapter 5: — the healing of the impotent man, — the persecution of the Jews because the Lord Jesus had performed that miracle of mercy on their Sabbath day, — and his lengthy discourse on his deity, power and mission as the Son of Man, the Messiah, the God-man Mediator. After all those things, because they believed him not, our Savior left Jerusalem and went over the Sea of Galilee. He left them to themselves, left them to be damned, believing a lie and clinging to their religious traditions. What a warning to every religious ritualist!

Though he left Jerusalem, a great multitude followed him, “*because they saw his miracles*” (v. 2). Like countless others in every age, these poor souls loved excitement, and found gratification in wonders, but they totally failed to perceive the Savior’s doctrine. They did not trust him as the Son of God, the Savior of sinners, and the promised Messiah (John 2:23-25; John 6:25-26). We see the same thing today. — People everywhere follow clever evangelists, faith healers, miracle workers and religious showmen, but few are interested in Christ the Redeemer, the Savior of poor, needy sinners.

In verses 3 and 4, our Lord withdrew himself even from the crowd that followed him across the Sea of Galilee. Weary with their unbelief, weary with their self-righteousness and empty traditions, he took his disciples up into a quiet, secluded place. The Passover was at hand; and John notes that Lord’s Passover had degenerated into “*a feast of the Jews.*” Though the Passover was near; the “*the Lamb of God,*” who was in their midst, was unknown and unwanted!

TENDER CARE

First, I call your attention to our Savior’s tender care for the needs men. After a while, the Lord Jesus came down from the mountain, and the great multitude that had followed him was still there. Matthew tells us, “*He had compassion on them and healed their sick*” (Matthew 14:14-15). The Master then put Phillip to a strong test. He knew what he was going to do (v. 6); but to test Phillip’s, he asked him, — “*Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?*”

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Phillip was a man much like you and me. He looked at the crowd, saw the need, and began to calculate. He said, “We don’t have enough money to buy a little snack for this many people, let alone to feed them! Two hundred pennyworth of bread would only give each one a “*little*” to eat.” What a sad portrait of us!

- How often in our daily trials and difficult situations, we start to calculate the need, and draw back!
- How often when seeing a work to be done for Christ and the souls of men, we start calculating the need, and draw back!
- Phillip began to calculate his own resources and abilities to accomplish the task of feeding this huge crowd, and said, “Lord, we can’t do it.” — Imagine talking of “*little*” in the presence of infinite power and riches! What is our feebleness compared to his power?
- What is our emptiness compared to his fullness?
- Instead of looking to him, Phillip, like us, looked to himself and his own strength.
- Unbelief is a horribly infectious thing. — In verses 8-9 Andrew, who had been a disciple longer than any of the others, said the same thing; and all the others agreed (Mark 6:37).

(John 6:8-9) “One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith unto him, (9) There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?”

Andrew, Phillip and all the rest of the disciples seem to have forgotten what they had seen, and heard, and learned. They all seem to have been temporarily blinded to the glory and power of Christ. — “There is a boy here with five pieces of bread and two little fish, but we can’t feed all these people with that!” There is just one problem with their calculations: — They were calculating without Christ! (Psalms 78:19-22). — “*Is any thing too hard for the LORD?*” (Genesis 18:14).

(Psalms 78:19-22) “Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? (20) Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people? (21) Therefore the LORD heard *this*, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; (22) Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation:”

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“The birds without barn or storehouse are fed;
From them let us learn to trust for our bread.
His saints what is fitting shall ne’er be denied,
So long as ‘tis written — ‘The Lord will provide.’

No strength of our own, nor goodness we claim;
Yet, since we have known the Savior’s great name,
In this our strong tower for safety we hide, —
The Lord is our power; — ‘The Lord will provide!’”

If our Lord Jesus was moved with compassion upon these multitudes, many of whom he knew were not his own, and so moved that he performed an astounding miracle to provide for the needs of their bodies, shall he not, without a doubt, provide for every need of our souls and our bodies? My brother, my sister, let nothing tempt you (Let nothing tempt me!) to be cast down with fear and unbelieving! As Hawker put it, “Both your bread that perisheth with using, and that which endureth to everlasting life, shall be given, and your water sure.”

(Isaiah 33:16) “He shall dwell on high: his place of defence *shall be* the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters *shall be* sure.”

(Philippians 4:19) “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

DISCIPLES USED

Second, notice that our Lord Jesus chose to use these same disciples to feed the crowd. How patient the Lord was with his unbelieving disciples! There was not even a hint of rebuke (Psalm 103:13-14). The Lord Jesus simply said, “*Make the men sit down*” (v. 10), and proceeded to perform another miracle, using those poor, weak, unbelieving disciples, just as though they had believed him perfectly and unhesitatingly!

(Psalms 103:13-14) “Like as a father pitieth *his* children, *so* the LORD pitieth them that fear him. (14) For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we *are* dust.”

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Mark tells us they sat down by companies in ranks by hundreds and fifties (Mark 6:39-40). I see four things here.

1. The Lord Jesus told the disciples to seat these people in an orderly manner, because our God is a God of order (1 Corinthians 14:33).
2. Not only that, our Lord required these people to be seated because the activities of the flesh must come to an end if we are to be fed the Bread of Life (Psalm 23:2).
3. Our great and gracious God and Savior does not need; but he condescends to use such insignificant, weak and worthless things as we are to perform his great works in this world (1 Corinthians 1:26-29; 1 Peter 1:23-25). — *“Take ye away the stone!”*
4. He even accepts and uses the most insignificant gifts we might put into his hands. We read in verse 11 that *“Jesus took the loaves.”* — He did not scorn the loaves because they were few nor the fish because they were small. God uses small and weak things.

DISTRIBUTING BREAD

Third, we see that the work of God’s servants in this world is distributing bread to hungry souls.

(John 6:11-12) “And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. (12) When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.”

- The Lord Jesus *“took the loaves”* and the fish.
- He gave *“thanks.”* — Thus, he teaches us to acknowledge God as the Giver of every good gift and to own him as the one who provides all things!
- He distributed to the disciples.
- The disciples distributed to the people. God uses men to perform his wonders of grace in this world. Let us never despise the means he uses (Ephesians 4:10-13; 2 Corinthians 4:7; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

(Ephesians 4:10-13) “He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) (11) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some,

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evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (12) For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: (13) Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

(2 Corinthians 4:7) “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

(2 Corinthians 5:18-21) “And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; (19) To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (20) Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. (21) For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

Go back to John 6. The disciples did not make the loaves and fish increase and multiply; but they increased and multiplied. By a strange, heavenly kind of arithmetic, they were multiplied by division and increased by subtraction! — God’s gifts grow in the hands of those who use them for the benefit of others, especially for the benefit of his people.

It was the Savior’s almighty power that provided an unending supply of food. It was the work of his disciples to receive humbly, and distribute faithfully.

That is a very vivid picture of the work every gospel preacher is meant to do. The preacher is not a mediator between God and man. The pastor has no power to put away sin, or impart grace. The preacher’s work is to receive the bread of life which his Master provides, and to distribute it among the souls among whom he labors. He cannot make men value the bread, or receive it. He cannot make the bread effectual, beneficial and saving. He cannot cause the bread to meet any need, or compel anyone to eat it. That is God’s work, not the preacher’s. Preachers are not responsible for those things. The whole work of the gospel ministry is the faithful distribution of the Bread of Life.

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- The preacher must seek the Bread by earnest prayer and diligent study. — Deacons were ordained in the Church so that God’s preachers might devote themselves to seeking the Bread of Life and have no concern about earthly bread (Acts 6).
- The preacher must faithfully distribute the Bread among hungry souls.

DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE

Fourth, this miracle stands before us as an undeniable display of divine omnipotence. We see our Lord Jesus feeding five thousand men with “*five barley loaves and two small fish.*” When the day was over “*twelve baskets of fragments*” remained after all those thousands had eaten all they could hold. Nothing less than the creative omnipotence of the Almighty God could have done this thing! This man, the God-man, called food into existence that did not exist before. In healing the sick, and raising the dead, he mended and restored that which had previously existed. Here something had to be created which had no prior existence.

This miracle ought to be specially instructive and encouraging to all who seek to do good to souls. It shows us that the Lord Jesus Christ is God, “*able to save to the uttermost.*” He has all power over dead hearts. Not only can he mend that which is broken, — build that which is cast down, — heal that which is sick, and —strengthen that which is weak. He can do and does greater things than these. He calls into being that which was not before (2 Corinthians 5:17), and calls it out of nothing! With a Savior who, by his Spirit, can create a new heart, nothing is impossible!

ALL FILLED

Fifth, look at verse 12. The Spirit of God tells us that “*They were filled.*” All those thousands of people, when fed by the miraculous power and grace of the Son of God, were filled. When the Lord Jesus feeds us, he fills us with grace and satisfies our souls with fatness (Colossians 2:9-10).

(Colossians 2:9-10) “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. (10) And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.”

His grace is all-sufficient grace (Romans 5:20-21; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10).

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(Romans 5:20-21) “Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: (21) That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

(2 Corinthians 12:1-10) “It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. (2) I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. (3) And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) (4) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (5) Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. (6) For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but *now* I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me *to be*, or *that* he heareth of me. (7) And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. (8) For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. (9) And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

NOTHING LOST

Sixth, I want us to take notice of the fact that our Savior required his disciples to “*Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.*” When they did, they had twelve heaping baskets full (vv. 12-13). There was abundance for all, and the boy had twelve baskets to take home. The liberal soul is made fat (Proverbs 11:25).

(Proverbs 11:25) “The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.”

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I do not think the Lord's intention here was merely to teach us to be frugal with our earthly goods. No, his instruction is far more needful. He required this gathering up of the fragments to teach us that we must take great care not to lose by our neglect the bounties of the gospel (Hebrews 2:1-4).

(Hebrews 2:1-4) "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip. (2) For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; (3) How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*; (4) God also bearing *them* witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?"

Let us take care that we do not lose that which God has given us in this place.

- Let us never be moved away from the hope of the gospel.
- Let us never be turned aside from the simplicity that is in Christ!
- Let us never be entangled with the yoke of bondage and the works of the law!

Come, hungry souls, and eat this Bread. Eat this Bread and live forever (John 6:47-50, 53-58).

(John 6:47-50) "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. (48) I am that bread of life. (49) Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. (50) This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die."

(John 6:53-58) "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. (54) Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (55) For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. (56) He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. (57) As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. (58) This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as

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your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.”

Amen.