

**Find Life in the Son:
Divine Creator and Sustainer
John 6:1-15**

Introduction

The feeding of the 5,000—that's 5,000 men plus women and children, so possibly as many as 15 to 20 thousand—is fourth miracle John records. It is the only miracle that all four Gospels relate, other than Christ's resurrection from the dead. No wonder it is one of the best known. It is clearly significant in understanding who Jesus is and what He came to do.

In chapter five our focus was on the identity of Jesus and His work as expressive of God's the Father's will and work. This miracle gives us further insight in Christ's heart and mission.

¹ After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself

knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number.

¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"

¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

1. Healing Signs by Christ (1-2)
2. Ministry Training by Christ (3-10)
3. Creative Power of Christ (11-13)
4. Sacrificial Mission of Christ (14-15)

1. Healing Signs by Christ (1-2)

¹ After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias.

The other side of the Sea of Galilee was the less populated region east of the lake. By the time John is writing at the end of the first century it was also known as the Sea of Tiberius after the city of Tiberius, founded by Herod Antipas in honor of Emperor Tiberius, who was in the 15th year of his reign when John the Baptist began his ministry (Luke 3).

Around A.D. 70 most of Galilee destroyed by the Romans, but the city of Tiberius on the western shore of the lake was spared and became the seat of the Roman government in the region.

John 6:2

And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.

Sign—miracle with a message

Nature of Jesus' miracles—not for show or entertainment, not even to gain a following.

So what is the divine message of Jesus' miracles? Think about the kinds of miracles Jesus did—healing the sick, restoring those who were handicapped in some way—the blind, the deaf, the lame; casting out demons; raising the dead; providing wine for

a wedding to save the bride and groom from public embarrassment, providing for them what should have lasted for months—a generous wedding gift; and here, feeding those fainting from hunger.

Jesus' sign miracles display God's response to human need. By the time John writes his Gospel, his readers have had the synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Luke, and Mark—for years. Matthew records that on this occasion He healed the sick (Matthew 14:14). Luke, that He taught them about the kingdom of God (Luke 9:11). Mark, that He was moved with compassion because they were as sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34).

These sign miracles drew a crowd, but that was not the chief purpose of Jesus' supernatural works. It will become clear that many of these seeking out Jesus were doing so for shallow, earthbound reasons. But we don't want to miss what these miracles teach us. They were divine signs to show us the heart and purposes of God. The infinite Lord of heaven and earth could easily stay aloof from a world of sinners if that were what He wanted to do. He is the God of justice, and the alienation from God our sin generates is exactly what we deserve.

But God is a God of goodness, steadfast love, and mercy, so true to His character He shows

compassion on us. He brings rain on the just and the unjust. Every day as Creator and Sustainer He feeds the entire world. We must not forget all the benefits He lavishes on us. He is not just the God far away way up there. He is the God who is near. His very name communicates His heart for relationship. Yahweh means "He is." It testifies not just to His existence, but to His presence. He is God with us. And nowhere is that more clear than in the Person and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Jesus has displayed God's heart toward us. Do not think God sits on His high throne with no thought of you and no care for you and no power to do anything about your broken life.

Further, Jesus' miracles display both His power and His willingness to heal every sort of disease and restore every form of brokenness that mars our lives. This is exactly the point Matthew makes when he quotes from Isaiah 53 to explain why Jesus healed and delivered people they way He did.

Matthew 8:16-17

16 That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. **17** This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

So it is not just wishful dreaming to think that someday there will be no more disease, pain, death, sorrow, or tears. It is a written promise of God that Jesus Himself proved He has the power and the willingness to do.

Applications

- How could the conviction that God's heart is full of compassion toward you and other suffering people change your outlook on life?
- How could knowing that one day all suffering will be gone because of the proven power of Jesus help you cope with your difficulties now?
- Are there ways you think about God that do not match what Jesus reveals about Him here?

2. Ministry Training by Christ (3-10)

³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy

here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number.

Much of this account turns attention to the disciples in this situation. Jesus was there to train His disciples for the ministry they would shoulder when He was gone.

His question to Philip underscores the human impossibility of supplying food for so large a crowd in such a desolate place. There was not the money to buy it—at least 200 days wages, nor the time to gather it all. That anyone in the nearby town would have this much food on hand to sell was out of the question.

Andrew finds one boy's lunch, but freely confesses it is nothing compared to what would be needed.

But Jesus goes ahead and has them seat the crowd on the grass—it was Passover season in the spring when there would still be grass; and in groups of roughly 50, making the count of how many were there possible and the distribution of food to them orderly.

Further when Jesus multiplies the loaves and fish, He has the disciples distribute the food

to the crowd. They fed the crowd, but He supplied the food. That is the way ministry works.

No human being or group is sufficient to give the world what it needs. We merely pass on what Jesus has supplied. We proclaim the good news. We tell what God has done, not what people must do.

Paul says it this way to the Corinthian believers who tended to follow their culture in being followers of men:

1 Corinthians 3:5-7

⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

Why did the disciples get to minister in this extraordinary way? Merely by obeying what Jesus told them to do. He did the miracle. They just passed it on.

That's what happened on the day of Pentecost when 3,000 turned to Christ in one day. It was beyond what any could have imagined but God. And throughout history there have been periodic gatherings of souls whose hearts were suddenly opened to trusting in

Jesus, numbering in the tens and hundreds of thousands, even into the millions. The Reformation. The first and second great awakening. The revivals that have swept our own country in the 1920s and 1970s.

Today we may think such awakenings are the stuff of history never to be experienced again, but the course of church history would teach us otherwise. Indeed, the end of the age will be punctuated by a worldwide awakening with converts from every nation, kindred, and tongue.

We would do well to be praying every day that the Lord of the harvest would bring another great awakening to our own nation. It is the only thing that can save us. Nothing less can turn back the prevailing cult of self-deification and sexual obsession, enshrining the slaughter of innocent children and subjugating our culture from our entertainment to our schools to the halls of government.

A wicked culture is ripe not just for judgment from God but for revival from God. But only God can do it. Let us, however, prepare for it, just as the disciples did on this amazing day—before the amazing happened. And let us obey our Lord's command to take the gospel to every created being and every ethnicity.

Applications

- What if you were to commit to praying daily for God to do the impossible again and send another great awakening?
- When and where can you share the good news, and with whom can you be sharing it?
- What “impossible” things should you prepare for as did the disciples when they obeyed Jesus’ directives?

3. Creative Power of Christ (11-13)

¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

His healing—mended and restored what was broken and diseased.

Feeding the 5,000+ was not just renewing what was broken, but creating what did not exist before.

What God did at creation. He spoke and it was done.

Power=amount of work divided by the time it takes to do it

Jesus performed this amazing miracle with no fanfare, though thousands of people experienced the benefit of it. He prayed. He broke the bread and fish and distributed the food to the disciples to pass out to the people. But in that understated process five barley loaves and two fish became enough to feed 15-20 thousand people. Jesus makes it look simple, because nothing is hard for God.

Similar to the first miracle John records, when Jesus turned water for purification to the finest wine; natural processes require significant time and labor for water to turn to wine; natural processes require a lot of time and labor to produce enough bread and fish to feed such a large crowd of hungry people. Jesus did it in minutes. It was the distribution and the eating that took the time.

Doing the impossible is God's stock and trade. Nothing is too hard for Him. The gospel itself rests on this premise. God has displayed His power to create good things out of nothing over and over. That there are any born again believers on the planet is because of this creative power.

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from

God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

When everyone had eaten, Jesus had His disciples gather the fragments that nothing should be wasted. They gathered far more than what they started with.

When you minister to others in Christ's name you may feel you have little to offer and that there's too much to pay, but when all is said and done, you will end with more than what you started with. Nothing done for Jesus is wasted. Its effect keeps on going in ways you can't control or imagine, even generation after generation, reaching even into eternity itself. Nothing you give up and give out for Jesus is lost. That's why Jesus says that those who lose their lives for His sake and the gospel's actually find their lives.

Applications

- What about your life needs the creative power of God to make you new again—a besetting sin, a hopelessly damaged marriage, the loss of hope that the joy of your salvation can be restored?

- Where do you see God at work in non-flashy ways that are nonetheless evidence of His love and power?
- What works of God can you be praising God for each day?

4. Sacrificial Mission of Christ (14-15)

14 When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"

God provided manna in the wilderness for the Israelites during the days of Moses, so Jesus' feeding this vast crowd reminded them of Moses and his promise of a coming prophet like himself to whom the people would listen.

"The Prophet"—Deuteronomy 18:15-19

15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— **16** just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' **17** And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. **18** I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. **19** And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.

In Acts 7 Stephen refers to this same passage in his sermon calling his listeners to stop resisting God. They refused Stephen's appeal. Instead they stoned him to death.

John 6:31-32

³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

These words are part of Jesus' discourse on His being the bread of life, meaning life far beyond just satisfying physical hunger, just as the water He offered to the woman of Samaria quenched a thirst far greater than mere physical thirst.

But they were thinking in political and economic terms, not spiritual: John 6:15 Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Jesus came into the world to give up himself as a sacrifice to bring life to a sin-cursed dying race. It was not the time to reign as

king, but to die as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

We are told in verse that it is Passover season. For the death angel to pass over the unblemished lamb had to be slain and its blood applied to the doorpost of the home.

Jesus is the Lamb, heading to the cross to pour out His lifeblood to set us free and make us citizens of His eternal kingdom. The crown would come later.

Applications

- What temporal, earthbound goals interfere with your denying yourself to take up your cross and follow Jesus?
- What are you doing to keep from getting sidetracked from pursuing the mission Christ has given His followers?

Conclusion

If you want to understand God, look at Jesus. When you see how He responded to human need, how He trained His followers to participate in meeting those needs, how easily He brought something out of nothing, and how committed He was to saving sinners through the sacrifice of Himself, you are seeing God revealed for who He really is.

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Closing Song: My Shepherd Will Supply My Need

Applications Summary

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