

The Miracles Of Jesus Christ: Feeding The Five Thousand (Part One)

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Christ's miracle of feeding the five thousand is unique in that it is the only one that all four gospel writers mention (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14). It illustrates Jesus' authority over nature and His divine intervention on behalf of others, showing that He is concerned about both humans' physical *and* spiritual needs.

Jesus is moved with compassion at the sight of thousands of people who had made a great effort to hear His message of hope. Although He is tired after a long day, He embraces the opportunity to teach them and heal the sick among them. As evening descends, His disciples suggest that the hungry crowd be disbanded to seek necessary food from the surrounding villages, but Jesus has something else in mind.

To test Phillip's faith, He asks him how the people could be fed. Not only does Philip learn a lesson of faith, but all of the disciples learn that true faith must rely on divine resources, not physical and material ones. Phillip begins to tally all of the meager supplies the disciples had among them, and somewhat stymied, says, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them." One denari was a day's wage at the time.

Then Andrew tells Jesus, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish." Yet, because of their lack of faith, the disciples cannot see any possibility of feeding the great multitude with their scarce funds and the scanty food on hand. However, faith enables us to see that with the omnipotent God, all things are possible.

This miracle is a magnificent act of creative power. No amount of human reasoning can reduce this miracle to a natural phenomenon. Indeed, complete understanding of miracles is beyond human capability to understand. By an act of His own creative power, Jesus revealed proof of His deity to thousands.

1. What is characteristic of Jesus' handling of the crowd? Matthew 14:19; Mark 6:39-40; Luke 9:14-15; John 6:10.

Comment: Jesus is very calm through all of this, for to Him, nothing is impossible. The disciples would have driven the hungry crowd away, but Christ is the One who had given manna to the Israelites in the wilderness. He had provided Israel sustenance in an orderly way, and here, Christ handles it likewise. He commands the people to sit down in manageable groups of fifties and hundreds, avoiding confusion and preventing injury to women and children should the whole multitude surge forward. Order is a characteristic of all of God's ways, as Paul asserts in I Corinthians 14:33.

Mark's description of the ordering of the crowd is very specific. Using the plural of the word that signifies "a garden plot or bed," he describes the people as reclining in sections, so that the separate groups resemble detached garden plots. As was the custom

among the Jews, the 5,000 men sat apart and were the only ones counted. No one knows how many women and children were there, but the number must have been substantial.

2. What is significant about the first thing Jesus does? Matthew 14:19; Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16; John 6:11.

Comment: Jesus gives public thanks to God for the food, revealing the importance of acknowledging who provides everything and from whom blessing comes. Thanksgiving is the primary ingredient in receiving blessings from God.

People who neglect a close relationship with God forget to appreciate and thank Him for His daily, continual miracles. Paul writes, "Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21). Yet, he commands the saints, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (I Thessalonians 5:18).

3. Why does Jesus send His gift of food by His disciples? Matthew 14:16, 19; Mark 6:37, 41; Luke 9:13, 16; John 6:11.

Comment: Christ performs the miracle, but for both practical and spiritual reasons, His disciples present the food to the people. It was more organized and took less time to distribute the food this way than by doing it Himself. More importantly, Jesus and His disciples were becoming a team, and it was essential that they share in His work to have firsthand experience. Their involvement in Christ's generous, compassionate, loving act of providence would be a lasting memory to fuel their faith and zeal in their future apostolic work.

Jesus' miracle provided them an opportunity to serve Him, while teaching us lessons in responsible service. Though God does not need us, He gives us the privilege and blessing to be involved in His service. Some people do not wish to be encumbered by a duty at church, but this is a wrong perspective of service. God provides opportunities to serve so that we might experience great blessing.

The disciples had a responsibility to give to the people what Christ had given them. When God gives to us, we are to share faithfully with others, not hoard His gifts for ourselves. Ministers are to preach the whole truth of God and not change the message or withhold parts of it (Acts 20:27). Church members should look out for the welfare of others, sharing our blessings. If we are wealthy with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3), we should pass them on to others by living God's way of life as a witness.