# Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

Mark 6:30-44

Key Verse: Mark 6:41

Taking the five loaves and two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided two fish among them all.

I think you all may agree that we eat good here at IIT UBF. Every Sunday after worship service we have a delicious home-cooked meal prepared with lots of tender love and care by our devoted families. From time to time we'll order some catering from a Chinese, a Mexican, a Thai, a Greek, a Mediterranean, a Pizza, or a Portuguese restaurant. One of the things the Bible Club members are very grateful for is the food provided by the ministry. While we are fortunate to live in a city with such diverse cultures and cuisines, most of all we thank God for providing the means for us to share so many wonderful meals together, and we thank God for the food that he made grow to grow from the ground or an animal. Eating is essential to life, so perhaps it is no wonder that the only miracle that is found in all four gospels is the feeding of the 5000. Some of the gospel texts have the miracle of healing the sick and blind, and others some do not. Some have the miracle of raising the dead to life, and others do not. But the one miracle found in all four gospels texts is the feeding of the 5000. Perhaps it is because it is a powerful demonstration of God satisfying a universal, basic and fundamental need of all people- the need of eating and nourishment, by more than capably feeding multiple thousands of people at one time. No other miracle was impressed upon the all four of the gospel writers except this one, because unlike other miracles, this one had a direct impact on thousands of people, it was also one in which the disciples could participate in themselves, and it showed in a real, tangible way that Jesus came like a shepherd to feed the people, so that we may have life, and have it to the full. This was not a made up event, it is not an allegory, metaphor or parable, but a real, historical, actual event that happened around 2000 years ago in northern Israel, and its importance and authenticity is validated by all four gospel accounts.

We return now to the book of Mark, the year is 29 AD, and Herod Antipas is the ruler of Galilee. We are entering into the last year of Jesus' ministry on earth. It was around this time Jesus had sent his 12 disciples out to preach the kingdom of God throughout Galilee, and now they have returned from their first mission. Look at v.30, "The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught." They all gave an account to Jesus of what they had done – the demons they drove out, the people they healed, the people who repented, and also the things they taught. When we are engaged in the work of God, there always seems to be good news to share. I remember the excitement last year when we heard the report of so many students in Rwanda signing up for Bible study when Msn. Daniel and Deborah had gone out there as missionaries. The disciples had their hands full – so many people were coming and going that they did not even have time to eat! Even though Jesus had given them power, authority and success on their mission, he showed care and concern for their physical health. Jesus said to his disciples "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." When was the last time your


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boss said something like that to you? I am fortunate, where I work, they value work-life balance, and offer me rest when I have worked too hard. We do have a lot of work to do for the kingdom of God, but here even Jesus shows us it is important for us to have rest. And where can we find the best rest? Jesus invited his disciples: “Come with me to a quiet place.” When you are weary and burdened, there’s no better rest than to spend time with Jesus in a quiet place. He will refresh your heart.

Jesus and his disciples went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. They were on their way to get some much needed rest and relaxation, but that would soon be interrupted. Look at v.33, “But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.” Put yourselves in the disciples shoes for a moment. You have just spent all morning helping and serving, so much that you don’t even get to eat, and you want to just step away for a short retreat with your favorite teacher Jesus. You’re hungry, tired and your eyes are getting heavy. Some of you might even be “hangry.” As your boat pulls away from the shore, you hear a shout, “Hey, they’re leaving, hurry up everyone let’s follow their boat!” And the crowd just gets bigger and bigger, and they’re so eager that they’re even starting to get ahead of you to meet you on the other side! How many of you would look forward to getting off the boat on the other side? Probably for many of us, we’d be a little annoyed. These people seem inconsiderate, rude and disrespectful towards you because they don’t seem to care if you’re tired, they have needs.

Now how did Jesus feel? I totally understand if all of you were annoyed, and I wouldn’t blame Jesus if he was bothered too. But what was his response to the crowd? Look at v.34, “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.” Jesus had compassion on them. The original word for this is a feeling in the gut. Jesus’ compassion went deep down into his stomach. While the disciples were hungry for food, Jesus was hungry to love. This is the true heart of God! He is a compassionate God, and feels it deeply. I’ve felt this before with my little brother Joe. When he was around 5 or 6 years old, at a Christmas party, all the bigger kids were running around and he couldn’t keep up. As they ran down the stairs, I saw he gave up, and with tears in his eyes he looked through the railings, and said, “Guys wait up!” My heart sank then and there. I wanted to go and help him, and go and comfort him. Our God is a compassionate God, and in fact, it is the first emotion he revealed to Moses when he showed him His glory. He said, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness…” (Ex 34:6). God is a God of compassion, and he looks upon us with love.

Verse 34 also tells us why Jesus had compassion – it was because they were like sheep without a shepherd. We don’t see many sheep nowadays in our place and time, but it was a common sight in Jesus’ time and place. But maybe it’s like this – what if you saw a box of cute little puppies let alone in the lawn outside? Most of you might say, “How cute! I want to take one home! Or I’ll take them all home!” Getting back to Jesus – he said they were like sheep without a shepherd. Who were supposed to be the shepherds? Who was supposed to lead the flock of sheep, to guide them to pasture and water? To protect them from wolves? It was supposed to be the religious


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leaders and teachers of Israel. But what were they doing? They were taking money from the poor. They were selling merchandise at the temple. They were burdening people with unnecessary laws. They were plotting to kill Jesus! Who was the king over the people in Galilee, the leader of the Jews in that region? It was Herod Antipas. And what did he do? He beheaded John the Baptist! The greatest man born of a woman, according to Jesus, the Elijah of the New Testament, the forerunner of Christ, the greatest preacher and teacher of the time, John the Baptist, was dead. God's people had no shepherd, they had no guide, so when they saw Jesus, who had become well known, they ran to him. There finally came someone who cared for them, healed their sick, drove out their demons, preached the kingdom of God, and took action, and they were drawn to Jesus.

A shepherd cares for the flock of sheep, protects them, leads them and feeds them. He gives his life to taking care of the sheep. There are many instances in the Bible where we hear of a shepherd going out to look for his lost sheep, even if it is one out of 99. Jesus embraced this identity, as he rebuked the Pharisees who were challenging him, he said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:11)" Even before Jesus came into this world, King David wrote about him, in a famous Psalm, Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul." Jesus has come to do these things, to be our shepherd, to lay down his life for us, to satisfy our souls, to give us peace, rest and refreshment.

How does Jesus do this? How can he accomplish these things? Look at the very first thing Jesus does in v.34, "He began teaching them many things." This is the first thing Jesus does, and it is significant. He addresses their real need, and what was their real need? It was the word of God. This is our real need. The word of God leads us to peace. In the word of God we find food for our souls. Jesus quoted this from Deut 8:3 right to the devil's face, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' (Matt 4:4)" Ps 119:103 says, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" Interesting fact about Psalm 119 – it is the biggest chapter in the Bible, 176 verses. And every single one of those verses is about the word of God. Look it up. You can pick any random verse from there, and it will tell you some aspect about God's word. Ps 1:1-3 tells us the one who delights in the law of the Lord, who meditates on it day and night is like a tree planted by streams of water, yielding fruit and never withering.

God's word gives life because it guides us into truth and into life. The Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 3 asks this: "What do the Scriptures principally teach?" Answer: "The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man." The Bible primarily teaches us who God is, and what he requires. This is the truth that leads to life, and this is why we study it. This is why it is central to our worship service, and central to the Bible Club. We come here every week, and open up our Bibles to learn just a little more about who God is. In the same way this is the goal of the Bible Club, in their weekly Bible studies: to learn who God is and what he requires. Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life: that they know you,


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the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. (John 17:3)" But more than just weekly, we must consume the word of God every day. Who here goes a day without eating? What will happen to you? You will become hungry, weak and will eventually perish. In the same way, when you neglect God's word, you will become weak, feeling farther from God, less able to pray, and become more susceptible to temptation and to fear. Strengthen yourself daily and grow on the milk and meat of the word of God.

Jesus continued to teach until it was late in the day, and I think the disciples' stomachs started to howl. Look at v.35-36, "By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. 'This is a remote place,' they said, 'and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.'" Late in the day might mean around noon. The Jewish day started in the evening, so by noon the day itself was almost over. The people probably have not eaten breakfast and the lunch hour is passing by, but Jesus was not unaware of this. In John's account we learn that Jesus already had in mind what to do (John 6:6). He had in mind that he was going to feed this crowd. Jesus understands that we can get tired and hungry, and he makes provision for that too. Jesus knows our physical needs. He may have kept teaching the crowd, and delayed until now to test the disciples. Here he would test their faith, and see what their answer was to the feeding of the crowd. Verse 37 says, "But he answered, 'You give them something to eat.'" What would be your answer to this question? Probably none of you would say, "Jesus, we know you could do it, just tell us what we need to do." Well, maybe now you might, after reading this story. But the disciples said, "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" Their answer was very realistic and practical. Let's say we take 2/3 of the average salary of $50000 in the US, which is $33,500. Divide that by 5000 people, and it comes to $6.70 per person. You might not be having some filet mignon, but maybe that can get you some dollar menu items, or a Little Caesar's pizza. But the crowd also included women and children, and that could easily double or triple the amount of people there. So the disciples were right, it would take more than a half a years wages, and for what? One meal?

But Jesus tries to help their faith move along. Look at v.38, "How many loaves do you have?"He asked, "Go and see." Hmmm… what's Jesus trying to do here, some disciples might think… Why would Jesus ask and tell us to go and see… So they found from a small boy among them "Five [loaves] – and two fish." This is almost laughable. This meager amount of food is barely enough for one person. The loaves were like the size of pita breads. How could this possibly feed 5000? But maybe some of the disciples were starting to get the idea that Jesus was about to do something here… Verses 39-40 say "Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties." Despite the fact that Jesus only had 5 loaves and two fish in his hand, the disciples obeyed what Jesus commanded. Their faith, though still small and weak started to believe that Jesus would be able to feed this crowd with what he was given. The people were neatly organized into groups, and the scene must have looked like a beautiful flowerbed on the large landscape.


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After the groups were formed, the miracle took place. Can we all please read v.41, “Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all.” Before distributing the food, Jesus gave thanks. In this way he blessed God, he acknowledged God for providing the food that is in his hand, and providing the wheat that sprang up from the soil. From the beginning, it has always been God who feeds us. He makes the food come up from the soil. Sh. Bob has some tomato plants in his garden at home. Just from a few seeds in the soil, out grows a vine, and then a few weeks later tomatoes are popping up everywhere! It really does seem like a miracle that things like that come up out of the soil. So remember, when you give thanks for your meal, you are also blessing God who provided.

Next Jesus gave the bread and fish to his disciples to distribute. Here is where the miracle happened. The disciples were coming back and forth from Jesus to the crowd, and the bread and the fish kept on coming! Jesus himself multiplied the loaves and the fish with his own hands. But note also, that he enabled the disciples to participate in this miracle. He didn’t cause the loaves and fish to fall from the sky, like manna from heaven, nor did he magically make more appear like in their pockets or clothes or baskets. He handed the loaves and fish to his disciples, so that they could feed the people also. This is how his sheep are fed today. Through the apostle’s teaching, and through disciples like you and me, the flock of God are fed the word of God. Jesus is the good shepherd who is always looking out for his sheep. In John 21, Jesus asks three times Peter “Do you love me?” And after every time Peter says “Yes,” Jesus repeats, “Feed my lambs.” The next time you are preparing Bible study, think about this – you are preparing a meal for God’s sheep. Whenever I prepare the message, I always think that I’m preparing a good meal for God’s flock here at IIT. It doesn’t have to be anything fancy, it could be something simple you learned about God through the passage. The gospel message itself is simple. The barley loaves and dried fish were a very humble meal, but it was more than enough. When my brother Joe was really young, he asked me if I wanted a butter sandwich. A butter sandwich? Sure, I said. So he went to the kitchen, and toasted two slices of bread. Then he went to the fridge, took out a stick of butter, and cut 5 squares from the butter bar, and put them between the toast. That was a butter sandwich. It wasn’t Jimmy Johns or Subway, but it was a beautiful gesture, and a delicious sandwich. Even at this stage in my life of faith, I have been studying the Bible for 23 years, I cannot just “wing” a Bible study. Even if I have studied the passage with someone else before, I am often forgetful of Bible truths, so I prepare before every Bible study. The disciples did not have to bake the bread themselves, but it was given to them by Jesus. In the same way, God will give you everything you need in order to serve him. You must first come to God and receive.

Finally, let’s look at the result of this miracle, in v.42-44, “They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of men who had eaten was five thousand.” This was an astonishing fact – even the leftovers, after everyone ate however much they wanted, far exceeded the five loaves and two fish they started with. This is an illustration of God’s abundant, abounding and overflowing grace. The bread and fish were more than enough to feed the crowd of more than 5,000, including women and children, and the


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leftover pieces that were picked up can be given to others, even the poor or the needy who were not there.

Jesus' feeding of the five thousand shows us that Jesus is the Son of God, equal in power and in glory with God the Father. Only God has the creative power to create something out of nothing, and Jesus demonstrated that power effortlessly before his disciples and before the multitude of people. More than 10,000 eyes witnessed this miraculous event. Now look at what God was doing in the midst of us. He was serving, he was feeding, he was teaching, he was healing. This is our compassionate God who loves his sheep! His compassion was felt deep down in his bowels, Jesus, was fully man and fully God. How deep does your compassion go for your children? You would do anything for them. My wife has had to endure so much sickness and pain trying and being pregnant, but in the end God gave us a healthy beautiful baby that we absolutely adore and love to feed. And even still, she burdens herself to provide the best food for baby. How far did God go to show his love and compassion for us? He spared nothing, and gave up his Son for us all, to give us eternal life. We are fed by the body of Jesus, broken for our sins, and given for the life of the world. Jesus is the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. We can also show our love for him, by feeding his sheep. God is the giver and sustainer of life, by providing food for all people, both physically and spiritually, and temporally and eternally through Jesus Christ.


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