

## **Five Thousand Fed**

HN 31/10/04 pm

Reading: I Kings 17, John 6:1-40

Study: John 6:1-14

Psalms: 96:1-5, 96:6-9, 78:20-25, 118:16-21, 118:22-26

**Praying farmer:** An honest farmer was asked to dine with a gentleman. The farmer, according to his custom gave thanks to God. Whereupon his host jeered him 'that is old fashioned; it is not customary nowadays for well educated people to pray at the table'. The farmer stated it was customary with him, but not with some members of his household. 'Oh then' said the gentleman, 'they are sensible and enlightened. Who are they?' 'They are my pigs' answered the farmer.

Galilee rather than Jerusalem is the setting for this chapter. In typical manner John relates a miracle performed by Jesus and proceeds to draw out from it a lesson – he calls them signs remember and signs point to something. The chapter begins with a multitude following Jesus and ends with many leaving him. They loved the miracle worker but not the man who spoke the truth about life and the Kingdom of God.

The miracles were a witness, a proof, that Jesus was sent by God the Father and that the Kingdom of God had come in him. John understood this and for this reason he wrote this gospel – *that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you may have life in him name* (20:31).

### **Feast**

This miracle was probably done in the third year of Jesus ministry for the feast of Passover was near. *After these things* is a general reference to time and in this case probably six months to a year after the events of chapter 5.

But mention of the Passover was not just to flag the time of this miracle but also helps us to understand certain aspects of it. Passover was the most important feast of the Jews. It was time of heightened religious activity and also nationalism. At Passover they remembered the great deliverance from slavery in Egypt, the time when their nation was born- they became the people of God. At the Passover a lamb was sacrificed. Its blood was sprinkled on the doorposts and its flesh eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Soon after the exodus God provided food for them in the form of manna – bread from heaven.

At the time of Jesus these people were oppressed by Rome and were looking for a deliverer like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15). Hence when they saw this miracle they concluded that Jesus was the 'prophet like Moses' and sought to make him king (6:14, 15). They were disappointed when Jesus did not comply with their expectations.

They were among the first to turn away from Jesus because he did not conform to their expectations, but they were not the last. Do we not see it today – people coming to Jesus,

expecting him to give them every material possession, and keep them fit and healthy all the time? Are there still those who tell us not to just pray for a new car but for a brand new BMW, because Jesus wants his people to have the best!

These followers of Jesus were a fickle lot – and foolish. They wanted a political deliver when they had just witnessed the creative power of Jesus. They had just seen the power of God, the *God who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they were* (Romans 4:17). Such compassion and power should have called forth faith, faith like that of Abraham.

### **Faith**

This miracle is the only one recorded in all four gospels. There are slight differences in the detail but no contradictions. Clearly this was the most memorable and significant miracle performed by Jesus.

Jesus had **compassion** on these people who followed him around the lake. Jesus had crossed over the lake to be alone with his disciples- they needed some rest and also John the Baptist had just been beheaded. But the crowd that had witnessed his ministry for some time and watched him heal the sick, followed them on foot around the top of the lake (Mark 6).

Jesus taught them many things there on the grassy slope near Bethsaida – the home town of Philip, Andrew and Peter. John does not mention this detail but picks up events towards the end of the day when the people must have been starting to feel hungry – although they apparently wanted to stay and hear Jesus.

Jesus demonstrated not only his compassion but also his **power** – his power to create, to create food, solid physical food for five thousand people and more. This was not a sign done in a corner! It was not creation out of nothing as when he created the universe, but still a demonstration of divine power over the natural realm.

A lad was there who had five barley loaves and two small fish. Andrew brought him to Jesus. Some scholars try to make a lot out of the action of this lad, even suggesting that in response to his example of sharing everyone opened their lunch bags and shared. If this was so where did the 12 baskets of leftovers come from? And why did Jesus not just tell them to share their lunches. Such attempts to discount this miracle are to be condemned.

Jesus took the loaves and the fish that were brought, just five loaves and two small fish. *And when he had given thanks he distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down.* He gave thanks just like he did at the last supper when he took the bread, gave thanks and broke it and gave it to his disciples. It became a distinguishing mark of Jesus it seems, the manner in which he gave thanks for the food. Remember on the Emmaus road when the disciples recognised him in this action.

I trust that we also are marked by our thankfulness to the Lord for the food he gives. Let us never be forgetful of his grace in things large and small and let us never be ashamed to

witness publicly, as Jesus did here before 5000 men, of the provisions of our loving heavenly Father, our Jehovah Jireh, our great provider.

Jesus had asked his disciples to provide food for this hungry multitude. He did this to test their faith. They had been with him for some years by now. He asked Philip *where shall we buy bread that these may eat?* In Marks account he answered *You give them something to eat.* What was their response? They thought only of their own resources and human possibilities. They did not respond in faith. This was to be a 'growing in faith' experience for them.

### **Free**

5000 men plus women and children to be fed! What would you have done? Called the pizza delivery place! Imagine ordering pizzas for so many. You would need to call every pizza place in Sydney. It would be huge logistical problem. Have you ever been to a function where over 5000 are fed?

Moreover what about the cost? How much for a pizza – \$6? For 5000 makes \$30,000. That's a lot of money. Where to find such an amount? This was how Philip thought when Jesus asked him to feed this crowd. 200 denarii would buy just a small portion for each. Denarii were a days wage so we are talking more than sevenmonths wages (\$150 per day about the same). Philip saw the impossibility of the task, and none of the other disciples came forward with any better suggestions.

Jesus did not need money. He did not need a bread shop. He is the Son of God and for him all things are possible. He made the people sit down in an organized way so his disciples could distribute the food. And as they did so the loaves multiplied and each one had his fill.

Out of love and by divine power Jesus freely gave bread to fill the stomachs of this multitude of people, people who were lost, like sheep without a shepherd.

How wonderful is the love of Jesus that he sees our need, and how awesome his power to supply all our need. 'Give us this day our daily bread' we pray. Do we believe that he who feed the birds of the air can and will supply our daily bread?

Jesus freely gives more than physical bread. He gives the bread of life. *I am the bread of life* he teaches from this sign. *He who comes to me shall never hunger.* He is food for our soul. He gives life, new life, eternal life to our starving souls, our souls that have been starved by the cancer of sin.

### **Filled**

Not only were these followers fed but they were filled! They had never eaten like this before. Their hunger was completely satisfied. The abundance of Jesus' provision is clearly seen in the collection of leftovers – 12 baskets were filled with the leftovers when Jesus told his 12 disciples to ensure there was no waste or loss.

Jesus gave himself; he was sacrificed for our sin there on the cross at Calvary. He gave up his life that you might live and not die in your sin. You receive the gift of life though believing in him. It is a free gift.

And it is the all-sufficient gift. He gave himself once, the perfect sacrifice for sin, the sin of the whole world. *But now once, at the end of the ages he has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself* (Hebrews 9:26). Your sin has been dealt with, the penalty completely satisfied.

When you partake of this bread of life you will be filled to full and overflowing with the love and the blessings of Jesus Christ – *every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ* (Ephesians 1:3). You will not want when you have the Lord Jesus Christ as your shepherd, as your saviour and Lord.

*Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon*