

**THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL
STORIES AND SIGNS**
JESUS THE MIRACLE WORKER
Jesus Provides Bread from Heaven
(*Matthew 14:15-21, Mark 6:32-44, Luke 9:10-17, John 6:5-13*)

Most listings of the miracles of Jesus put the number at 37. However, when those lists include His virgin birth, resurrection, and ascension the number to 40. We are told in **John 21:25 (ESV)** ²⁵ *Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.* This leads me to believe there were more miracles that were not recorded.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, it was not His intent to set up an earthly kingdom at that time. I have often wondered why would His own followers continue to believe His kingdom would be earthly when He was performing so many 'out of this world' miracles. After reading this week's lesson materials, I realized that most likely it was because the people knew about the miracles that God had worked through Moses. Those miracles opened the way for the establishment of the nation of Israel in the Promised Land. The people had been expecting the promised Messiah – a Savior for centuries but their expectations were focused on an earthly kingdom. After the miracles of His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven, His followers would understand the reason why He came – He came to establish His kingdom in the hearts of men. Modern-day evangelist Billy Graham said, "the greatest miracle of all is the miracle of a changed life and this can happen as we open our hearts and lives to Christ."

One of the miracles of God given through Moses was the miracle of the manna – bread from heaven that fell with the morning dew to supply the physical needs of His children for 40 years as they wandered in the wilderness. After they arrived in the Land of Promise, we read in **Joshua 5:12 (ESV)** ¹² *And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.*

Bread is a basic food item – it is considered a necessary diet staple. The miraculous provision of bread by Jesus would parallel the miraculous provision of bread from heaven by the LORD during Moses' time. Jesus would provide bread for 5,000 men plus women and children. There might have been in the vicinity of 15,000 people who experienced this 'sit down' dinner. This is the only miracle that is told in all four gospels. There was also another similar miraculous provision of bread where 4,000 men not including women and children ate as recorded by Matthew and Mark.

Even in our times when 'free meals' are offered, there is a great outpouring of people in attendance to accept the free food. Because of Jesus serving a free meal, people would begin to surge after Him 'just for the physical food.' **John 6:26 (ESV)** ²⁶ *Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill*

of the loaves. Jesus would then go on to say in **John 6:35 (ESV)** ³⁵ ... “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

Let’s look at the miracle as told by Matthew. Jesus provides by showing compassion.

Read Matthew 14:13-14 (ESV) ¹³ *Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.* ¹⁴ *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

Now when Jesus heard this is a reference to the beheading of His cousin, John the Baptist, by Herod. Jesus quietly withdrew from that area and went to a *desolate place*. Other gospels make it clear that His disciples went with Him. Jesus did not want to deliberately provoke trouble with Herod at this time. Also, undoubtedly Jesus was filled with great personal grief over the death of John. The words from an old hymn say: **Jesus knows all about our struggles**. We can rest assured that Jesus understands when we experience loss of loved ones because He personally experienced such loss in His own earthly life. We know best what someone is feeling when we have had a similar experience. This is how we can know for sure that Jesus knows all about our struggles – He experienced the same trials of this earth we do.

Visualize the scene – Jesus needs some time alone and departs by boat – the people realize He has left – so they chase Him down on foot. It reminds me how the ‘paparazzi’ chase down famous people in our day. Princess Diana died in an accident because she ran away from the paparazzi. Now, take a look at Jesus’ response to the crowd. He doesn’t take the attitude of ‘there’s that stupid crowd again. I can’t get rid of them.’ No, Jesus stepped out on the shore *had compassion on them and healed their sick*. That’s our Jesus! He loves people! When He walked this earth He loved people, and He still loves us from His throne in heaven today!

The compassionate Jesus! Jesus used the word compassion in three of His parables we recently studied. The landowner had compassion on his tenant and forgave his debt. The Samaritan had compassion on the Jewish victim and cared for him in love. The father had compassion on his prodigal son and ran to greet him when he came home. If we are to be like Jesus, we too must show compassion. Whenever need is acknowledged, the Lord is ready to meet that need.

Jesus provides by doing the impossible with what we have.

Read Matthew 14:15-18 (ESV) ¹⁵ *Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.”* ¹⁶ *But Jesus said, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.”* ¹⁷ *They said to him, “We have only five loaves here and two fish.”* ¹⁸ *And he said, “Bring them here to me.”*

So often, when we have a need – we take that need to God in prayer and then proceed to tell Him how to fix our problem! Well, I suppose we are in ‘good company’ because Jesus’ disciples did the same thing when they said: *send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves*. It was their ‘plan’ to send the crowd away from the presence of the Lord to be fed.

They were about to learn the lesson that we all should learn – the Lord can miraculously provide for any need with more to spare but we must remain in His Presence to be filled.

John reveals a bit more detail by telling us that Jesus questioned Philip: **John 6:5-6 (ESV)**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.* Philip concluded that there just was not enough money available for even a trip through a ‘fast food’ establishment. But, they were about to experience a ‘fast food’ meal!

Jesus threw the disciples a ‘curve ball’ when He said: *They need not go away; you give them something to eat.* The fact that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all record the incident shows that the event made a huge impact on all of them.

We find another detail where Andrew chimed in. **John 6:9 (ESV)**⁹ *“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?”* They did not have enough! They had five loaves of bread and two fish that were not even their own. Barley was a staple among the poor. The loaves would have been small flat wafers – not big loaves of French bread or homemade yeast rolls that we might envision today. The two fish? Well, David Jeremiah suggests were about the size of two small sardines. The available supply reminds us that God can do anything, including multiply a person’s resources for His glory.

Let’s consider for a moment the generosity of one person – a child who was willing to give what he had to feed others. He did not know that the bread and the fish would be multiplied. He gave away what he had – without expecting anything in return. His gifts reminds us of **Mark 12:42-43 (ESV)**⁴² *And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.*⁴³ *And he [meaning Jesus] called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box.* Even though the boy gave his lunch away, it is most likely, he went home with more than what he gave. Just like when the Lord multiplies what we have after we give to Him our tithes and offerings. We can only speculate as what the boy’s mom thought when she heard the news of the gigantic meal that came from his small lunch of bread and fish!

The Lord uses ‘little things’. A baby touched the heart of Pharaoh's daughter causing Moses to be educated in the palace. God used a shepherd's rod in the hand of Moses to perform miracles. In David's hands He used a slingshot and a stone to defeat the enemies of Israel. He used a little slave girl to get the attention of Naaman and direct him to Elisha. And the miracle of the feeding of 5,000 men possibly as many as 15,000 when all present were counted began with a little boy!

Jesus provides for meeting needs through His followers.

Read Matthew 14:19-21 (ESV)¹⁹ *Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.*²⁰ *And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.*²¹ *And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.*

In order for the crowd to be filled, they must sit down and not run around out of control. **Psalm 46:10 (ESV)**¹⁰ *“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”* Our God is the God of order! **1 Corinthians 14:33 (ESV)**³³ *For God is not a God of confusion but of peace...*

The Lord took this bread and fish –barely enough for one person and broke them into pieces and the disciples distributed the bread and the fish to the multitude. Mattoon says, “Breaking is a painful part of life. God, many times, will break us in order to use us and spread our influence around to touch the lives of others. He has to break our stubborn will sometimes, or break our heart to soften it and make it tender. In another story in the New Testament, an alabaster box was broken, and the fragrant, expensive perfume was poured upon the Lord. Like this box, our lives are broken so that we might bring forth the fragrance of a Christlike life.”

And, we must not forget the words of Jesus as He broke bread with the disciples on the night before His death. Paul wrote of Jesus in **1 Corinthians 11:24 (ESV)**²⁴ *and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”*

Now, let’s think about the leftovers! The Lord does not like to waste anything. Those leftovers were gathered in 12 baskets. There is much speculation regarding the number of the baskets – did 12 represent the 12 tribes of Israel or did each of the 12 disciples who served receive his own personal basket? For me, the leftovers are a reminder that Jesus always abundantly provides more than enough when we turn control over to Him. The leftovers were not to be discarded, but to be eaten. It is God’s desire that the purpose of our lives be fulfilled.

Some would question, “Was what happened REALLY a miracle?” Non-believers would like to give the ‘educated’ answer that perhaps the generosity of the boy caused the other people to want to share and they brought out their hidden lunches and passed them all around. NOT!

The people who were present declared that this was a miracle and even wanted to crown Him King! **John 6:14-15 (ESV)**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.* Yes, they were expecting a ‘miracle worker’ but a Savior of Souls – not so much! Had this event been only the result of mass psychology, the crowd would not have responded by wanting to make Jesus King.

All the gospel writers mention the fact that Jesus gave thanks. His prayer of thanksgiving reminded the hungry people that God is the source of all good and needful gifts. **James 1:17 (ESV)**¹⁷ *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

As we give thanks over our meals, let’s remember Jesus’ example of giving thanks. The meal was not a meal royalty would eat – just a poor man’s basic meal of bread and fish. Let’s be like Jesus, instead of complaining about what we do not have, let’s give thanks to God for what we do have. Jehovah-Jireh – the LORD our Provider.