

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Encounter Jesus – The Son of the Living God

Little Is Much When God is In It!

“Jesus is able to do much with only a little when we give it to Him.” – *Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)* ⁶ *And without faith it is impossible to please him....* God’s desire is always that His children live by faith.

The feeding of the 5,000 men is the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four gospels. There are a few differences in the four accounts, which we would expect from four different writers. Charles Spurgeon says that the story is in all four gospels so that we won’t forget **how much the Lord can do with little things that are yielded to Him!**

Like the other three gospel writers, John does not record every single event in the ministry of Jesus. 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. Arranging or harmonizing the events in His life into chronological order is difficult. By comparing the other gospel accounts, Rose Chronological Guide to the Bible lists the occurrence of 18 different events in the ministry of Jesus between the healing of the man at Bethesda in *John 5* and the feeding of 5,000 in *John 6* which helps us understand when we read that a large group of people were pursuing Jesus.

By comparing all four Gospels, we find that Jesus was at the height of His popularity in Galilee. Pastor Scott Harris pictures it this way: “As the people see Jesus departing by boat, they start following Him on the shore. The trip is about 5 miles by boat and 6 or 7 miles by foot. As they go they would have attracted the attention of those in the cities they passed prompting even more to join in. They would also have attracted the attention of many of the pilgrims going to Jerusalem for the coming Passover. John is very direct about the reason for all these people following Jesus. They were seeing the signs Jesus was performing on those who were sick. They were attracted by Jesus’ miracles. Certainly there were those that wanted to be healed from their sicknesses, but there were also those who were following just to see the miracles being performed.” So many people were coming for healing that He and the disciples found no time to even eat. It was right after Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist, had been beheaded. Jesus wanted to be in a lonely place for these reason; but, the people would not leave Him alone that easily.

Read John 6:1-6 (ESV) 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.*

John gives the alternate name for the Sea of Galilee (Sea of Tiberias) since that would have been the more familiar name to the people in Asia Minor to whom he was writing.

In the other gospel accounts of the feeding of the 5,000, we learn that when the crowd came to Him, Jesus taught them and healed their sick. It had been a long day for everyone. (**Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17**). John omits these details but knowing what happened, helps us understand the need of the crowd for physical food. And, Jesus took this opportunity to test Philip. Testing can be negative or positive as it is here. Jesus' purpose was to test Philip's faith in Him and confirm His faith with the miracle to follow.

Read John 6:7-9 (ESV) 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?"

When Jesus asked Philip where they could buy a great amount of bread, Philip started adding up the cost. A denarius was the amount of money a common worker would receive for a day's wages. Philip determined that even two hundred days worth of wages would not be enough. Philip basically saw a hopeless situation and determined that nothing could be done about the needs of the crowd.

Have you ever felt this way? That is limiting what God can do. Is there any impossible task you want God to do or He wants you to do? Don't underestimate His power, intervention, ability, or His strength in helping you. Trust Him to do the impossible. Jesus was about to teach him that financial resources are not the most important resource. Jesus wanted Philip to learn from personal experience that the Lord of heaven can do much with just a little.

Next, Andrew chimes in. Andrew is the disciple who is remembered for bringing others to Jesus. He first brought His brother, Simon, and now, he is bringing a boy with five barley loaves and two fish. Maybe Andrew's reason for bringing the boy was he felt obligated to acknowledge the boy's good intentions. Apparently, he had no faith in Jesus doing much with little because he said of the boy's offering, *but what are they for so many?*

So far, the disciples have alternately suggested ignoring the problem (**Mark 6:36**), solving it with money (**John 6:7**), and now Andrew comes up with the 'wild idea' of a miniscule donation of food from a boy.

The fish were likely salted or dried sardine-type fish. I don't know if they were as small as our canned sardines today but they certainly would not come near feeding 5,000 men. The boy was most likely poor because barley was the food of the poor. It was fed to the livestock. Wheat was eaten by those who had more money. Nevertheless, the barley loaves are significant. The crowd who was following Jesus at this time was almost exclusively Jewish, and they would have been aware that one of Elisha's miracles was multiplying 20 small barley loaves to feed a crowd of 100 men, with food left over (**2 Kings 4:42-44**). Elisha's servant, Gehazi's question "How can I set this before a hundred men?" sounds very much like Andrew's question. But Elisha knew that the Lord had this difficult situation well under His control. He commanded his servant to set out the bread and grain, and when Gehazi obeyed, there was not only

plenty of food for everybody, but there was food left over. The Word of the Lord had announced and accomplished the impossible.

.Jesus will perform a miracle even more dramatic by feeding thousands with even less. This will mark Jesus as one greater than the prophet Elisha, and inspire the crowd to proclaim Him the long-awaited Prophet.

We are not told what the boy believed concerning his offering. Could it be possible that when the boy saw the miracles Jesus was performing that he ‘got it’ when the disciples didn’t? We can only speculate because the Bible does not tell us. However, there are things for us to learn from the lad.

1. Jesus can do for many with little.
2. Age is no barrier to Christ.
3. Availability matters.
4. Preparation is important (the boy brought his lunch).
5. No one knows what can happen when you bring someone to Jesus Christ.

Read John 6:10-11 (ESV) 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.*

We always like to speculate concerning how many were served lunch that day. We know the men numbered 5,000. However, it is possible that the number gathered around Him including women and children could have been as many as 15,000 to 20,000. Nothing in the text specifically indicates how the bread and fish multiplied. In **2 Kings 4**, there is the case of the multiplied oil. A prophet’s widow was in a financial predicament. Elisha told her to go to friends and neighbors and gather containers and then Elisha told her to pour the oil she had in one container and fill up a room full of vessels. The oil multiplied even as she poured it until the vessels ran out. Jesus did not use fanfare or majestic public display. He worked quietly – possibly like when He performs miracles for us still today.

Read John 6:12-13 (ESV) 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.*

The lesson of the leftovers reminds us not to be wasteful. When God provides resources to us in abundance it just might be for us to share with those in need.

Read 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.*

The people’s reference to Jesus being the Prophet to come was a reference to Moses’ words in **Deuteronomy 18:15 (ESV)** 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—* Moses led Israel out of Egyptian captivity, and now this people wanted Jesus (whom they believed was the Prophet like Moses) to free them from Roman occupation. Tony Evans says, “They wanted to make him king by force. they only wanted the physical benefits he offered. They wanted the blessings without the blesser.”

Read John 6:16-21 (ESV) ¹⁶ *When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” ²¹ Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.*

John (also in **Matthew 14:22-33**; **Mark 6:45-52**) follows the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 with the miracle of Jesus walking on the water, but he gives few details. John doesn’t tell us that Jesus made the disciples get into the boat. He doesn’t tell us that Jesus sent the multitude away or that He was praying on the mountain. He omits Mark’s comment (**Mark 6:48**) that Jesus saw the disciples straining at the oars or that He intended to pass them by when He came to them on the water. He doesn’t say that the disciples thought that they were seeing a ghost (although he does say that they were frightened). To us it would seem that John left out the most important part (Peter’s walking on the water). He doesn’t tell us that the storm was instantly stilled when Jesus got into the boat and the disciples’ worshipful response, “You are certainly God’s Son!”

So, why did John include this story in his Gospel? What does he want us to take away from his recollection?” Could it be that John gave a condensed version because he just wanted to focus on one thing and for his readers to do the same? Most likely, many years later the words of Jesus on the storm-tossed sea still echoed in John’s ears: *It is I; do not be afraid.* Those words were so precious to him.

Whenever we are fearful let’s remember the words of Jesus on that stormy night. Listen! Jesus is calling in the midst of the storms of our lives: **Do not be afraid.** Let’s step out in faith remembering that our Jesus can do much with little when we give what we have to Him.