

18. Jesus Fed the Five Thousand

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children both believe and learn to share with others from the Word of God that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the One who fulfilled all of the prophecies written about Him in the Old Testament. He also came as the Savior of the world. In this topic, we are going to see that Jesus fed a large crowd of five thousand men plus their families.

A large crowd began to follow Jesus as they saw the miracles that He did. John 6:1-3 says, “After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is *the* Sea of Tiberias. Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.” We see that this crowd of people following Jesus was in the area around the Sea of Galilee. We also see that the Sea of Galilee was known for a time as the Sea of Tiberias, which was the name of the Roman emperor.

We see the reason why this large crowd began to follow Jesus was due to the fact that they saw the signs (miracles) that Jesus did by healing people with various diseases. People love to see things happen and they heard about the miracles that Jesus did and so they came to see Him. We see that they quickly stopped following when they heard the teaching that Jesus gave. In this chapter, we see that there was a crowd of five thousand at the beginning of the chapter. Then, they heard the teaching of Jesus. As a result, John 6:66-67 says, “From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’” Here, we see that the crowd quickly went from five thousand to twelve because the people were not ready to accept the message that Jesus is the Bread of Life. Miracles draw crowds but they do not make disciples. The people wanted to be entertained rather than become disciples.

Because of the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain so that He could teach His disciples. In John 6:4-9, we read, “Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. Then Jesus lifted up *His* eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?’ But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, ‘Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.’ One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, ‘There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?’” We see that this happened close to the time of the Passover. Since chapter five was at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, this would be about six months later.

We see that the disciples had just returned from being sent throughout Galilee to preach that people should repent. Mark 6:30-31 says, “Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. And He said to them, ‘Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.’ For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.” Here, we see that Jesus had actually taken the disciples to an isolated place so that they could get some rest. The people saw Jesus and the disciples leave and a crowd quickly followed. Jesus was on the mountain talking with His disciples and teaching them when He saw this great crowd of people coming toward them.

We see what Jesus did when He saw this large crowd coming toward the place where He and the disciples were talking. Mark 6:34 says, “And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.” Jesus saw the crowd and saw their spiritual need. As a result, Jesus spent the rest of the day teaching this crowd of people. Jesus also saw this as a time to test His disciples and so He asked Philip this question, “Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” Instead of answering the question, Philip gave a financial report. He said that they did not have enough money to buy even a little food for such a large crowd. Since that time, many Christians have followed the example of Philip and have done the same thing when the Lord has opened great opportunities for ministry.

We read that Jesus knew what He was going to do but just asked this question to test Philip. Philip saw the problem of a lack of money but forgot that Jesus is the problem solver. That was why he said that they did not have enough money to buy food for the people. In contrast, we see that Andrew saw an opportunity to minister to the people, even though he did not know what Jesus would do. Andrew came to Jesus and said, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?” Andrew had found out that this boy had brought a lunch for himself and had not eaten it yet. Andrew realized that was a very small amount of food for such a large crowd but He also realized that Jesus was the One asking the question. That was the reason why his answer was very different from the answer of Philip.

Andrew is only mentioned three times in the book of John. However, every time that he is mentioned he is bringing someone to Jesus. Here, he brought a boy with a lunch. In John 1:40-41, we see that he brought his brother. Those verses say, “One of the two who heard John *speak*, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated, the Christ).” Then, in John 12:20-22, we read, “Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’ Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus.” Every time we see Andrew, he was bringing someone to Jesus.

Jesus knew what He was going to do. In John 6:10-14, we read, “Then Jesus said, ‘Make the people sit down.’ Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed *them* to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.’ Therefore they gathered *them* up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.’” We see that there were five thousand men plus women and children so this was a very large crowd.

Jesus quickly taught the disciples how to organize the people. Luke 9:14-15 says, “For there were

about five thousand men. Then He said to His disciples, ‘Make them sit down in groups of fifty.’ And they did so, and made them all sit down.” We see that Jesus performed the miracle that the disciples could not do and then He gave the disciples the responsibility to distribute the food to the people. Jesus gave thanks to the Father for the food (while the amount of food that He had was just the lunch of one boy) and then Jesus divided up the food and gave the food to the disciples to distribute to the various groups of people that were seated all over the mountainside. The bread and the fish just kept multiplying as Jesus broke them.

Jesus just kept breaking the bread and fish so everyone on that mountainside that day ate until they were full. Then, Jesus told the disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.” Jesus was probably using a physical illustration to teach a spiritual principle. The disciples gathered up the food that the crowd had been unable to eat. In all, they gathered twelve baskets full (one for each of the disciples). However, this also gave the disciples a visual illustration of what Jesus had seen earlier. We saw that Jesus was moved with compassion because the people were like sheep without a shepherd. Just like the fragments of food needed to be gathered, Jesus wanted the disciples to see that when people are like sheep without a shepherd they need to be gathered to the Lord so that they do not wander away and get destroyed.

We also see that this miracle was called a sign just as each of the miracles in the book of John is called a sign. Again, we are reminded of the words of John 20:30-31 which read, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” These signs have been given so that all will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Here, we see that the men recognized that Jesus was the Prophet predicted in Deuteronomy 18, that would come into the world.

We see that most of the men saw Jesus as the Prophet for the wrong reasons. The next day, many of these same people asked Jesus when He came back to their side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus said in John 6:26-27, “Jesus answered them and said, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.’” In contrast, there were a few who believed because they were true disciples. We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that it is important to help each person realize the importance of following Jesus for the right reasons. Many people are like the crowd who only follow Jesus for the physical benefits in this world. They will not have eternal life because they focused on the wrong things. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to explain what it means to follow Jesus.