Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand with Five Loaves and Two Fish

May 31, 2020

Mark 6:30-44

Key Verse 6:38 “‘How many loaves do you have? he asked. ‘Go and see.’ When they found out, they said, ‘Five—and two fish.’”

Jesus’ feeding the five thousand is one of the two miracles recorded in all four gospels, the other being the resurrection of Jesus Christ. John 6:4 says that it is near a Passover. So it is springtime in Galilee in the year AD 29. This miracle is the capstone on the display of many miracles in Galilee. Jesus demonstrates that he is the bread of life to be broken for a starving world. We can learn three lessons in this passage. First, the compassion of Jesus. Second, Jesus wants us to have a sense of responsibility for the crowd by saying, “You give them something to eat.” Third, what to do in a challenging situation. Suppose we sit under an apple tree, and we want an apple. Many people will sit there and hope that an apple will fall into their mouth. But we must look around and get a ladder and climb, take an apple, and eat it deliciously. May God help us not to sit down and despair in a challenging situation, but to “go and see” so that we may obtain God’s blessing.

**First**, Jesus’ compassion. Look at verse 30. “The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.” The disciples were ordinary men. They despaired over hardships and were often fearful. However, during their fieldwork training they had experienced the power of God. Their lives were changed forever. They became apostles, representatives of King Jesus. They were excited to report to Jesus what they had done. They were excited that the demons submitted to them in Jesus’ name. (Lk 10:17)

During this report session so many people were coming and going. They had been healed and delivered by Jesus and his disciples. They wanted to hang around their shepherds. The disciples had become a source of blessing. Jesus knew that his disciples needed some rest. Probably they did not sleep well or eat well. So Jesus urged them to hurry up and go to a quiet place to get some rest. So they got into a boat and set off across the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps the disciples fell asleep, one by one, until only Jesus was left to sail the boat. As they slept, the disciples dreamed of a delicious barbecue, and a camping trip with a big bonfire and sleeping under the stars. However, their dreams were disrupted. When the people saw Jesus’ disciples leaving, they began to run along the edge of the lake. What was it that compelled them to run so fast? The crowds of people came to Jesus with their unique problems seeking Jesus’ help. Each person was desperate. Each person ran and ran, in full strength. The crowds got there ahead of Jesus and his disciples.

Look at verse 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 to teach them many things.” Jesus did not look at them as buzzing flies which bother people. Jesus did not regard them as rushing monkeys who are only interested in bananas. Jesus saw them as sheep without a shepherd. Sheep are innocent, naïve, stubborn and smelly. They are also cute. With a shepherd they are safe. They do not fall into pits. They find their way. But without a shepherd, they are completely helpless. Probably, Jesus’ heart was deeply moved and his eyes were wet with tears for them. Compassion is a combination of two words: com (together) and passion (pain). So it means to share pain together, sharing suffering together. Compassion is God’s heart. Compassion is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Without believing in God, we don’t know what compassion is. Without knowing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we don’t know what compassion is. One who has compassion can grow as a man of integrity with the divine nature. Once Martin Luther said, “If I were God, I would destroy all humankind once a day.” Martin Luther was a man of courage and a lover of the truth. But his statement was far away from the compassion of Jesus. Jesus saw the people as sheep without a shepherd and he had compassion on them. Jesus saw each of them as one of his own children who was ailing and gradually dying. So he began teaching them many things. Taking care of sheep was so important that he canceled his plan for a retreat with his disciples.

**Second**, you give them something to eat. Jesus taught the crowd of people all day long until it was late in the day. The disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already very late. Send the people away so they can go to surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” (35-36) They were reasonable. What they said seemed right. They hoped that Jesus would scatter the crowd so that each one might be responsible for his own lodging and food. Then they would be able to eat by themselves. Let’s think about that for a minute. How would 5,000 plus people in an isolated place go looking for food? There were not any supermarkets. I doubt it would be done in a very orderly way. Most likely, too many people would converge on the same village so that the merchants there would sell out their food, which would force the unlucky ones to move on to the next village, where the same scenario would repeat itself, and so on. While some would get fed quickly enough, others would likely still be on the road late into the night. In short, this situation had the makings of a real mess. I don’t know if the disciples considered any of this, but even if they did, it didn’t change their attitude. All they saw was a need that was not theirs. No doubt they thought they were being perfectly reasonable. In the world we live in, the Not My Problem attitude is generally thought to be reasonable. It was the crowd’s problem! Let the crowd take care of it!

What was Jesus’ answer? Jesus looked at them straight in their eyes and said, “You give them something to eat.” (37) Jesus challenged them. Jesus told them to feed all the people. Jesus told them it was they who should take care of the people. Why did Jesus demand that they give them something to eat? It seems impossible. Jesus challenged them because they wanted to avoid their responsibilities. When Jesus said, “You give them something to eat,” he meant, “You should be compassionate instead of thinking of them as annoying people.” When Jesus said, “You give them something to eat,” he meant, “You must have a shepherd heart for them. Therefore, even if you have no bread, you must feed them by any means.” Why did Jesus challenge them? It was not just to give them hard time. Jesus had a follow-up plan. Jesus challenged them to take the responsibilities of feeding them.

The disciples felt overwhelmed with Jesus’ command. So they responded to him by saying, “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?” (37b) They tried to show why it was not possible to feed them. It would take too much money, which they did not have. In fact, they said, “No way! There is nothing we can do.” Here Jesus is teaching them to have a sense of responsibility for the crowd. To Jesus the real problem was that no one had a sense of responsibility for the people. The religious leaders should have been their shepherds. But they only made use of people for their benefit (Mk 3:2). The political leaders, such as Herod, were slaves of sin, and instruments of the devil. Compared to them, Jesus’ disciples did well to identify the need of the people. However, Jesus wanted them to do more. Jesus wanted them to take responsibility for the crowd. Many people analyze problems without doing anything. Jesus wanted his disciples to take responsibility. Furthermore, Jesus wanted them to learn faith in God Almighty. The disciples had just experienced the power of God in their lives. They experienced that Jesus used them greatly even though they had no money. But again they fell into unbelief that they could do nothing without money. Many of us also think that without money we cannot do anything. Jesus wanted them to change this pattern. As they had begun to live by faith, Jesus wanted them to continue in faith. Jesus wanted them to feed the crowd by faith.

**Third**, go and see. Jesus helped the disciples by asking, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” (38) Jesus guided them with a helpful suggestion. Jesus’ challenge was huge, but his follow-up instruction was very specific and doable. When they found out, they said, ‘Five–and two fish.’” When they began to obey Jesus practically, their attitudes began to change. They became positive. They found some loaves, and they also found some fish. Jesus had not asked for fish. The disciples were going beyond the letter of the command to obey it from their hearts. Now they were fully cooperating with Jesus. This was a turning point in this event. Jesus’ faith to train his disciples was changing them little by little. According to John’s gospel, it was Andrew who brought a boy’s lunch to Jesus. It was not Andrew’s, but a boy’s lunch. Andrew somehow persuaded the boy to give up his lunch. Andrew was a man of possibility. Usually people think about what they don’t have and what they cannot do and complain. But Andrew didn’t think, “I cannot do anything because I have no money.” Instead, he began to look around here and there. When he found nothing, he looked around here and there again and again until he found a boy with a small lunch box. Andrew found a certain possibility, even when the situation looks impossible. His full name may have been Andrew the Possible.

Here we learn a very precious lesson. Jesus challenges us to feed his sheep. More specifically, we are praying that God may restore Canada to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. It seems an impossible challenge. We need to start with specific and doable thing, such as “Go and see.” It is important to note that we don’t have to give something great to Jesus. Instead we must understand the mind of Christ and bring what we have. Then God accepts them to feed his flock. Many young people want to do something great for God. But their concept of serving God is to go to a foreign country like Iran and die as a martyr. It seems impossible to most people. So they struggle every day with their sin problems, not knowing what to do. We can bring very small things like five loaves and two fish. Indeed, God gave each of us at least five loaves and two fish. We must discover what our five loaves and two fish are and give them to God. Then God will not only bless us, but also bless this nation and the world. We don’t have to be a martyr in order to serve God. We can serve God in a small way by teaching the Bible to one student.

50 years ago, when Dr. Samuel studied the Bible, he learned the world mission command of Jesus from Mark 16:15, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” He wanted to obey it. But it seemed impossible. How can he send out missionaries when he did not have money to buy airplane tickets? Then he learned that several Bible students who were nurses were going to Germany as contract laborers. He went to the airport and persuaded them to delay their leaving until they received 2 weeks of missionary training. Several nurses accepted his calling and received missionary training and were sent out. It was the beginning of European UBF. They were not professionally trained Bible teachers, but they invited German students to Bible study and raised them as leaders in German UBF. It was their five loaves and two fish for world mission.

Here Jesus must have been inspired by Elisha’s story in 2 Kings 4:42-44 about feeding of 100 men with 20 loaves of bread. Elisha told his servant to feed the people gathered there, although there was not enough food for a hundred men. He said, “How can I set this before a hundred men?” In the end, however, the men not only had enough to eat, but “they ate and had some left over.” Jesus surpasses Elisha by feeding far more people with even less.

Here the word “loaves” is the word for a biscuit. It is not a loaf of Wonder Bread. The fish was a small pickled fish. That was the standard diet there. You take the pickled fish, and put it on the biscuit, and that’s lunch. When they brought the five loaves and two fish, Jesus told them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Jesus coworked with his disciples by letting them make people sit down on the grass. Jesus did not distribute the food by himself. He allowed his disciples to do this; his plan is to feed the world through his disciples. Then what happened?

Jesus took the five loaves and two fish and, looking up to heaven, he thanked God and prayed that God would feed his children. Then God blessed him, and enough bread and fish came out of the five loaves and two fish to feed five thousand people. This scene is very similar to the Lord’s Supper which commemorates his death. He took the bread, gave thanks, he broke it and he gave it to his disciples. The disciples became the waiters to serve the massive crowd. Was the food good? It was like eating in the Garden of Eden. Nobody said, “I don’t like fish.” They all ate and were satisfied. This was the best meal anybody ever had.

Here we learn that we must listen to Jesus’ command, “Go and see.” “Go and see” should be our life philosophy. “Go and see” should be our life of faith. When they obeyed Jesus’ command, “Go and see,” they fed five thousand people. When the disciples of Jesus went and saw, God’s blessing overflowed. Look at verse 43. “The disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.” Each disciple picked up a basketful of bread in his lunch bag. May God bless you to not sit down and despair in this hard world, but to “go and see” so that you may experience God’s abundant blessing. We do what we can and leave to God what only he can do.

Big Idea: Go and see your five loaves and two fish