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The Miracles of Jesus Christ: Feeding the 5,000

Harold Willmington

Liberty University, hwillmington@liberty.edu

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THE MIRACLES OF JESUS CHRIST

MIRACLE NINETEEN: Feeding the 5,000 (Mt. 14:14-21; Mk. 6:34-44; Lk. 9:12-17; Jn. 6:5-13)

SURVEY

With but five loaves of bread and two small fishes, donated by a small lad, Jesus feeds 5,000 men plus their wives and children. After all had eaten to their satisfaction, there remained twelve basketfuls of food.

SIGNIFICANCE

- This is Jesus' only miracle recorded by all four gospel writers.
- Obviously there were more individuals involved than in any other miracle.
- It is the only miracle where someone (a small boy) contributed something to the action involved.
- It marks the only attempt by an Israelite crowd to crown Jesus as King (Jn. 6:14-15).
- It is the only miracle where He asks His disciples some questions:
"Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" (Jn. 6:5)
"How many loaves do you have?" (Mk. 6:38)
- It is the only miracle where He asks His disciples to serve Him:
"Bring me the five loaves and two fishes" (Mt. 14:17-18).
"Have the people sit down" (Lk. 9:14-15).

SPIRITUAL TRUTHS

- At this time, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of Ezekiel concerning the ministry of the promised Good Shepherd.
"For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. ...I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel." (Ezek. 34:11-12, 14)
- In John 10 Jesus would later describe His role as the Good Shepherd, but here He will demonstrate it! Note:

1. He was the sensitive Shepherd

a. He knew the needs of the twelve

"And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately." (Mk. 6:30-32)

The disciples needed this rest, for they had just learned of John the Baptist's martyrdom. In addition, they were approaching the danger of burnout.

b. He knew the needs of the crowd

"And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things." (Mk. 6:34)

(1) They needed to be taught

Hosea the prophet had once cried out: *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge"* (Hos. 4:6).

To counteract this, our Lord invested a great amount of time during His earthly ministry in teaching the Word of God.

"And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes" (Mk. 1:22). (See also Mt. 4:23; 5:2; 7:29; 9:35; 11:1; 13:54; Jn. 6:59; 7:14, 28; 8:2, 20; 18:20.)

(2) They needed to be healed

"And he healed them that had need of healing." (Lk. 9:11)

(3) They needed to be fed

It is estimated that it would have required some fifteen tons of food to feed this great multitude.

2. He was the systematic Shepherd

"And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties." (Mk. 6:39-40)

3. He was the sovereign Shepherd

"And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all. And they did all eat, and were filled." (Mk. 6:41-42)

4. He was the sufficient Shepherd

"When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten." (Jn. 6:12-13)

- There is a note of sorrow at the end of this otherwise fantastic miracle. Rightfully recognizing Him as a prophet, the 5,000 men wrongly attempted to make Him their king. But both their motive and their method were wrong.

1. Their motive was wrong.

Jesus Himself would point this out during His sermon on the following day.

"Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed." (Jn. 6:26-27)

In a previous incident, another group of men had made the same mistake.

"Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." (Jn. 2:23-25)

2. Their method was wrong.

Jesus did not come to be crowned by sinful people, but rather to be crucified for sinful people. The Father alone will someday give the Son His rightful kingdom.

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). (See also Psa. 2:7-12; Dan. 7:13-14; Isa. 6:9-11.)

- At least five reasons have been suggested concerning why this miracle was performed:
 1. To demonstrate Christ's compassion upon people—He was concerned not only with their souls, but also with their bodies.
 2. To test His disciples—This undoubtedly strengthened their faith. They would remember it all their lives.
 3. To prove His messianic claims—The Jews had a tradition that when the Messiah came, He would feed them with bread as Moses had once done. Note the following dialogue which took place on the next day between the crowd and Jesus:

"Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven ... And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." (Jn. 6:31-32, 35)

4. To show the value of small things when given over to Christ—Especially is this seen by the giving of the loaves, not only in matters of quantity (five loaves), but also in quality (they were barley loaves). Wheat loaves were the normal diet back then. Barley loaves were eaten only by the very poor.
5. To illustrate God's faithfulness—In fact, this miracle was simply an unforgettable illustration of a profound principle Jesus had previously taught during his Sermon on the Mount.

"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Mt. 6:31-32)