

## **The Miraculous Feeding**

Scripture: Matthew 14:13-23

Code: 2308

Our study of the Word of God this morning is again taken from Matthew 14:13-22, that first gospel. In our study today, we come to a high point in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a familiar account we know as the feeding of the 5,000. This particular miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle recorded by all four gospel writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Thus we conclude that it is of unique quality. Each writer, in fact, not only includes the miracle but puts it at a point of climax in the life and ministry of our Lord.

When the Lord began His great Galilean ministry, it was one in which He sought publicity, the crowds, the populous in the cities; He sought to make known to them His name, to demonstrate His power through mighty works. He sought to teach them the words concerning the Kingdom of God and Heaven. He sought the crowds, the open places; He desired the publicity. He wanted to manifest Himself as the King offering a Kingdom.

As we have seen Him do that, we have begun to note that the religious leadership has rejected Him. There is a rising hostility along with this increasing publicity that our Lord has sought. As we come to this particular miracle, His popularity reaches a pinnacle. In fact, the result of this miracle is that the people in general in Galilee want to take Him by force and make Him the king. They are enamored with and fascinated by Him. They are in awe of Him, and willingly follow Him; this is a high point.

It also marks the beginning of His withdrawal, because just prior to this very high point of popularity has been the murder of John the Baptist. So there now is not only religious hostility from the Pharisees and religious leaders, who manifest that, as we saw, in chapters 11-12, but there is political hostility as well. Herod is the petty monarch who rules the area of Galilee and is very threatened by the Lord Jesus, as he was by John the Baptist. So because of the hostility of both the religious and political leaders, the Lord now begins to withdraw following this miracle.

It is clear that even with those who see Him as the King, there is great superficiality, great shallowness. In a very real sense, He is under threat by His enemies - the Pharisees and the Herodians - and He is even under threat by His would-be friends - the crowd - who want to push Him into some political monarchy which is not at all in God's design, as was made evident by the words of our Lord in John 18 when He said, "My Kingdom is not of this world," not on the terms of men's kingdoms.

So because of all of these converging pressures, this is the pinnacle of His popularity. At the same time, it marks the departure into seclusion that starts here. Finally, as we move through this, the last year of His life, He spends most of His time only with the Twelve, readying them for what is about to happen in His death and resurrection, and preparing them for the task at hand, as they will be the foundation for the building of the church.

All the writers, then, mark out this miracle as a very climactic moment in the life of Jesus Christ. As we flow through this miracle, I want you to see a series of points which overrule one another, and will take us through the understanding that we need, and then we'll talk about the lessons that are taught by this wonderful account.

It all begins in verse 13 with what I'll call 'the desire for privacy.' "When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself." Here, we see the Lord's desire for privacy. It says at the beginning of the verse, "When Jesus heard," and He heard that not only had John the Baptist been beheaded by Herod, but that Herod also believed Jesus was John risen from the dead, He then withdrew.

Why? Was He afraid of Herod? Not at all, but He would not expose Himself needlessly to the imminent danger of such a person as Herod, whom He later called 'a sly fox.' But if Herod was so intimidated by John the Baptist, and not only by John, but by his own wife and the people around him, that he murdered John the Baptist, he would stop at nothing to murder the one whom John the Baptist announced as the True King. Jesus knew full well that Herod's father, Herod the Great, had murdered every male child in the vicinity of Jerusalem and Bethlehem in order that he might stamp out one who was supposed to be a king, and this, his son, would perhaps do no less if he were convinced that Jesus was a threat to his reign.

So our Lord withdraws privately by boat across the Sea of Galilee to a wilderness place. I think it is important to understand that the Lord knew that the people also saw the Messiah as a political ruler, a king who would overthrow the Herodian dynasty and Roman monarchy, and establish freedom and independence for the land of Israel. Because our Lord knew that that was the people's perception, He knew that's what would come back to Herod and only complicate and endanger Him and His disciples to a greater extent. So He sought privacy.

It wasn't easy to find privacy in Galilee; the area is very small: 50 miles long and 25 miles wide, and there were 204 towns, the least of which had 15,000 people in it. It was very densely populated, thick with humanity. To find a place of seclusion would indeed be a very difficult thing. But our Lord sought it out, a wilderness place, and went there by boat, privately.

It wasn't only because of the threat of danger imminent in the situation regarding Herod; He went there for some other reasons. I believe He went there also because He needed refreshment, rest, solitude with the Father, time to contemplate the meaning of the death of John the Baptist. He knew now that the Cross loomed imminent in the future. By the way, it was only a year now until He would be crucified.

It also is indicated to us by Luke and Mark, who write of this same incident, that His disciples were with Him. They had now returned from their short-term mission of preaching and teaching the Kingdom, healing diseases, and casting out demons throughout Galilee. They had come back, and it was time for fellowship, time for them to report to Him, time for a debriefing on the mission, if you will. It was time for further preparation for what was now ahead of them, as the hostility had mounted, religiously and politically, and the people's misguided direction to make Him a king was also a pressure. It was a time of important instruction for them.

So it says in verse 13 that He departed from there, there being Capernaum, the city where His ministry in Galilee had centered. He went by boat into this wilderness place. After the unceasing ministry, the business of that time in Galilee, He sought a private, secret place. He tried even to go secretly, but was unsuccessful, because the crowd was constantly watching Him.

As to what place He went, Luke 9:10 tells us He went to a place called Bethsaida, or Bethesda. Basically, there were two of those; one on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, and one on the western shore. The one on the east was identified as Bethsaida Julia because it was named by Philip the tetrarch for the daughter of Augustus Caesar. Luke says that is where He went.

About a mile south of that particular town, there was a grassy hillside which swept up from the plain by the Sea of Galilee to a high mountain. Jesus took His disciples, got out of the little boat, and ascended that slope to find seclusion, no doubt, in the trees up the hill. He desired time with them, time in prayer, time in planning, time in instruction, time in rest and refreshment. But the desire for privacy is overruled by the second point, the design of the people.

Verse 13. "But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities." The cities, as I said, 204 of them in Galilee, began to empty their people into an accumulating mass of humanity, walking, or traveling by foot, across the northern end of the Sea of Galilee to go to the place where they had noted Jesus was going in the little boat.

One of the other writers tells us that some were even there already when He arrived, the fast ones, the ones who ran. The lame and blind and diseased, those who were ill and had come for healing, would have arrived much later. So even though there were some who were there before He arrived, He went beyond them into the mountain with the Twelve and sought the time of solace and quiet. But the crowd begins to collect.

John 6:2 tells us why, very simply. It says, "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. Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near." So there were, no doubt, not only the people collecting out of the towns and villages, but pilgrims on the way to the Passover who would have swelled the crowd in addition.

They were definitely impressed with Jesus; they had seen Him heal diseases, and that was very impressive. That is what attracted them. People are always drawn even to would-be false healers, to say nothing of one who legitimately had banished disease from their land by His multiplied healings. So the crowd begins to accumulate from Capernaum, Korazin, and Bethsaida west and Bethsaida Julia, and all the other little towns and villages around Galilee.

Frankly, the majority of them were thrill-seekers. They sought Him, not because they wanted to believe what He said, not because they wanted to worship and adore Him, but for the simple reason that they saw the diseases He healed and wanted to get in on the wonder-working, and maybe have it applied to their own disease, but surely to at least be fascinated by it. We might say that they are like the shallow soil of the parable of the soils in Matthew 13; they are like the weedy, thorny soil. There is an initial curiosity, an initial interest and excitement, and believe me, this group is excited.

Before this event is over, they want to take Jesus by force and make Him the king. They really are saying to themselves, "This may be the Messiah; we've not seen such power displayed ever." So there is a certain kind of curiosity that the seed has taken some root in the ground, but the soil is very shallow and very weedy. Their love of the world and of riches, and their desire not to pay any price at all in such an enterprise causes them ultimately to vanish from the scene and walk away from Jesus Christ.

Their perspective is totally self-centered; they are self-indulgent, they want to follow Him for the healings. They would like Him to pull off a revolution and throw out their oppressors. They would like Him to establish a utopia; they are like the thrill-seekers today who follow Jesus for their own self-indulgent purposes, and they also are not the true worshipers whom the Father seeks. Their commitment is choked by the love of indulgence and by their shallowness. We see, then, the design of the people.

Even in spite of that, we see a third point here that overrules the design of the people, and that is the deeds of pity. God even pities and extends compassion and mercy in Christ to these thrill-seekers, these very shallow people, again revealing the heart of God toward all men, even those who do not understand, will not believe, and ultimately reject the truth. Notice verse 14. "And Jesus went forth."

That means He went forth out of that mountain place where He was with the disciples; the crowd by now had become swollen. The accumulation ultimately, verse 21 says, reached 5,000 men. You can be assured that there would be at least 5,000 women and very likely even more than that, for women were uniquely drawn to Christ. In addition to that, the multiples of children would be beyond the ability to number or calculate. In those days, children were a blessing from the Lord in the sight of the people, and they desired to have as many as possible in most cases, and there may have been 25,000 children, and that may even be conservative, including the men, women, and children.

A great crowd has found its way to the soft grassy slope down by the Sea as Jesus comes out of the mountain. It says, "When Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion," and that means 'to suffer with.' He felt their pain, He felt their hurt, He felt their need, and He went forth toward them, "And healed their sick."

I suppose, humanly speaking, we would have said, "Go away. We're having a meeting that isn't open to the public," or, "Go away, we need refreshment, time to ourselves." Or we might have said, "Go away. God has called us apart and this is His plan for now, we'll deal with you later." But the text says He was moved with compassion. That means His heart went out to them.

It wasn't so much a cognitive thing, or analysis, or that He just reasoned what was the right thing to do in the divine mind and did it; it is the term with a root splagchnon, which speaks of the visceral area, the bowels. He felt the pain. Jesus Christ, though God, was not coldly calculating and analytical in terms of the needs of men; He was passionate, and felt the pain in His own heart, and the Hebrew always identifies emotion in the bowels, or the visceral area, because anxiety and trauma and compassion and emotion have an effect on our stomachs. It hits us in the gut.

So Jesus felt pain, genuine emotion, as when He stood over the city of Jerusalem and tears ran down His cheeks. He said, "How often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her brood, but you would not." Or as He stood over the grave of Lazarus and again, the tears coursed His cheeks, as He wept over the identification of pain and emotion in the death of one whom He loved and whom His friends loved. He represented God, just as Jeremiah did in chapter 13 when he called to Israel to repent, and said, "If you don't, My eye will run down with tears and I will weep for your destruction." He wept, as it were, in heart, like Paul in II Corinthians 11, who was in mourning, weariness, anxiety so often in his ministry as he saw the needs of men.

I really believe that this is a mark of God. As we read in the beginning of our worship this morning from Psalm 146, God's heart goes out to those in need. It is not an issue of whether they will respond or reciprocate by believing; it is that God's heart goes out to those in need anyway. I believe that's why, in chapter 10, the Lord said to the disciples that He would give to them the power to heal diseases. It was not just that that would demonstrate divine power; He could have demonstrated divine power by having them fly or leap tall buildings in a single bound, or walk on water or create

food, or any number of ways to describe and demonstrate divine power.

The reason He gave them the ability to cure disease is because He was not only demonstrating divine power, but divine compassion, and the heart of God toward those who hurt. So Jesus felt pain in His splagchnon, in the visceral area; His heart was grieving when He saw the crowd. Of course, the grief was spurred by the perfect perception of Hell that He had in His mind and the genuine reality of the state of man, which He saw without any hindrance. So He suffered with them, and moved away from the time with the disciples. The Bible tells us in verse 14 that He healed their sick.

The word 'sick' is a special word. It means 'the strength-less ones,' the ones without strength, who, no doubt, had made great sacrifice to even be there. How they had made it in this foot journey speaks of their concern, and their hope that they will find healing when they arrive, and they did. So our Lord healed them. He sets aside His rest, refreshment, priority of time with the disciples, and that is such a wonderful thing because it gives us hope in our need that God is never too involved in the running of the universe and all of the "biggies" of the priority plan, but that He can set it aside to stoop to one who has a need. The needs of pity overrule even the design of the people.

The deeds of pity are also overruled in the story. We just sort of bask in the wonder of our Lord's compassion and are faced with the dullness of perspective in verse 15. We read, "When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food.'"

The disciples are very concerned with the feeding of this group; they have had a long journey, and it has incited their hunger. There has been a busy, busy day, and you don't see that in Matthew's version of the account. Between verses 14 and 15, there is an interlude that you must know, so turn for a moment to John 6, and we'll fill in that gap.

Jesus steps out of that position with the disciples on the hill and begins to heal people. At that very juncture, John fills in the narrative in verse 5. "Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him," He's just stepping out to go down and heal them, and He initiates something with Philip. He comes and says to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?"

He plants a problem in Philip's mind; this is a real problem. "Philip, I'm going to go down and spend the day with these people." Mark and Luke add that He not only healed them, but He taught them concerning the Kingdom of God. So He spent the day healing and teaching; all day, giving Himself to the multitude out of compassion. But before He even started that, He plants a question in Philip's mind: where are we going to buy bread to feed this group?

There are several reasons why He asked that of Philip. The number one reason is because Philip was from that area, and would most likely know the resources, the places where such food might be gained. Secondly, He asked Philip, verse 6 says, to test him. Philip was like a lot of us - thick. It took him a long time to get the picture. John 14 says that Philip asked, "Show us the Father," and Jesus responds, "Have I been so long with you, Philip, and you still don't know? If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." So this is a test for Philip.

Jesus is saying, "Philip, I'm going to heal and take care of the teaching of the Kingdom; you just work on this problem: how are we going to feed the people?" Philip must have gone and reported this to the other eleven and said, "Hey, guys, we have to figure out a way to feed these people while the Lord is doing all this." They wracked their brains all day and never came up with an answer. In fact, Philip said, "We have 200 denarii," which was 200 days' wages, and probably what was in their treasury to buy their resources. He says, "That's all we've got, and even if we could find a place to buy enough, this wouldn't do it; if we used all of this, we wouldn't get enough for people to take small bites." So there is no resource.

Andrew comes, and sort of says, tongue in cheek, "Lord, I've been through the whole group and found one kid with five flat barley cakes and a couple of pickled fish." Barley was the cheapest grain, and the poorer the people, the more likely they were to use barley and make little bread cakes like a cracker. They would take the fish, which were commonly pickled, and then put them like a relish on the bread.

So Philip says, "There are two problems, Lord. One, we don't have any food; two, we don't have enough money to buy any food." And they have a whole day to stew over this; this is a day-long test, and the Lord goes about His business of healing and bringing the people the knowledge of the Kingdom. They're fuddling around, trying to figure out how to solve the problem.

Finally, evening comes, and they are no closer to a solution than they were at the first. Verse 15 picks it up. The Jews had two evenings; one was 3-6, the other was 6-9, and this was the first evening, prior to the setting of the sun. "When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, 'This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food.'" That was their solution; good, eh? Just get rid of them, send them away.

I confess to you that if you wanted to believe anything, you would have to believe that the Twelve, who had seen Jesus walk into Galilee and heal everyone in sight; who had seen Him create wine at a wedding; who had seen Him raise the dead, and calm the sea and control the wind; who had seen miracle after miracle; who had seen Him do the same through them in their recent ministry, at least the Twelve would have said, "Lord, You can do it; just say, 'Food!' and it will all appear." I mean, it doesn't seem like too much faith when you'd seen as much as they had seen. But they are thick. It's

like a man standing in front of Niagara Falls asking if anyone knows where he can get a drink; the power is all there, they are just too blind to see it.

Before you criticize them too strongly, remember in your own life how many times in the past God has met your needs, and how in the last, or present, crisis, you are struggling to figure out where the resources will come from. So they come, and have no answer. "Send them away, Lord. Get rid of them."

Verse 16. "But Jesus said to them, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.'" Sure. They're thinking, "We don't have any food." He knew that, so why would He say that? It was very simple. He is making them face the fact that they don't have any food. You say, "They already knew that." But He just wanted to be sure it was really solid in their knowledge, the admission of no resources. "You give them something to eat."

They said, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." That is it. Even infinitesimal bites of that couldn't cover 25,000 people. They are baffled, and that's right where the Lord wants them. It is very important that they say, "We haven't got it, and we can't get it. What we have isn't enough, and what we can get with what we've got isn't enough either. So we haven't got it and we can't get it." That's a great spiritual lesson for all who serve God; you haven't got it and you can't get it any more than they could. It is the dullness of their perspective. It is strange that no one said, "Hey, guys, the Lord could just create it." But there is none of that.

Then He adds another interesting command as we come to the next point. Their dullness of perspective is overruled by His display of power, and this is just incredible. Here, we come to the great part of the story. In verse 18, He says, "Bring them to Me. Bring the five bread cakes and two fish." Now, in a sense, He is saying to them, "You don't have it, and you can't get it, but what you do have, give to Me so that you really have nothing." You can imagine that they are sort of sitting back saying, "We'll never be able to feed this crowd, but maybe we can hang on to the loaves and fish, and maybe the kid will get lost, and at least we can eat. It won't be a lot, but it will keep us alive." But He says, "Give Me that bread and fish."

In verse 19, He does a very strange thing: He commands the multitude to sit down on the grass. It is the spring of the year, and the grass is green. This is a lovely spot, the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. I've been there several times, and it is absolutely beautiful. The grass sloping down to that little plain would be a beautiful place to sit, and the sun would be setting in the west and the little whitecaps would ripple as the breeze comes across the Sea in the evening. The air would be cool, and they'd be in the nice grass, and they're going to have a picnic!

Mark tells us that the Lord told them to seat the people in groups of 50 and 100 with aisles in between, so that they could serve them. Of course, the disciples are obeying the Lord, but they can't figure anything out. They still don't know what is going on. Mark says, "He sat them prasiaprasia,"



or, "Garden bed by garden bed." This is a very vivid description. There is the green grass, with little aisles in between, and clustered in groups of 50 and 100 were these people in brightly-colored oriental garments, so it would have looked like little garden beds of flowers among the green grass, as seen from God's perspective.

They are all seated, wonderfully in order, prepared to be served, and the only thing is, there is nothing to serve them. Then, this is even more interesting, "He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He thanked God." You have to know the disciples are peeking during this prayer to see where the delivery truck is. He is thanking the Lord for this box lunch in His hand as if they were all going to have a wonderful feast.

By the way, it says, "He blessed," and the same indication in John 6:11, it says He said 'thanks,' therefore we conclude that saying 'thanks' to God and blessing God are the same, so we bless the Lord and say thanks to the Lord. "And He broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes."

The miracle is almost hidden, isn't it? There is no fanfare. It doesn't say He got up on top of the mountain and said, "Food!" or that angels flew all over and trumpets blew and the earth shook. He just started handing out bread and fish and never stopped; He just created them. It must have been good, because it had never been touched by the curse. It was the best bread they'd ever eaten, and the best fish, and it just kept coming. He gave it to the disciples, and they passed it out.

You say, "How much was there?" Well, verse 20 says, "They all ate, and were chortazo," which is the word used of an animal who is into the feed trough for all he can get, or a horse in the feed bucket. It means foddered up; they ate as much as they wanted. You can know that if it was uncursed barley cakes and uncursed fish, they had a lot. It must have been the best meal they had ever eaten, and they were totally satisfied. They had all they wanted.

Isn't that like the Lord? He doesn't say, "Just a bite or two." It's all you want. The supply was exactly equal to the demand. And after everyone was full, which is the same word used in Revelation 19:21, where you see the birds that come to the great day of the Lord and gorge themselves on the flesh; it is a word that is used in Matthew 5:6 of those that hunger and thirst for righteousness, being filled. This is a very abundant concept.

Of course, there was some left. How interesting! When they collected all the fragments, there were 12 basket fulls! Isn't that interesting? There were also twelve disciples. Amazing. As great a wonder as the ability to create was the ability to create exactly the amount that satisfied everyone with exactly twelve baskets left over for the disciples. That is the economy of God; He doesn't waste His miracles. You say, "What about the Lord? There wasn't any for Him." Yes, and that would be another lesson for the disciples. If He was to eat, guess where He'd have to get it? From them.

What was the reaction? Verse 21 says, "They that had eaten," and the Greek participle makes it literally, "They that were the eaters," were 5,000 men, plus women and children. What was the reaction of this group. John 6 says that they tried to make Him king; they tried to take Him by force and make Him a king. That was all they needed - free food. Talk about a campaign promise! I mean, He could not only heal all their diseases, but He gave free food, and the best-tasting food there ever was. Anyone who could heal all the diseases, cast out demons, raise the dead, and give free food could overthrow the Romans, bring a revolution, bring a utopia, the ultimate welfare state. This has to be the king, so their political aspirations reached a fever pitch, and they tried to force the issue.

Verse 22 says that Jesus constrained His disciples, which means they must have fought against it. They now get the message, by the way, that He had the power. He constrained them to get into a boat; they didn't want to leave Him, I think, but He sent them away before Him. He would come later. "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there." Now the dull disciples were gone, the enthusiastic crowd was gone, and He was in the solitude with the Father. He had just put on a display like the world has never seen or will never see until Jesus comes again. He had demonstrated such incredible power and they had been there, the whole crowd, and seen it all.

In conclusion, listen carefully. There are some lessons here that are the sum of what the Lord wants to teach us in this incident. I call them the divine purposes. We have seen the desire for privacy give way to the design of the people, which gave way to the deeds of pity, which gave way to the dullness of perspective. Then came the display of power, and now there are some divine principles.

The Lord was teaching here; all of this was a massive lesson. There are three groups in this crowd. There are the Twelve, and this was for their training. There is the elect remnant, and this was for the confirmation of the faith of the elect. There is also the rejecting, shallow thrill-seeker, and this was the unmasking of the thrill-seeker. All of these were in view. Let's take them one at a time.

What did Jesus teach here in the training of the Twelve? He was always involved in training the Twelve; He was always involved in doing things that they might learn. What did they learn from this? What practical lessons that they could apply to their ministry, and that you and I can apply to our ministries as disciples of Jesus Christ, did they learn? Think back through the story, and try to see if you can identify where they fit.

The first lesson I see here is that He taught them to withdraw from needless danger. There is no virtue in a martyr complex. Sensibility says that you withdraw from needless danger.

Secondly, He taught them that it was important to seek rest and solitude for refreshment and the restoration of strength for the task. The Lord needed that, and He knew they needed that, and He

knows you need that, that place of solitude, quiet, solace, refreshment.

Thirdly, He demonstrated to them how important it is to spend time with those who labor with you. He took the Twelve; they needed time together, and there was a mutual stimulation there, a mutual strength. That was all part of discipling, to share His life with them, and they with each other.

Fourthly, He taught them the lesson about compassion for those in need, and showed them the heart of God, which was a heart broken over the needs of men. Not just spiritual needs, but even physical needs reached the heart of God.

Fifthly, He then taught them that sacrificing rest and leisure to meet the needs of others demonstrates the caring heart of God. It was a great lesson, because it is easy to get to the place where you feel your priority right is the right to leisure. Our Lord demonstrates that the priority is to meet needs, and you sacrifice leisure for that.

Sixthly, I believe He taught them very clearly in this incident that while you're meeting physical needs, you're also teaching the truth of the Kingdom. You can't just have a 'social gospel.' It is not enough just to do that which men need physically, but while He was healing, He was teaching them the things of the Kingdom of God. He would take them at face value in terms of their physical need, but not without trying to turn them to an understanding of their spiritual need. When you reach out to meet someone's physical need, it is with a view to turning them to the spiritual dimension.

A seventh lesson is that He taught the disciples to learn to obey even if they didn't understand why. Can you imagine this group of guys organizing all these people into units of 50 and 100 to serve them food they know they don't have and can't buy? But they did it, and I imagine that when it was all done, they said, "Boy, we want to be sure that when the Lord tells us to do things that we don't understand to go ahead and do them anyway, because something wonderful might happen."

Number eight, I think there is a great lesson here about doing things in an orderly fashion. God is a God of order; Paul tells that to the Corinthians when he encourages them to do things decently and in order. God is a God of great order, and He doesn't want any stampede for food. It is marvelous how the Lord Jesus sets everyone in garden bed by garden bed and has all the disciples moving among them. He is the God of order, with a place for order.

Number nine, God also demonstrated His economy of stewardship. There was nothing left over except enough to fill twelve baskets full, which would have fed the disciples, leaving nothing. There was not a waste; God is a steward of His miraculous power, a steward of infinite treasure. How much more are we to be stewards of finite treasure? Don't waste.

He also taught them that God was generous; everyone got all they wanted, and were stuffed. They ate as much as they cared to eat. God is not a God who doles it out piece by piece, but a God of abundant supply. So in ministry, we should come to men's hearts with the heart of God, which is a heart of abundance.

An eleventh lesson is that He taught them that ministry is looking to provide for others, not yourself. He says, "Give Me what you've got, and we're going to give it to them." They didn't get anything to eat until they had fed everybody everything they wanted, and you can imagine them saying, "How long is this going to keep coming? What if they run out before we get ours?" But there was enough. They had to go around and collect it, but it was there in exactness. It is the lesson that we are called to provide for others, and God will be sure there is provision for us.

That's what He told them in chapter 10, when He said not to take two coats or staffs, or money in a bag. He said, "Just go and give yourself away, and charge no man anything and I will make sure your supply is met."

A twelfth lesson is to learn to share with those who have not. I think the Lord didn't take a basket because He wanted them to learn to share with Him, and that's a great lesson. From all He gives us, we must give back to Him. Isn't that how it is? He has given us time; He wants a return. He has given us talent, spiritual gifts, money, possessions, and all of it has come from His creative hand. He asks that we share it with Him; that's what stewardship is. This is a great lesson.

The thirteenth lesson is that we should learn to trust the power of God to provide what seems impossible. I mean, they were saying, "We don't have it, and we can't get it," and He says, "That's right where I want you. Now you can learn that when you come to the point where you don't have it and you can't get it, trust Me to supply it."

I think about that in terms of ministry. It's the responsibility to feed you spiritually, to represent Christ week in and week out, to stand between Him and the world, as it were, and Him and the church, and to feed the church. I know two things: I don't have it and I can't get it, and that is why I depend on Him to provide it. People ask me all the time what the key to preaching is. The key to preaching is studying the Word of God with diligence and waiting on the Lord to put the meal together. You give Him all you've got. "Lord, I've exegeted the passage, read all the theology on it, figured out a few good illustrations; now will You do something with all this?" And you give Him your five little bread cakes and two fish and say, "Will you take this and feed the multitude?"

That takes us to a fourteenth lesson, which is to begin with your own, available resources. Even though it is little, trust God to make it much. As the song says, little becomes much when it is placed in the Master's hand. It's amazing when you think you have nothing and you wind up feeding thousands. God can use small things; He used the tear of a baby to move the heart of Pharaoh's

daughter. He used a shepherd's stick to work mighty miracles in Egypt. He used a sling and a stone to conquer a nation. He used the little girl to lead Naaman to Elisha. He used a widow with a little meal to sustain a prophet. He used a little child to teach His disciples the meaning of humility and salvation. He used Balaam's donkey to preach His truth, and the jawbone of another donkey to slay 1,000 men. He can use a small thing for a great end. Jesus likes to have the weak; that way, when things happen, we know it's His power.

A final lesson is that God wants to provide for people through you. When He took the little that He had and broke it, He gave it to the disciples. They stood between Him and the multitude. We stand between Him and the multitude, and God wants to feed the multitude through us. It is our availability, our heart of service. We stand between Christ and a needy world. This is a spiritual lesson for every generation; the hungry multitude is always present, and there is always a little band of disciples who haven't got it and can't get it. But there is always the compassionate Savior who wants to multiply it through us if we're available. This was a time to train the Twelve.

Let's look at group two. This would be the faithful remnant. In that crowd, there were true believers who said, "This is the Messiah." There were those who really believed, who really saw that this was the Messiah. There were some who even asked the question in John 6, "What must we do to work the works of God?" Jesus says, "No man comes unto Me unless the Father draws him," but He also said, "He that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." He says, "All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me, and I will lose none of them, but will raise them up at the last day." In other words, He knew that in that crowd were the gifts of the Father, the elect remnant, the true believers. And this was for them; this whole day was for them.

What did they see in it? Just think about it. They saw divine power in this man Jesus Christ; they saw before their eyes creation, for this was a creative miracle. They saw divine compassion, and the heart of God in that individual. Those were representations of deity, and they saw His great integrity - no waste. False charlatans, those prophets who feigned to represent God, would be wasteful, flaunting their supposed power. There is an economy here that speaks of the integrity of God.

They also heard Kingdom teaching; they heard words that were inexplicable in coming from a human mind, that spoke of the mind of God. They also saw a symbol of the Lord's ability to meet spiritual needs as they who hungered and thirsted after righteousness would be as filled as they who hungered and thirsted after food. So the elect remnant were taught and were given enough to confirm their faith, so there was an establishing of the Twelve and a confirming of the believing remnant.

That brings us to group three. These are the rejectors, the shallow soil, the weedy, thorny soil, the thrill-seekers. They were revealed, made manifest. John 6 tells us that the next day, the crowd showed up. Jesus went across the Sea; the disciples took a boat, and He walked across the Sea,

met them in the middle, and they all went to shore. The next day, the crowd is back and Jesus says, "You seek Me not for My sake, but for the sake of food. That is all you want." Self-indulgence.

He said, "Unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood." In other words, "Unless you will take in all that I am, all that I say, all that I do. Unless you totally and fully receive Me, you have no part with Me." At that point, it says that many of them walked no more with Him. They were gone. The whole thing just revealed the thrill-seekers. Many of them walked no more, but it doesn't say all of them. Some of them continued to walk; that was the remnant that stayed according to John 6.

Then there were the disciples, and the Lord said, "Will you go away too?" And Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Only You have the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure that You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Isn't that great? You know what this did for the disciples? It made them sure, and for the elect remnant, it brought them to believe and continue to follow. For the thrill-seekers, they turned around and left. So there was some good soil; many left, but a few stayed. The disciples were sure. This was a monumental, climactic point in the life of the Lord. The multitudes have gone; from now on, the Lord concentrates on the few, and the Twelve, as He moves toward the Cross.

I suppose the question that is obvious to be asked of you today is which group are you in? Are you an already-committed disciple? If so, doesn't this add surety to your faith? Are you one who has sought with an open heart to know the Lord Jesus Christ? Does this not convince you that He is God, and elicit from you true saving faith? Or are you a thrill-seeker, and have you been following Jesus for what you can get, and when the pressure is on and the demands are made, you're gone? Let's bow in prayer.

We know, Lord, that You know every heart and what group each of us fit into. You know those of us who are Your disciples; sometimes we're thick, sometimes we don't understand, sometimes we don't apply the history of Your revelation to the current problem, and we need to be tested and strengthened. We have been strengthened today; we have learned principles to better serve.

Father, we pray that You would make of us who are disciples all that You want us to be. We pray for those who are a part of that remnant, that elect that the Father gives the Son, none of whom the Son will ever lose, but all of whom will be raised at the last day. Draw even this day that true heart, that open heart, that pure heart to Christ. Then, for the thrill-seekers, Lord, may they be unmasked as shallow soil, thorny ground, where there appears a little interest but no fruit, they have turned to walk away. Father, we pray that each of us would examine our hearts to see where we are. If we find ourselves in group three, may we rapidly move to that second group, confessing sin and embracing Christ.

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