

JESUS FEEDS 5000 WITH 5 LOAVES AND 2 FISH

John 6:1-15

Key Verse: 6:5

“When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?’”

Today’s passage contains the trademark miracle of Jesus included in all four gospels: the feeding of the 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish. This is the fourth miraculous sign recorded in John’s gospel, after turning water to wine, healing the royal official’s son and healing the 38-year invalid man. This event reveals more of the character of two of Jesus’ disciples: Philip and Andrew. We can learn something from both of them. Especially, let’s learn of Jesus, who He is, and not misuse his blessing or take it for granted.

Verse 1 says this event happened “some time” after the events in chapter 5. Verse 4 adds that it was near the time of Passover. The scene shifted from Jerusalem to Galilee, to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. Luke 9:10 places this event near the town of Bethsaida on the northernmost tip of the Sea of Galilee (see a map). The other gospels tell us that this was intended to be a retreat of rest for Jesus’ disciples, after their fieldwork mission (Mk 6:30-31), and after the sad news of John the Baptist’s martyrdom (Mt 14:12; Mk 6:29).

Though they had gone to get away from the crowds, verse 2 says, **“...a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick.”** Thus far, only two healing signs have been mentioned: the royal official’s son and the invalid man. Of course, Jesus healed many others as the gospels testify. Jesus was known as a Healer, who healed the sick by the power of God. Surely many people came to see Jesus’ acts of healing. Also, many came for personal healing of their sicknesses and diseases. Others came to hear his teaching. In any case, a great crowd of people followed Jesus.

What did Jesus do? Verse 3 says, **“Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.”** Crowds of people followed Jesus like the annoying paparazzi. But Jesus did not run and hide from them. Jesus did not rebuke them and tell them to leave him alone. Jesus sat down with his disciples. Jesus used this as a teaching moment, both for his disciples and for the crowds. Matthew, Mark and Luke’s gospels tell us that Jesus welcomed the crowd, taught them and even healed their sick (Mt 14:14; Mk 6:34; Lk 9:11). But John’s gospel

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emphasizes how Jesus used this situation as a teaching moment for two of his disciples: Philip and Andrew.

First, a test for Philip (5-7). Look at verse 5, **“When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”** Philip was one of Jesus’ 12 disciples or apostles. Philip was introduced in John 1:43, where Jesus found Philip and said, **“Follow me,”** as Jesus was leaving for Galilee. Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the Galilean town of Bethsaida. Philip found his friend Nathanael and said, **“We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”** Nathanael scoffed, **“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”** **“Come and see,”** said Philip. So we see that Philip was not a complicated person. He concluded quickly that Jesus fulfilled prophecies of Moses and the prophets. Also Philip didn’t argue with Nathanael; he simply brought him to Jesus to see for himself.

Then why did Jesus ask Philip the question, **“Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”** It might be because Philip was from Bethsaida, the area they were in. Maybe Philip knew where all the local bakeries were. That’s possible. More likely however, was that Jesus knew this was precisely the question that Philip needed to struggle with, learn something and grow. Verse 6 tells us that **“[Jesus] asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.”**

A good shepherd knows his sheep, a good teacher knows his students, and a good father knows his children. He knows how they are each different. He knows each one’s strong points and weak points. He knows what will make them angry or afraid or discouraged. He also knows how to bring out the best in them. Jesus knew Philip personally. So Jesus asked Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”

Consider Jesus’ question. He said, **“Where?”** A correct answer would then be a place. Next Jesus said, **“shall.”** “Where shall” is more definite than “where might.” Next Jesus said **“we.”** “Where shall we” meant that Philip didn’t have to feed them all by himself. Jesus wants to include us in what he wants to do. Jesus wants us to participate in his work. Jesus doesn’t ask anyone to do something all by themselves. Jesus is with us all along. Next Jesus said, **“buy.”** Why did Jesus say “where shall we buy” when he had no intention to spend even one denarius to feed the crowd? I found a great answer during Bible study. The word “buy” involves a cost. To buy something, we must spend money. Money does not grow

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on trees. Money must be earned through toil and sweat. Following Jesus involves a cost. Serving others involves a cost. One who is not willing to spend anything or pay the cost, cannot follow Jesus or serve others. Every good parent knows that taking care of children is costly. A few weeks ago my son Andrew fell and cut his head and needed to go to the emergency room to get stitches. It was Friday 10pm and we had just returned from our campus meeting. I felt too exhausted to take him. But my wife volunteered to go, even though she had worked all day and hadn't even stepped into our home since early morning. As a good mother, and to my own shame, she was willing to pay the cost. Last Sunday I was on Devon Avenue handing out gospel tracts. An Indian woman said to me, "I used to be a Hindu. Now I am a Christian. I respect what you are doing. It must be hard." I appreciated her encouragement. But I replied, "This is nothing compared to what Jesus did for us." She agreed. I hope this inspired her to spend even a little time, money and effort for Jesus and for the gospel. What have you spent for Jesus and for others? Jesus promises that whatever we give for him and for the gospel he will repay many times over.

Next Jesus said **"bread."** Where shall we buy bread? Jesus could've just brought in quail as God provided for the Israelites. But Jesus wanted to give them bread. Jesus had more to teach them about bread from heaven in the next passage. Finally Jesus said, **"for these people to eat."** These words expressed Jesus' love and compassion for the people, who were tired and hungry. In the other gospels, the disciples asked Jesus to send the crowds away. But Jesus said to them, **"You give them something to eat."** Jesus wanted to give the crowd bread to eat, even though he had no money. This was Jesus' will and desire. Do you share Jesus' heart for the hungry and needy, even for one needy person? A few weeks ago we heard Jesus' words, **"Open your eyes and look at the fields!"** How do you see the world, or your neighbor? I've been visiting a refugee family from a Muslim nation as a volunteer. This week I saw that they had a brochure from a religious cult on their table. So it opened a door for me to share with them about Jesus. At the same time, I felt that we Christians must be more diligent to share the true gospel with others. We must do this not only when we go to the campus, but when we talk with our neighbors, when we go shopping, when someone comes to repair our home. Last summer as part of an evangelism class I had to report on sharing the gospel with others. It was good for me to be intentional about sharing the gospel with others, whether one time or three times, and prayerfully gauging their responses. Who have you shared the gospel with recently? Even saying the words, **"Jesus died for our sins"** or **"Jesus rose from the dead"** can be a powerful witness or beginning point of sharing the gospel with someone.

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Let's look at Philip's response to Jesus' question: **"Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"** Philip answered Jesus in verse 7, **"It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"** Did Philip pass Jesus' test? Well, let's analyze his answer. Jesus said, **"Where?"** Philip didn't give a location. He said, "It would take..." Philip's reply had to do with how much money was needed to give each person a bite. In a glance, Philip estimated the size of the crowd and multiplied that by \$1 each for a double cheeseburger at McDonald's and concluded, "That's half a year's salary for a minimum wage worker!" What Philip was really saying was, "That's impossible! We don't have that kind of money! And besides, even if we did have that much money, it would be a great waste since they would all be hungry again in a few hours!" Philip's quick conclusion was, "Unreasonable," or, "Impossible!" Philip failed Jesus' test.

Second, Andrew's acceptable offer (8-9). Suddenly Andrew spoke up. Look at verse 8. **"Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 'Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?'"** Andrew probably didn't have any money, and he certainly didn't have any bread. But amazingly, Andrew didn't think like Philip. Jesus didn't even ask Andrew, but that didn't stop Andrew from speaking up. Jesus said, **"Where?"** Andrew answered, **"Here."** **"Here"** was not a bakery. **"Here"** was a boy who had some bread. **"Here"** was 5 small barley loaves and 2 small fish. It was not enough to feed 5000 people. But it was something. Jesus will bless something when we bring it to him in faith and participation. With Jesus' blessing, little becomes much.

When the going gets tough, there are two kinds of responses for disciples of Jesus. When we are confronted with a challenging problem, one response says, "I can't." This is the negative, pessimistic response. The other response is, "I cannot, but Jesus can. I cannot solve the whole problem, but with Jesus' help and blessing, I can do something. I can participate in some way." This is the positive, optimistic response. With Jesus in the equation, the solution comes to the problem. This is the secret we can learn from Andrew. Andrew is the disciple of bringing people to Jesus. First he brought his brother Simon Peter to Jesus. Now he brought a boy with bread to Jesus. One who brings to Jesus will experience his blessing. We can bring someone or something to Jesus and he will bless and use it. Jesus took Andrew's borrowed offering and fed the crowd.

Louis Braille was born in 1809 in France into a devout, middle class family. At age 3 he accidentally gouged his eye with a sharp tool. The infection spread to

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his good eye and he became blind. Later, a priest saw the potential of young Louis, began to teach him, and got him into the Royal Institution for Blind Youth. Louis was a good student and learned to play the piano. Playing religious music on the organ became one of his joys of life. A system of raised dots for reading was introduced to the Royal Institute, but it had serious flaws. Louis' suggestions for improving it were resisted, but he humbly persevered. Finally, at age 15, he created the world's first really good system for blind reading. At age 19, he developed a Braille system of writing music. He died of tuberculosis at age 43. On his death bed he said, "God was pleased to hold before my eyes the dazzling splendors of eternal hope." This humble, determined young man became a blessing to millions of blind people in the world.

There are too many things in this world which we cannot do and too many problems to solve. We cannot solve the unemployment problem, or problems of pollution, drugs, disease, divorce, murder, robbery, immorality, natural disasters, poverty, or unbelief. It is easy to look at any of these problems and say, "Too huge, I give up!" or just ignore the problems and live selfishly. But what if we help one person in Jesus' name. What if we bring one person to Jesus for his mercy and blessing. Two terrible things to do to others is kill them or drive them away from Jesus. The greatest thing we can do for someone is to help them come to Jesus, for Jesus is the giver of new life and healing.

When Philip didn't look for something to contribute and give to Jesus, he couldn't help in any way. But when Andrew found 5 loaves and 2 fish, even though it wasn't his, and offered it to Jesus, a great miracle happened by Jesus' blessing. But the real hero in this story, of course, is not Andrew, but Jesus.

Third, Jesus feeds them all (10-15). Look at verse 10. Jesus said, **"Have the people sit down."** **There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there).** With this command, Jesus made his disciples participants in feeding this massive crowd. In this way, they could participate with Jesus in this miracle and in caring for this huge crowd. The people sat down on the grass to have a huge picnic with Jesus.

In verse 11, **"Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish."** Jesus took the 5 loaves that Andrew offered. Jesus never despises anything brought to him in faith, even small things. Jesus gave thanks. It is good to thank God for even the seemingly small things that we have been given. When we thank God, his power and glory are revealed all the more. Jesus then distributed the

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loaves to the people through the hands of his disciples. The people took as much as they wanted, first of bread, then of fish. The bread and fish did not run out. The baskets were not depleted, even though bread and fish was passing through the hands of all the people. It was a miracle of provision.

In 2 Kings 4:42-44 the prophet Elisha gave 20 barley loaves to 100 men, so 1 loaf fed 20 men and that was a miracle. Jesus fed 5 loaves to 5000 men or 1 loaf to 1000 men, a miracle 200 times more powerful than Elisha's! In the time of Elijah there was a drought. A widow at Zarephath said she had only enough flour to bake bread, eat it and die. But when she made a loaf for Elijah at the Lord's command, her jar of flour was not used up and her jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah (1Ki 17:16).

Jesus fed the crowd of over 5000 with 5 small loaves and 2 small fish. The boy had enough to eat as well. His lunch box became a blessing to over 5000 people when he gave it to Andrew, who gave it to Jesus. Jesus didn't spend any money to feed them. It would be easy to take for granted this blessing and throw away the leftovers. But look at verses 12 and 13. **"When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.' So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten."** There was one basket leftover for each of the disciples. When they followed Jesus and obeyed him, they were not only a blessing to others; they were also blessed and amply provided for with a basketful themselves. The Lord provides for his people who trust and obey him.

Look at the response, however, of the crowd in verses 14-15. **"After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself."** They were right that Jesus was the promised Prophet who was to come into the world. But they misunderstood why Jesus came. It was not to be a worldly king or to give them free bread. They could not make Jesus king to do their will. Jesus came to do the Father's will. Jesus would become King of the Jews, not in the way that they wanted, but in God's right way and at God's right time.

So what do we learn from this passage? What Jesus wants to do, he is more than able to do. And he wants us to participate in his work. We learn from Philip how we should not respond to something Jesus wants to do. If, like Philip's response, we look at our own resources, we will quickly despair and give up due to

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our weaknesses and limitations. From Andrew's response, we learn to listen to Jesus and act in faith, bringing something or someone to him for his blessing. Most of all, we learn about Jesus. Jesus was ready to pay the highest price for our salvation, with his own blood. It was costly for Jesus to save the world. It is costly for us to follow Jesus and to serve others in his name. But it is worth it. Jesus will take what we bring, multiply it and make it a great blessing to others. Jesus is able and willing to feed the hungry masses and he wants us to participate in it. **“Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?”** Will you respond like Andrew? What will you bring to him?