

JESUS FEEDS THE FIVE THOUSAND

John 6:1-2

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?’”

In the last passage we learned that Jesus wants us to believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and have eternal life in his name. We can believe when we accept the testimony of John the Baptist, the testimony of the works that Jesus did, and the testimony of Scripture. However, to accept this testimony we must love God more than the praise of men. We must hold on to one word of God in any difficult situation as the absolute truth of God. Then we have the assurance of eternal life. We can also be good witnesses of Jesus to the people of our time.

In today’s passage Jesus feeds the five thousand. This event appears in all four gospel books. We learn the mind of Jesus in this passage. We also learn what kind of people are useful in the work of Jesus. May God help each of us to be a useful disciple of Jesus.

First, Jesus decides to train his disciples (1-4).

Look at verse 1. “Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias)....” The transition from chapter 5 to chapter 6 is rather abrupt. In chapter 5 Jesus was in Jerusalem. In chapter 6, Jesus suddenly appears in Galilee, crossing the lake to the eastern side. In chapter 5 Jesus spoke to

the hostile Jewish religious leaders. In chapter 6 Jesus trains his disciples and ministers to a crowd of Galileans. John ignores trivial details in order to explain why Jesus began to train his disciples. The Jewish religious leaders were called to be Bible teachers. But they were unbelieving. They had no word of God in their hearts. As a result of their unbelief, they could not be shepherds for Israel. In fact, they were like a deadly cancer.

Look at verse 2. "...and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick." In spite of the bad influence of the Jewish leaders, many ordinary people followed Jesus. Why? They saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. They wanted spiritual help from Jesus, mostly healing. Many sick people were following Jesus, arms outstretched, calling for his mercy: "Jesus, please heal my shriveled hand!" "Jesus, please heal my lame leg!" "Jesus, please heal my sleeping disorder!" These people were needy. Yet in their desperate situations, they believed that Jesus cared about them. They believed that Jesus was mighty to save. So they came to Jesus shamelessly, asking help. Each thought his problem was most urgent. Each tried hard to push through to Jesus first for his help.

The need of the crowd was overwhelming. No doubt, Jesus wanted to reach out to each person and heal them with a touch. Jesus wanted to heal not only their bodies, but their spirits that had been deranged by sin. Jesus wanted to restore the image of God in them and make them men and women of mission. But Jesus did not rush in and begin to heal. Look at verses 3-4. "Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Feast was near." In his human flesh, Jesus faced a time limit. Very soon, he would go to the cross and die for the

sin of the world. Jesus sat down with his disciples on the mountainside. Jesus must have looked at them one by one. They were ordinary young men and generally not well educated. But they believed that Jesus was the Messiah. They followed Jesus with commitment and listened to his word. If they became shepherds like Jesus, there was hope for the world. It was time to begin training them.

Second, Jesus asks, “Where shall we buy bread?” (5-7).

Look at verses 5-6. “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?’ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.” Here we learn the mind of Jesus. Jesus had already decided to feed the crowd. Jesus regarded each person like one of his own children. Jesus knew they were hungry. So Jesus wanted to feed them. Jesus was compassionate, like a mother. Jesus’ compassion extended not only to one or two needy people, but to a great crowd of suffering people. The compassion of Jesus is beyond human comprehension. The compassion of Jesus is like heavenly sunshine descending from above. The other gospels emphasize Jesus’ compassion. However, John’s focus is a little different.

John emphasizes that Jesus wanted to test Philip. Jesus wanted to train Philip. Jesus asked him, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” Jesus challenged Philip to think like a leader. Jesus wanted Philip to share his shepherd mind for the crowd. To do so, Philip had to shake off the mind of a sheep, that is, an ordinary man’s mentality. How does a person become a shepherd? It is not by assuming a

title: “Shepherd.” A shepherd must have the mind of Jesus. One of Jesus’ greatest blessings is to teach us his shepherd mind.

How did Philip respond? Look at verse 7. “Philip answered him, ‘Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!’” Philip had a listening problem. Jesus did not ask him how much it would cost. Jesus asked him where they could buy bread. Philip was from that area. So he should have known where to buy bread. All Philip had to do was suggest a place. But Philip did not. With his human reason, he manufactured irrelevant data and concluded that Jesus’ request was impossible. He even implied that Jesus was irrational for asking the question. We see from his answer that he was brilliant. He could survey the situation at a glance and calculate how much it would cost. Also, his way of expression is so descriptive and interesting, like that of a journalism major. But he was uncooperative. He did not like Jesus’ question. He did not want to feed the crowd. He did not understand Jesus’ mind. Philip was self-centered and Philip was useless.

Third, Andrew’s faith (8-9).

Look at verses 8-9. “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?’” Suddenly another disciple spoke up. He was Andrew. Andrew had brought Peter to Jesus. After that, Andrew seems to have been ignored. Perhaps Andrew did not look like leadership material. However, Andrew had been following Jesus quietly. Andrew did not care about human recognition. He was happy simply to be around Jesus. He paid close attention to

what Jesus said and did. He had learned the mind of Jesus. We learn from Andrew what kind of attitude we must have toward Jesus' words.

When Jesus said, "Where?" Andrew answered, "Here." Andrew had listened to Jesus' question carefully, though it was directed at Philip. Someone else might have thought, "I'm glad Jesus wasn't talking to me." But not Andrew. When Jesus spoke, Andrew listened, no matter what. Andrew was ready to obey Jesus' word. Andrew was like a good soldier, eager to please the commander. As soon as Jesus said, "Where?" Andrew began to look around. His eyes must have searched the horizons, seeking a Sam's Club sign. Then he looked for Costco, then Aldi. But there was no place. Still, Andrew looked around. His eyes fell on a young boy with a lunch sack. Maybe Andrew made a big smile at the boy and asked, "What is in your lunch sack?" Andrew was so friendly and sincere that the boy trusted him and revealed its contents. It was five small barley loaves and two small fish. It was just a boy's small lunch. But to Andrew, it was a beginning point to carry out Jesus' command. Andrew brought the boy to Jesus and said, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish."

When Andrew brought the boy with five loaves and two fish, he knew it could not feed the whole crowd of people. But Andrew was not trying to feed all the people by himself. Andrew was depending on Jesus to feed the people. Andrew knew the mind of Jesus and believed that Jesus would feed the people. So Andrew brought the five loaves and two fish with faith in Jesus. We too must bring what we have with faith in Jesus. Jesus gives us commands that are seemingly impossible to carry out. Jesus says, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." When Jesus says this, he has already decided to make it a reality. Jesus

will do it. But he wants us to accept his command by faith and participate in what he is doing.

During the early days of UBF in Korea, there was a great work of God among students. Many were healed from fatalism and found new life in Jesus. They loved Bible study. But whenever they came to the end of a gospel, there was Jesus' world mission command. At that time, it looked impossible for Korean students to obey. They were poor and under severe travel restrictions. But Dr. Samuel Lee and Mother Barry took this command of Jesus as God's word, the expression of God's divine love for all people of all nations. So they prayed to carry it out. Other church leaders told them, "You are crazy. World mission is possible only for rich Americans and Canadians." Nevertheless, Dr. Lee and Mother Barry persevered in prayer and looked around for five loaves and two fish. Here and there, they found them. For example, Dr. Lee had been offered a scholarship to study for a Ph.D. in America. It was what he really wanted to do. But he offered it to another person on the condition that she spend one year as a missionary in Jeju Island. It was actually part of Korea, but was across the sea. The person agreed, served one year as a missionary, then studied in America on Dr. Lee's scholarship. I heard that Dr. Lee cried a lot to give up his scholarship. In this way, he brought five loaves and two fish to Jesus by faith.

Fourth, Jesus blesses the five loaves and two fish (10-15).

The contrast between Philip and Andrew was a lesson to the other disciples. They realized that they should be like Andrew. Those who had been thinking like Philip all repented. Andrew's faith was a good influence to make an atmosphere that

Jesus could work in. Look at verse 10. “Jesus said, ‘Have the people sit down.’” The disciples were now drawn into the mind of Jesus. They were one with Jesus. When Jesus said, “Have the people sit down,” they responded with positive attitudes and expectation. They knew Jesus was going to do something. This gave them spiritual authority. When they spoke, noisy children quieted down; yacking women became submissive; brawny men listened attentively. Soon, the crowd of people was seated in an orderly way.

Look at 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 loaves. They were just five small barley loaves. But they came through Andrew’s wholehearted obedience and creative effort. They were precious to Jesus. Jesus thanked God for them. Jesus thanked God for Andrew’s good influence. Jesus thanked God for the little boy’s sacrifice. Jesus thanked God for what God was about to do. Then a miracle happened. As they were being distributed, the five loaves and two fish began to multiply. Each person who was seated received as much as they wanted, but still, there was more left. Finally, everyone in the crowd ate as much as they wanted. Five loaves and two fish fed five thousand men. Jesus is God who satisfies all human need by his almighty power.

Look at verses 12-13. “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.” Jesus taught his disciples to be good stewards of God’s abundant blessing. They should not fall into a spoiled rich man’s mentality,

thinking that God would rain bread from heaven whenever they wanted some. They must realize that God supplies what is needed. If there is something left over, it is to supply a future need. So Jesus said, "Let nothing be wasted." Early Americans turned this into a proverb, "Waste not, want not." May God help us to be good stewards of God's blessings.

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." In one sense, they learned what they should learn: Jesus is the Prophet, the promised Messiah. But their concept of the Messiah was not right. They wanted to make Jesus king by force. This really makes no sense. If Jesus is King, they must listen to him and obey him. What they really meant is that they wanted was to turn Jesus into their permanent servant who would supply free bread and fish throughout their lifetimes. They all wanted to retire and enjoy a comfortable life without any struggle to survive any more. This made them crazy people who offended the Son of God deeply. But Jesus did not confront them at this time. Jesus quietly withdrew to a mountain by himself to pray.

Fifth, Jesus restores his disciples with his word (16-21).

The disciples must have been very excited. They experienced Jesus' power and love in a dramatic way. They had been used as instruments of God's abundant blessing for the great crowd of people. They felt that they were somebody. They all became very optimistic. Then the human dreams hidden in their hearts came to the surface. Delusions of grandeur made them giddy. They did not notice that Jesus had slipped away quietly to pray.

When evening came, they went down to the lake and got into a boat. Then they set off for Capernaum. It was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. But they were not worried about anything. They were indeed confident. Then a strong wind came up and the waters grew rough. It was difficult for them to do anything but fight against the wind. About three and a half miles from shore they began to flounder helplessly. Suddenly their bodies felt the effects of much work and little sleep. Their arms began to feel like lead weights. Their eyes were strained and they became grumpy, then frightened. Then they saw someone approaching the boat. It was Jesus. Jesus was walking on the water. It was another miracle. Jesus revealed his divinity and his mastery over nature. The disciples should have been relieved and welcomed Jesus. However, they were terrified. Without the word of God in their hearts, even Jesus' great miracle caused them to express fear.

How did Jesus help them? Look at verses 20-21. "But he said to them, 'It is I; don't be afraid.' Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading." Jesus' word melted their hearts. Fear was gone and they trusted Jesus again. Jesus restored fellowship with them by his grace. In the end, Jesus maintains his relationship with us by his grace.

Today Jesus asks us, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Jesus wants us to share his shepherd mind for the young people of our nation. Let's repent of our selfishness. Let's bring five loaves and two fish to Jesus with faith.