

“Five Loaves and Two Fishes”

John 6:1-14

Chapter 1, Jesus is the Word Who is the Creator.

Chapter 2, His creative power is demonstrated by turning water into wine.

Chapter 3, Nicodemus: Religion versus regeneration.

Chapter 4, Truth versus tradition: the woman at the well.

John Chapter 5 records that the Jews sought to kill Jesus because they **correctly** understood Him when He called God His Father, “making Himself equal with God.” Then Jesus answers the Jews with an “Amen, Amen” and preaches a sermon on His deity. There is simply no other interpretation of John 5:17-47 than that Jesus of Nazareth is God!

Back when I was grading a correspondence course for the prison ministry on Biblical Interpretation the student answered almost every question correctly. He had head knowledge of the subject. But in an essay question about a definition of Christianity he wrote many correct things but also said, “I don’t go for that predestination stuff and that Jesus is God.”

My comments were that he should read Jesus’ sermon on His deity in John 5:17-47. Then I suggested that he read John’s entire gospel. It will not do to say that Jesus was a “good man” and a “prophet” if what Jesus said about Himself is not the truth. He would be a lunatic or a liar.

A brief outline of John Chapter 6:

Jesus feeds a great multitude by multiplying five barley loaves and two small fish [1-14].

Jesus refuses to be made a political king over Israel after the flesh [15].

After feeding the great multitude Jesus walks on the water [16-21].

Jesus rebukes the people because they only followed Him to get a free lunch [22-26].

In His usual manner Jesus preaches the meaning of His miracle; that He is the true bread from heaven, the bread of God [27-59].

Chapter 6 closes with many of the multitude rejecting what Jesus preached about the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation [60-71].

Almost a year has passed between Christ's sermon on His deity as recorded by the apostle John in Chapter 5 and His sermon on the bread from heaven in Chapter 6.

Herod had murdered John the Baptist sometime before what is recorded here in Chapter 6.

Let's read together John 6:1-14.

John 6:1-14

After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. 2 Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. 3 And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.

4 Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. 5 Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" 6 But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.

7 Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little."

8 One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, 9 "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"

10 Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

11 And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost."

13 Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. 14 Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

The Holy Spirit must have a special purpose by having the apostle John to record the “Feeding of the Five Thousand.” All of God’s word is for our instruction, but this is the **only** miracle that all four Gospel writers record. [Cf. Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17]

While there are no conflicts between the four Gospel accounts, each one brings out some different aspect of the miracle.

Matthew and Luke connect this miracle with the news of the death of John the Baptist and Jesus retires to a quiet place. Mark points out that it was upon the return of the apostles from their preaching tour.

This miracle is about Jesus multiplying bread and fish.
We should see the creative power of Jesus.

But there is much more to be learned from this miracle.
The spiritual meaning of the miracle is profound.

The Gospel in the NT is based on the OT Scriptures. Jesus calls on the writings of Moses as a witness from God the Father to His claim to be God.

Jesus will again call on the OT as He claims to be the bread of God.

The **main lesson** of this miracle is that Jesus of Nazareth is the “**Sent One of God.**”

Another lesson of this miracle is that there were two ways to handle the problem of there not being enough food. The disciples’ way was to send them away. The Lord’s way is to give them something to eat.

Yet another lesson is, be frugal. Save for a future need.
They had more left over than they started with.
They would need it later to help others.

Those applications are only on the surface of this miracle.
Let’s try to go deeper into its spiritual meaning.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

“Bread” in the Bible is not a loaf of bread that you can buy at Food Giant.

In the Bible, “bread” signifies that which is necessary for life.

God fed the people in the wilderness with manna [manna means what is it?].
God [the Word] gave this bread through Moses.
The people ate the manna and they died [47-49].

Jesus is the “True Bread” from heaven sent by God the Father, and Jesus Christ is the sustainer of life.

We need to bury this thought deep in our minds.
Jesus Christ is the giver and sustainer of life!

After Feeding the Five Thousand and Walking on the Water, Jesus preaches a sermon in which He declares that He is the True Bread from heaven.

Remember that the apostle John is writing about 30 years after the other three evangelists and that John’s burden is to show that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ who is promised in the OT Scriptures.

As with all of the miracles of Jesus, they are teaching far more than His power to create and to heal and to raise the dead. Everything that Jesus said and did was in some way a fulfillment of the OT Scriptures.

There is a vitally important connection between this miracle in John’s Gospel and one in the OT, which was a type or adumbration of it.

Once more I must give credit to Charles Alexander for the spiritual insight that he has given to the many OT connections in John’s Gospel that most writers seem to miss or ignore as not being significant.

Most of the commentaries that I checked give very little notice to Elisha’s similar miracle in 2 Kings or to its fulfillment in John Chapter 6.

Some ignore it altogether. In my understanding, Elisha’s miracle is the basis for the Lord’s claim to be the Bread of God.

Elisha's miracle is the OT basis for the bread from God.

2 Kings 4:42-44

Then a man came from Baal Shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley bread, and newly ripened grain in his knapsack. And he said, "Give it to the people, that they may eat."

43 But his servant said, "What? Shall I set this before one hundred men?"

He said again, "Give it to the people, that they may eat; for thus says the LORD: 'They shall eat and have some left over.'" 44 So he set it before them; and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD.

It was a time of famine in Israel when Elisha came to Gilgal, where there was a school for the prophets. There came a man from Baal-Shalisha bringing "bread of the firstfruits," twenty loaves of barley bread and newly ripened grain. At Elisha's command, this short supply was set before a hundred men, who not only ate and were satisfied, but had some left over.

These "loaves" would be more like what we would call "rolls."
These "rolls" were small things like the Lord broke.

The comparison of these two miracles is most instructive.

Elisha fed 100 men; the Lord fed 100 companies each numbering 50 men.

The significance of the OT miracle being multiplied is further evidence that the New Covenant is replacing the Old Covenant. The time had come for the Bread of Life to be revealed to the whole world.

Elisha's miracle is at **Pentecost**, or the time of the firstfruits. The Lord's miracle is at **Passover**, fifty days before Pentecost. The OT and the NT miracles combine to teach that Passover and Pentecost are linked.

The crucifixion [**Passover**] and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit [**Pentecost**], the whole salvation of sinful man, is the work of Christ, and the time is at hand.

The miracle of Elisha was designed as a means of identifying to the Jewish nation the arrival of the true Messiah and the time of His kingdom. The nation rejected the sign, scorned the Messiah, and demanded an earthly kingdom instead of a spiritual kingdom.

Their error is carried on to this day!

Jesus presents Himself as the Bread come down from heaven and in so doing abolished forever the Jewish prerogative and privilege in the words,

“For the Bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

This Jesus is “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Bear with me because not everyone has heard with “ears to hear” the explanation of “world.” The “world,” as John uses “cosmos” [make up] in verse 33 means both Gentiles and Jews and does not mean everyone in the entire human race.

Another aside: be very careful reading John’s Gospel when he uses “world,” because John uses the word in no less than five [probably seven] senses or meanings of the word. You must compare Scripture with Scripture and study the context to interpret the Bible.

But the Jews understood that Jesus meant both Gentiles and Jews. This is what so angered the Jews at Paul’s preaching. Paul writes in Romans that God had **never** favored the Jews in the matter of salvation.

Romans 9:6-8

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, 7 nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." 8 That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

Jesus is the Savior of all kinds of peoples, nations, and languages from the uttermost parts of the globe to the end of this present age.

The people who ate the loaves and the fish were willing to make Jesus their earthly king [6:15] because they had been taught **incorrectly** by the rabbis in their synagogues to look for an earthly kingdom of luxury and prosperity, and eating bread for which they had invested no labor. [6:26]

Read the other gospels and see that the day has gone on and the people are becoming restless and they need something to eat. Christ asks Philip, the Bethsaida Jew with a Gentile name, where bread may be bought.

The question was to “test” [prove] Philip, to show that the kingdom of God is a thing of faith, **“for He Himself knew what He would do!”**

In a commentary by G. Campbell Morgan who said that when he had heard a sermon on the phrase, **“for He Himself knew what He would do!”** that George Muller that changed his entire theology. For the first time he saw the sovereignty of God in salvation and predestination and the eternal purpose of God! **“for He Himself knew what He would do!”**

There is never any apprehension or anxiety with our Lord. All things are ordered and sure. All is known from the beginning, all the facts, all the circumstances are arranged by divine Wisdom.

Those who deny God’s omniscience and providence and predestination are pathetic. **“For He Himself knew what He would do!”**

Philip answers, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may have a little.” A single denary was a day’s wages and bread was cheap, so Philip’s estimate is an indication of the magnitude of the amount of bread needed for so many people.

We might wonder that having seen water turned into wine and healing the nobleman’s son from a distance and healing the man who was lame for 38 years that Philip would say instead, “O Lord, You know!”

When the Lord commanded Ezekiel to preach to the dry bones and the Lord asked, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

Ezekiel answered, “O Lord God, You know.” [Ezekiel 37:3]

But before we allow our sinful pride to allow us to think that we would have answered the Lord any better than Philip we must remember how often we doubt and exercise so little faith.

It is also significant that, Andrew, the only other disciple with a Gentile name is brought into the action here.

“There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?”

Andrew is not instructing divine Wisdom, but offers a humble suggestion. “But what are they among so many?”

Well done, Andrew! Here could be the solution, Lord, but it is not for me to even suggest what You might do.

The prominence of Philip and Andrew, both Jews with Gentile names; indicates the bringing of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God.

The Five and the Two:

Augustine who lived from 354-430 A.D. pointed out the significance of the five barley loaves. At first I thought Augustine’s interpretation of the five loaves was a reach until I recalled the **context** where Jesus says that Moses wrote about Him.

Augustine says the five barley loaves are allegorical and mean the law.

“These five barley loaves,” he said, “are the five books of Moses – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.” These books are known as the law. They contain all the evidences and tokens and declarations of God’s ancient covenant with His people.

Moses was the mediator of that Old Covenant, in types and shadows of which the New Testament reveals is fulfilled in Christ.

Further, those five books tell of the time when God fed His people in the wilderness with manna and Jesus will refer to that event as well. Christ declares that He is the true bread from heaven.

To “eat” this True Bread is to have eternal life!

We will deal with what it means to “eat” the True Bread later in this message but know for now that it **does not** mean eating the literal bread of the Lord’s Supper!

The five barley loaves then are symbolic, but Augustine did not offer a meaning of the two fish.

Again, I call on Charles Alexander for an interpretation of a meaning of the two fish. No other writer that I have read offers any interpretation of the meaning, if any, of the two fish. It is as though they have no meaning at all. Well, I am convinced that everything that Christ said or did is full of meaning.

Charles Alexander says that the two fish represent the church. The five barley loaves represent the OT and the two small fish stand for the church.

The Lord foretold that His disciples would be fishers of men and at least seven of His disciples were fishermen.

So if the two small fish denote the **nature** of the church, and the **manner** of the ingathering of the elect, why two? The answer is that “two” is the signature of the church in her relation to the two covenants.

We have a clear and unmistakable explanation of the two covenants in Galatians 4. Paul, in Galatians 4:21-31, gives an allegory which describes the **two** covenants as being represented by **two** women and by **two** sons.

Galatians 4:21-31

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar — 25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children — 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27 For it is written:

**"Rejoice, O barren,
You who do not bear!
Break forth and shout,
You who are not in labor!
For the desolate has many more children
Than she who has a husband."**

28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. 29 But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. 30 Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

Hagar and her son Ishmael stand for Jewry, which is in bondage to the law, or the Old Covenant. Sarah and Isaac are the Jerusalem above and are free, and represent the church, and the New Covenant.

Therefore the New Testament church, and **not** a future nation of Jews, is the true object of prophecy, the church is the legitimate heir to the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and is the true Israel of God.

[Galatians 6:16]

Matthew, Mark, and Luke each tell that the Lord broke the bread and then gave it to His disciples, who in turn gave it to the people.

The bread is the **bread of life**, the doctrine of Christ, as Christ tells us in His sermon on the bread, and breaking the bread is the **understanding** of that Word. The eating of the bread is the receiving of the Word by faith.

Do we not sing?

“Break Thou the Bread of Life, Dear Lord to me, As Thou didst break
the loaves Beside the sea; Beyond the sacred page I seek thee Lord;
My spirit pants for Thee, O Living Word.”

The writer of that song got it right.

So again, the bread is the bread of life, the doctrine of Christ, as the remainder of the chapter tells us, and breaking the bread is the understanding of that Word. The eating is the receiving of the Word by faith.

The Apostolic Authority:

The position of the apostles between the Lord and the multitude is a statement of apostolic authority. Just as there were twelve patriarchs in the OT there are twelve men in the NT to whom the entire range of truth is entrusted.

What they did not write and teach is **not** authoritative.
Any who came after them and claim to be apostles are liars.

Revelation 2:1-3

"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,

'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

There is no new revelation from God since the apostles finished the Bible.

Mohammed and Joseph Smith are liars. The false prophets in our own time who claim to have a "word from God" that is contrary to the Bible are liars!

With the exception of the NT historical books – Mark, Luke, and Acts – which were written in association with the apostles and by their authority – all the NT, all the doctrinal works, were written by the apostles.

An apostle must have written even the letter to the Hebrews, the purest theological writing in the entire Bible, and that apostle must have been Paul.

After reading many arguments that Paul is not the writer of Hebrews, I remain convinced that Paul is the only one who could have been its writer.

Christ lays down the apostolic principle that through these men the NT word should come. These twelve were to "sit on twelve thrones."

Matthew 19:27-28

27 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"

28 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel

“Twelve Thrones” is a figure of the apostolic reign under the Gospel in this present age “in the regeneration”. This is the time of regeneration of men and women! This is not a future earthly reign in a literal “millennium” when the apostles allegedly return from the enjoyment of eternal life to rule over a mixture of mortals and immortals in the land of Palestine.

In their reign, the apostles now preside over **true Israel**, the church, and they reign by the written word, which is the only authority the true church will receive! The “thrones” denote their authority and it is shown by the Lord placing the broken bread in their hands to be distributed to the multitude.

The Twelve Baskets:

Here is the picture. The Lord blesses the bread and breaks it and places it in the hands of each apostle. The twelve then proceed to the companies sitting on the grass and take from their hand a portion, which they present to the first, then the second, and then the third, and so forth.

As much remains in their hand after giving the bread as was there at the first.

The multitudes begin to eat, but as much as they eat, they have remaining in their hand. Pieces fall the ground but there is still as as much as they started with. At last all are filled and the ground is littered with the bread that remains. There is so much in abundance.

The statement that they are all filled is to show that this miracle is no mirage. You could not convince thousands of hungry men that their hunger is satisfied unless they are filled!

The Lord commands that the fragments be gathered so that nothing is lost. Why is this important? Not just to show the greatness of the miracle.

Something more significant is meant.

Twelve large baskets are procured and are filled with the fragments. The apostles bear the load on their shoulders. We are not told what they do with the fragments. What we do see is the men carrying away the bread. See them carrying the bread throughout the history of the church. All the bread that we eat, brothers and sisters, comes from apostolic baskets.

These baskets of bread have been carried into all the world and multitudes are being fed as we continue to spread the Gospel in this present age until our blessed Lord returns.

The riches of Christ are inexhaustible. The more we partake of Christ the more of Christ remains. The apostolic baskets – the gospels, the epistles, the Revelation - are full of Christ.

In verse 14, the men who had seen the miracle that Jesus did said,
“This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

They are referring to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:

Deuteronomy 18:15-22

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, 16 according to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.'

17 "And the LORD said to me: 'What they have spoken is good. 18 I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. 19 And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him. 20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 21 And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' — 22 when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

They were correct in 6:14, that Jesus is that Prophet. But the very next verse, John 6:15, shows that they completely misunderstood the nature of Messiah's kingdom.

There is this strange teaching that is so very popular in our day that Jesus "offered" a kingdom to the Jews and they refused His "offer." There is nothing in the Bible to support such a claim.

What the Jews rejected was the absolute authority of Jesus over them as the Son of God! Jesus very clearly explains the nature of His kingdom.

John 18:33-38

33 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

34 Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"

35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?"

36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?"

Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

38 Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all."

It is my earnest desire that together we have a better understanding of this great miracle. It is my earnest desire that we have a better grasp of the spiritual significance of this and the other miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is my earnest desire we really believe in the sufficiency of Christ and His Holy Word. The lessons of this great miracle of the "Five Loaves and the Two Fish" are that Jesus of Nazareth is the Creator and the Sustainer of life.

The bread that we eat in the memorial supper is the symbol of His **body**. And the wine is the symbol of His **blood**.

But the breaking of the bread and its distribution in John 6 is the doctrine of Christ as the apostles explain it in the NT.

Mark 6:52 says that the disciples “had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.” Do not harden your heart to the truth of Jesus Christ!

False prophets who teach that you must do something to become “qualified” for salvation have deceived many people. All that you must do is to repent of your sins and trust the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

And repentance and justifying faith are the gift of God!

Amen!

Jim Gunn
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