

4th sign John 6:1-14 - The five thousand fed

Signs

Semeion say-mi'-on from Semaino see-mah'-ee -no - to signify a legal term used in evidence or a scientific term used in a proof.

The word "Sign" is used 19 times in John's Gospel

4th sign John 6:1-14 - The five thousand fed

Five Thousand Fed:

1Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), **2**and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. **3**Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. **4**The Jewish Passover Feast was near.

5When 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?" **6**He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

7Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages^a would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

8Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, **9**"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

10Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. **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.

12When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." **13**So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

14After 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." **15**Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

The events recorded in chapter 6 immediately follow the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda.

There is an interesting difference in the events recorded in Chapter 6 and the synoptic Gospels. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, the main emphasis of reporting concerns Jesus' ministry over a two year period in Galilee. John only covers two signs from that time:

1- The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000,

2 - The accompanying miracle of Jesus' walking on the water to his disciples during the storm.

All four gospels record these two miracles, and John's selection of this particular incident indicates there is something very important about it. In our Lord's words to the multitude on this occasion he gives the first hint of his approaching death.

1Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), 2and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. 3Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. 4The Jewish Passover Feast was near. (John 6:1-4)

This incident occurs in the spring of the year (at Passover). At this time, the hills would have been green with grass. The multitudes were following Jesus everywhere despite the fact that it was the Passover season, when they ought to have been on their way to Jerusalem. The Law required that every male Jew celebrate the Passover there if they could possibly get away. So ordinarily these great multitudes would not be in Galilee but in Jerusalem. They were following him everywhere he went because they did not want to miss the tremendous excitement of the "signs" which he did.

Evidently Jesus was feeling the pressure of these crowds, and wanted to get away for a time alone with his disciples, who had been ministering from town to town themselves (Mark 6:6-7) and had seen the power of God manifested through them. They got into a boat to go across the northern end of the Sea of Galilee to the eastern shore.

But the multitudes would not give up. As the boat left to cross the lake they followed to where they saw the boat was heading. Jesus and his disciples arrived first and went up on the hillside together. As he watched he could see the crowd coming along the shore and eventually gathering at the foot of the hills. His response was to determine to do something for them.

Verse 6 states "he himself knew what he would do."

He also uses this occasion to subject the disciples to a quiz. They had been with him for two years and had heard all his amazing words. They had seen the mighty power of God demonstrated again and again and had been sent out on a ministry (Mark 6:6). Jesus now decides to test their faith. According to this account, Jesus chose to examine Philip first:

5When 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?" 6He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Examination time has come. We are not sure why Jesus chose Philip. Perhaps, because:

- He was from the area.
- It may be that Philip was the one whom he thought to be most advanced in the lessons of faith.
- He was a scholar, a thinker, not loud and brassy like Simon or ambitious and fiery like John and James. Perhaps Jesus saw in him a man of deep perception. Quiet people are often deep thinkers.

- Perhaps he chose Philip because he was the one who would most likely understand all that was underneath the very dramatic surface phenomena which the disciples were witnessing.

In any event Jesus said to Philip "How are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?" He did not really expect to buy bread. In fact Jesus knew that Philip could not possibly answer his question. There was no village and no stores nearby, and they had very little money. His question is clearly designed to set before Philip a predicament that had no human solution.

We often find ourselves in situations where there is no apparent answer in the normal resources of human life. That is what Jesus did with Philip.

Jesus was thinking of ministry to these people, of meeting their need. But Philip according to this account immediately began to think of money. He responds to Jesus' question:

7Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

Evidently Phillip estimated the resources available and gave up in despair; he thought there was no way this problem could be met.

Are we all Philip?

How many times has this happened in our own experience! As we contemplate the Word of God to us he commands us to feed the multitudes -- not only physically, when need arises - but even more important, spiritually.

How would we respond to Jesus' command, "Feed the multitudes"?

Would we form a committee? Study the problem to better understand the parameters? Would we set goals? Start a fundraiser? Establish an organization?

The result is that very little gets done.

Throughout his ministry, the game plan of Jesus was to work with where he was and with what he had.

In response to Jesus' question, Philip gasps in utter despair, "Lord, how can we do this?" In this examination Philip gets a big "F," just as we probably would have too.

Isn't it interesting to think that, if Jesus had given that command, "Feed the multitude," to a worldly person (an atheist), they would have likely said exactly what Philip said? Without any reckoning upon the resources of God whatsoever, thinking only in terms of the human resources available, the worldly person would have responded in the same words as Philip, "We don't have enough money. We can't do this. It takes money to buy bread."

What a revelation of Christian unbelief....

Andrew does a little better. He came to Jesus and said, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?"

There is not a lot of faith in his response, but there is a little.

What Andrew actually said (in the diminutive) was there is a little boy ere with five loaves of bread and two little fish. That was all he could find in the crowd. It was all he could come up with.

The Lesson of the miracle:

A little faith and what we have at the moment is all Jesus needs. He never asks us to start accumulating more before we begin to minister. All he wants is what we have right now. As soon as he found out what was available in the crowd, that was all he needed; just one small boy's lunch was all it took. Immediately 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. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. (John 6:10-13)

Notice the simplicity of Jesus' actions. It is much the same as when he changed the water to wine in Cana.

There is no special pleading, no raising his hands and dramatically crying out to God. There is merely a simple taking of the bread and the fish and, lifting his eyes, giving thanks to the Father.

In Chapter 5 of John, Jesus declares the process by which he performed his work: He said he could only do what he saw the Father doing. In that inner vision of his heart he could see the Father feeding the multitude, that this was what was demanded for that moment, and he simply responded with thankful expectation that God would do what he said he would do.

So Jesus gave thanks for what had been provided and began to feed the multitude.

How did the miracle of multiplication occur?

Did Jesus place all the fish and bread in a basket and send the disciples out with little amounts of it to distribute it, and then as people reached in it kept increasing? Or did he heap up a great quantity of it, and then send them out to distribute that? How did he do this?

From Mark's account:

Mark says that Jesus "blessed, and broke" the bread (Mark 6:41), and he uses the aorist tense, which is to say it was a single action never repeated.

Then Mark uses the imperfect tense, "he kept on giving to the disciples." In other words, the miracle took place in our Lord's hands. As he held the simple meal in his hands he would break off pieces and give to the disciples, and he kept on doing that. There never was an increase in the amount in his hand, but there was always a continual supply until the entire multitude of five thousand males were fed, plus, undoubtedly, another three to five thousand more women and children. There were probably ten thousand people in that great crowd who were fed.

And they were not given a tiny amount. John tells us they "ate their fill."

Then, Jesus commanded the disciples to clean up the place, save all the fragments, and police the grounds so that nothing was left to mar the landscape that God had made.

According to the account they filled twelve baskets with the fragments remaining. That is a hint as to where the baskets came from. Obviously these were the disciples' own personal baskets. In those days every Jew who traveled carried a basket, just like a woman today carries a purse.

But they collected the remnants of the feast in their baskets and found that each had a full basket of food for the rest of the day and for the trip back in the boat.

Notice the effect Jesus' action had upon the crowd:

When the people saw the sign which he had done they said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!"

Perceiving then that they were about to take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. (John 6:14-15)

That is a remarkable statement of a proper conclusion, followed by a terribly wrong response. As they saw this miracle happen, their minds went back to a verse in the 18th chapter of Deuteronomy, where Moses, who had fed the people in the wilderness with manna from heaven, had said to the people, "The Lord your God shall raise up unto you a prophet like me," (Deut 18:15). The murmur began to spread through the whole crowd, "This must be the one of whom Moses said, 'There will be a prophet like unto me'." And they were correct. That was one of the signs of the Messiah. This was proof that here was the one of whom Moses spoke. But the strange and sad thing was that when they reached that proper conclusion, they immediately reacted in a very improper way. It says that Jesus, "perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king," separated himself and went back up on the mountainside alone.

They were not ready to follow him as the Messiah; they wanted to use him; they wanted God to work for them according to their program and their schedule.

Many of us act exactly the same when we place our requests before our Lord.