

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND

Reading: John 6 v 1-14

Let us think about the work of the Lord before we look in detail at today's chapter. Remember his work to bring men and women to see their great need as sinners. To come to change their ways and to serve their God. And to prove beyond all doubt that Yahweh, Israel's God was a great God of power and that Jesus was His son and had been given that power to perform miracles.

John chooses 8 miracles of the Lord and only records these eight. He calls them signs and wonders; they were given for a special reason to teach a special message. Remember Israel and Judea would be full of sick people suffering from the results of sin. Yet Jesus did not go around curing them all because he did not want to appear as a mere miracle worker having the multitudes flocking to them for what they could get out of him. Jesus wanted them to **hear** his words.... this word of God could cure them **forever** giving them the opportunity of **eternal life**, this was the main reason for the miracles and signs Jesus did throughout his ministry.

The miracle of the five thousand has been well known to us from our early years but once more I want us to look behind the background of the miracle to see the message behind it.

JOHN 6. As we said earlier, Jesus was very popular at this time and the multitude of people over with him was a constant drain on the resources of the Master. The disciples had returned from their preaching efforts and were anxious to report the wonderful things that had been accomplished. At this time also news of the death of John the Baptist reached him and Jesus felt the need to be alone with his disciples.

As they were on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus took the disciples over the other side of the Sea, away from the crowd and into a deserted place. However the crowd were not going to let this man who could work such wonderful miracles go and they quickly went around the shore to where Jesus was. On the way they gathered many, many other so that soon a large crowd had gathered to find Jesus. Jesus had climbed into a mountain (why do you think this was...?) and he could see all the people coming towards him. What would have been our reaction? He was tired, sad and in desperate need of being with his disciples alone, yet he forgot all his own needs and thought about these poor people so much in need. They however **were not aware of their great need of seeking forgiveness of sins**, so Jesus began to teach them and instruct them as to what they must do with their lives to please God.

The preaching went on for hours and hours and the great crowd had forgotten the need for food and it was getting dark. The disciples were getting worried; they had enough food for themselves but it would be impossible to feed the great number with them now. With these thoughts in mind they approached Jesus and told him to send the multitude away so that they could go and get food for themselves.

Jesus firstly had to teach his disciples a lesson so he asked them where they could buy bread for the crowd. Notice he speaks to Philip, why do you think he spoke to Philip in particular? Well if you look at John 1:44 it tells us that Philip came from Bethsaida which was a local village, so Philip should have known if there was food in the area.

The reaction was astonishment; they declared that even if they had 200 pence and could get enough bread it would still only be enough for everyone to have just a very small piece. When you consider that a labourer worked all day for one penny, we are talking about over six months wages!

The disciples came forward with the 5 barely loaves and two fishes. Barley was they first to ripen and was considered the poor man's diet. It was probably food brought for the disciples. Try to picture the scene when Jesus with only this small meal in front of him told the disciples to sit down in companies of 100 and 50. The word *companies* is most interesting, it means "guests at a table" these people were guests at the table of the Lord Jesus.

Notice, next Jesus gave thanks to his Father in presence of them all, the food was then broken and distributed to all the people. This would take a considerable time and we are all told them the people *ate until they were full*. The pieces of food which were not wanted after everyone had eaten were gathered up and there were 12 baskets. Why 12? What so you think this taught the disciples and us?

John 6:14 tells us the people declared that *this was the prophet who should come into the world....* They were quoting the Old Testament where in Deut 18 God promises to raise up a great prophet like unto Moses. This was speaking of the Messiah and at this time the multitude thought that Jesus was the one they had been looking for, but all this was soon to change.

Before we move on, let us think about what has happened.

- The miracle was at the time of Passover, i.e. remembering deliverance.
- The need of the people was great and would naturally have cost a great price.
- Jesus seated the people as his guests.
- Thanks to God brought abundance of food for all
- 12 baskets left over.

John 6:15 tells us of another danger. Look at what it is, notice the reaction of Jesus. He went down again into the boat to escape the people... why?

Later when the crowd caught up with Jesus again he needed so much to put right their thinking. He told them they were only after him because they had seen miracles and had eaten of the loaves and fishes. He told them not to worry about these things because they could perish, but to work towards seeking for everlasting life.

Then came the reply. What should they do to please God? Jesus replied that they should believe on the one God had sent.... but they needed proof and asked for a sign that they might see the wonders he could do. How ungrateful they were to say this when Jesus has done such wonderful miracles.

Notice now... John 6:51.... Read what the people say. What did the people say which was incorrect? The next verse tells us. The verse also tells us about the **true bread**. What is this true bread? Jesus answers the question – he was the True Bread. Now if ordinary bread keeps us alive and provides for the needs of the body, the teaching of Jesus or the words that come from him feed our minds and provide for our spiritual life. This "bread" or provision from God, John tells us will give life to the world. Indeed we know that the life and sacrifices of the Lord Jesus did just this. Remember much later when he spoke to the disciples and gave them bread in Mark 14:22, he told them to "take eat, this is my body".... He used the identical language to provide us with the key to unlock the true meaning of the feeding of the five thousand. He was teaching that by the breaking of his own body in death he would provide true bread which would sustain many unto life eternal.

Again notice in John 6:48 the great difference between the manna and Jesus the *true bread*. The people who took of the manna died... it only kept them alive for a time, but Jesus' teaching could give people **everlasting life**.

This talk on bread of life was not received well by the majority of the crowd. They had come to Jesus for more food and excitement, but Jesus had appealed to their understanding and motives and when he made the statement *except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you...* this statement was offensive to the Jews for the law forbade the eating of blood and they took him literally and although he clarified his meaning saying that he was not referring to literal flesh and blood, but his words which they must digest, they could still not cope with this challenge to deeper thinking on their part.

From this time forward many of the disciples left him and his popularity started to fall, even among the twelve there were some misgivings. But for now we must leave the Lord and the multitude and consider ourselves what we have learnt.

God can and will provide for our every need but He is more interested in how we treat His word and see the provision for **our spiritual growth** in the life and death of the Lord Jesus.

Are we like the multitude who only wants to serve God for what he can get out of it.... I feel today's lesson has much to make us search our hearts.