

Miracles of Jesus 12-07-22b

Let's pick up our study now, looking at the feeding of the 5,000. We've been looking at it primarily in Matthew, but also from the other Gospels. There's some great details in Mark.

Interestingly, since Mark is the shortest Gospel, and yet we have quite a few details, and then of course John has details especially on the conversation. He names the participants in the conversation that Jesus has with His disciples about the needs of the multitude. They had made this trip specifically and explicitly for their own benefit, and they're placed in a position where they have the opportunity to minister to others, and that's what they do.

This is the Lord's response. Now, just before the break, I mentioned the precedent for feeding many from insufficient barley loaves back in 2 Kings chapter 4. It kind of brings to mind the parallels. One of these days it will be in the kingdom or well beyond when I am finally able to understand the way the Lord Jesus drew on Old Testament Scripture to know when and how to do so many of the things that He did.

There are clues there. I think in His human soul, with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, I don't think He just dreamed this stuff up out of His deity. I don't think that God spoke in a voice and said, feed the 5,000.

He figured these things out from His knowledge of Scripture, and I think He was meditating on Old Testament Scripture all the time, these things that foreshadowed Him in ways. We can see some of the obvious ones, the suffering servant and Psalm 21, and why is thou forsaken? We can see these things, especially in hindsight, but He knew them as He was living His life. You think, wouldn't it be great to have such a mastery, such an immersion, such an understanding of Scripture that you would know its pertinence and its application in the specific circumstances of life the way He did? That's our goal.

We want to move in that direction. But you think about this, and I just made a few quick notes, and this is not a comprehensive list, but just think about Elijah and Elisha and the similarities to the Lord Jesus. Elisha parted the Jordan River, remember that, with the mantle? And Jesus was at the Jordan River, was baptized in the Jordan River.

There's a connection there to the Jordan, being in that water. Where is the Lord God of Elijah? Elisha asks. This is back in 2 Kings 2. He says, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? Well, when Jesus is in the Jordan, you don't have to ask where is God? He speaks.

He speaks from heaven. The Holy Spirit descends like a dove. There's like a question and answer thing there.

Where the water parted for Elisha, they were in the heaven's part for the Lord Jesus. Elisha asks a question. John the Baptist sees the answer.

So it's a beautiful picture there. This bread and grain multiplication we've already seen in 2 Kings 4, compared, for example, with Mark 6. It was bread in the 2 Kings passage. What kind of bread was it? What kind of bread was it? It was barley bread, but what's the other description? Why did the guy have it? It's of the firstfruits, right? It's bread of the firstfruits.

When is the Feast of the Firstfruits? What does it come right after? Passover. What feast is in view in John's account? Passover. Very same time of year, juxtaposed.

But you notice that Jesus always seems to kind of outdo the Old Testament. Old Testament prophets, we've seen this in some of the resurrections, where you've got an expired person and I think Elisha and Elijah both stretched themselves out three times and they seem to go through this very intensive effort and the person, the son, the widow's son comes back to life. But Jesus, come forth.

Touch the beer. Take them by the hand and up they come. Jesus is just such a distillation of all of the power that the prophets rather imperfectly and strenuously were able to exercise in the Old Testament age.

For Jesus, it's effortless. It's a word. It's a thought.

Miles away, go home. Your son lives. Don't bother the master.

He's died. No, he lives. He just doesn't have to lay on them, doesn't have to do it three times, doesn't have to do any kind of mumbo-jumbo.

Miles away. At a great distance of separation. Just touch them.

Just speak to them. It's just a wonderful indication that what had been shadowed, here's the reality. And the shadow just gives you an outline.

Now you've got the fully incarnate, fleshed out truth of God, word of God, glory of God right there and it is so incredibly more powerful. But you remember the prophets, Elisha heals a leper. Jesus healed the lepers.

Raised the Shunammite son. Jesus raises the synagogue leader's son. Raises the widow's son.

The prophet in 2 Kings 6 gets an axe head to float. Jesus floats himself and Peter standing on the water. Just everything is bigger.

Everything is more powerful with the Lord Jesus. With Elijah, remember you had the widow of Zarephath and the flour and oil were multiplied to sustain those two people.

And she was able to make something for the prophet himself but the widow and her son is sustained by the flour and oil over a long period of time.

Well, that's two people fed by the prophet or through the prophet. Jesus, 5,000 people. The widow says, give me a drink in 1 Kings 17 verse 10.

You have Jesus with the woman at the well. I'm going to give you living water. And both of them raise a son in an upper room.

But the difference is just so dramatic. Anyway, that's a few quick notes on that because the Lord Jesus was intimately familiar with His scriptures. He knew them inside out, upside down, backward and forward.

He meditated on them. He prayed in them and through them and about them. And God, His heavenly Father revealed to Him what He should do, when He should do, how He should do, all of the things that we have recorded in Scripture.

There's a great quote I have here from Thomas Aquinas. It's kind of in this regard. Thomas Aquinas, there's a lot you could say about Aquinas, but he did have a good thought here.

Knowledge of things is not produced in us through knowledge of signs, but through knowledge of things more certain, namely principles. For knowledge of principles produces in us knowledge of conclusions. Knowledge of signs does not.

Isn't that a great thought? All those old gray heads, just like with the modern not-so-gray heads, you have to filter and find the good stuff. But I'll read that again. Knowledge of things is not produced in us through knowledge of signs, but through knowledge of things more certain, namely principles.

Knowledge of principles produces in us knowledge of conclusions. When you draw a conclusion, you can make application. Knowledge of signs doesn't do that.

So in all of these miracles that we study, we are looking for those principles that are reflected, that are illustrated, that are communicated, that are emphasized, that are brought before us so that we can draw conclusions for ourselves and make application for ourselves. This is what Jesus did with His knowledge of the Old Testament signs. So back to our study now of the feeding of the 5,000.

It's not difficult to figure out what the bread symbolizes, what it represents. Jesus uses bread as an illustration many times. He compares Himself to bread.

I am the bread of life. You partake. And later on in the upper room, He's going to use bread in a different way.

This is My body. This is My sacrifice on your behalf. It is broken for you.

Partake of this. But partaking of the bread, of course, represents the Word of God as the object of our faith. It is not enough to see it and handle it.

It is not enough to look at it and appreciate it. Doesn't this smell good? We take it in. It becomes a part of us.

It is a source of strength and nourishment. And the disciples seem to have a mindset that, well, Jesus has done the teaching all day, and that's great, but now let's send them home and we're going to sort of get back to real life now. We've had church, but now we've got some realities we've got to deal with.

And one of the things, when Jesus says, you give them something to eat, He's saying, look, it's not two separate things. It's not like here's spiritual things and highfalutin teaching, but now we've got to get back to, you know, eating and sleeping and the workaday world. There's no difference for the Lord Jesus.

It's all one thing. He says, you've heard the teaching. You've been with Me.

You give them something to eat. And in the symbolic sense, we take in the Word of God as we hear it, as we metabolize it, as we think through it and meditate on it and pray about it and try to incorporate it into our life. And that should equip us to speak the truth to one another in love, to be a blessing to others because of the power of that Word.

If we have been given to eat in the spiritual sense, we should be able to give to others to eat in the spiritual sense. And so Jesus is sort of playing with this idea. He's trying to get the disciples to think and to say, look, it's not two different spheres, two different worlds.

It's all one thing. Your soul has been fed all day. It's time for you to minister.

And in the symbolic sense, these disciples are now going to pass on what Jesus breaks and gives to them. They are going to distribute to others. And this is ever the role of the teacher, the pastor, the intermediary, taking the things of the Lord Jesus and passing them on.

Isn't this the role of the Holy Spirit? He will not speak of Himself. He will take of Me and give them to you. And pastors and teachers are just agents, hopefully usable by the Holy Spirit to accomplish that task in the physical realm.

So as we continue reading the account in Matthew or Mark or whichever one you have it in, it gets very similar at this point. We have only here five loaves and two fish. He said, bring them here to Me.

Then He ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. All of them sit down. They don't receive it standing, He says.

And you get the idea that they have stood up because they are getting ready to depart.

They probably sat during the day. We don't think they stood all day long for the teaching.

But apparently they have stood up and they are starting to gather their gear and put on their robes and they are leaving. And it would be so convenient to just let them go. It's evening.

Let them go to their own homes. And the disciples point this out. Jesus says, tell them to sit back down.

And these people have been there all day and they say, well, what next? There is not a big bullhorn up at the top saying, sit down, we are about to feed the 5,000. He says, tell them to sit back down. This is something of an act of faith and obedience on their part, isn't it? They say, the Lord wants us to sit down.

We don't know why. But they do it, don't they? He says, have them sit down on the grass. Mark tells us that they sat down on the green grass.

And this would make sense because it's the time of Passover. It's the spring. Luke tells us, Jesus said, make them sit down in companies about 50 each.

About 50 each. In John there was, Jesus said, make the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place, so the men sat down in number about 5,000.

In Mark it tells us that they sat down in groups by hundreds and by fifties. Well, actually, this is a hundred groups of 50. What's a hundred times 50? Math majors.

A hundred times 50? 5,000. That's how they knew how many there were. There was a hundred groups.

All the Gospels indicate that they sat down in groups of 50. Mark tells us that there were a hundred of those groups. So there's a hundred groups of 50.

Now, this is interesting to me because why didn't Jesus say, have them all sit down and remain a gaggle of 5,000? They need to be in smaller groups. Why? What difference does it make? Well, what does the feeding represent? This is the distribution of bread. Bread means what? The Word of God.

And so as they receive the distribution of the Word of God, what size group are they in? It's a small group. There are multiple distributors. Jesus doesn't say, Peter, you're the rock on which I'm going to build my church.

I'm going to give you this bread and fish. All the rest of you disciples, I want you to watch here. Peter's going to now feed the 5,000 because he's the new Pope.

Interestingly enough, it doesn't happen. He doesn't say, Peter, I'm going to give you this

bread. You give it to the other disciples.

You're kind of like the Pope. They're going to be like the bishops and the cardinals, and they'll go out. There's none of that.

But this does, in my mind at least, foreshadow the future way that God is going to feed His people, and it is with multiple individuals to small groups, groups of about 50. And I think that that's about us personally. This is just my, it's not Scripture.

You can do what you want. You can think what you want. Churches, God works in large churches, but I think ideally churches are local and they're small.

Up to about 50 is a good size. Have them sit down in groups of 50 for the distribution of the Word. And maybe they can all get together to do other things, but when it comes time to fellowship around the barley loaves, they're groups of 50.

So Jesus explicitly tells the disciples to organize them. So the disciples go out and say, how about this group of families? Now, is there exactly 50 in every group? You think they say, 51? Hey, you, sorry, you 12-year-old kid, you get up and sit over here. We've only got 49 over here.

They're about 50, just small groups. At Jesus' explicit instruction, what reason is there for this if it is not communicating something to us later on? He could have said, you all line up in two lines, and the disciples are going to pass down the middle. He could have done it in any one of a number of ways.

This is what He does. So they sat down in groups, 100 groups of 50, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, Jesus looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. Jesus does the same thing in the upper room.

Addresses His heavenly Father. He is thankful for it. He breaks it, and He distributes it.

The Lord Jesus does this. It is a reminder that He was here, and He was incarnate. He had flesh and bones, and He is the first to break this bread.

And when we look at the Lord Jesus living in our flesh, facing our challenges, being tired, being stressed, being persecuted, tested in all points like as we are, He's the one that breaks the bread of the Word. He has broken it for us first. He has lived the application of it.

He has taken the truth of God and lived it out in human flesh. He's the one that broke it into digestible pieces. He's the one that shows how it's done, and He hands it to us through teachers in this case, through the disciples.

He is thankful. When He prays this prayer and looks up to heaven, what is He doing? He

is acknowledging the source. Remember when Moses stood up there and said, Shall we bring water forth from you from this rock? Whack! Acting as though He is responsible for the water, the Lord Jesus Christ, as notable as He is, looks up to heaven and in the sight of all of these people acknowledges that God is the source of the bread.

And it's important for us to remember that what do we have that we have not received? I think sometimes somebody who studies and they say, Wow, here's somebody that has had a great insight. Here's somebody that's put together a great program or published a great book or come out with a great tape or some other kind of... We want to be careful to acknowledge that every good and perfect gift comes down from above. No pastor takes credit.

No teacher takes credit. You don't present anything, hopefully, that you don't find in the Word of God. You're not the inventor.

You might find it. You might discover it laying fallow or neglected. If I were to go out here and somehow find a Civil War weapon in pristine condition that somehow got left in an attic of an old house or something, well, I'm not Remington.

I'm not a gun manufacturer. I didn't put the thing together. I was just fortunate enough to find it and bring it to light and let people look at it and admire its workmanship.

But the discoverer, the distributor, doesn't get credit. And Jesus Himself is careful to make the point by thanking the Father for this, what seems to be a very small amount, a very paltry amount, but you just don't know what God is going to do. Something may seem small, may seem insignificant.

Think about your own life. We think about our own circumstances and our own opportunities. We say, well, this is small.

I'm just like a little barley loaf here. You do not know what God is up to. Don't sell the Lord short.

Don't underestimate Him. There is big potential in small things. You know what these loaves look like, right? They're more like tortillas.

This is not wonder bread. These are little flat, round matzo bread. You've seen matzo bread.

It's kind of a thick tortilla-looking thing. There's five of them. I could eat tacos and finish all of them.

I could finish all of those off by myself. Now, they've been out there all day. What kind of fish is this? Is this like a wiggling grouper type of fish? What kind of fish is this? This has probably already been prepared.

The head's been cut off. It's been turned into fillets, probably salted so that they would last all day. They've been out there in the spring.

It's warm. There's green grass. If there was a pond nearby, everybody would be out there looking for fish.

Somebody brought these probably in a salted form. So they're like we would carry jerky, maybe. This is like fish jerky, two little slabs.

Boy. But this was the commonplace. How do you preserve things in the ancient world? You didn't have a cooler pack.

You didn't have a lunch pail with an insulation on it. So this was something you'd carry in a pouch. People looking at that thinking, well, you know.

But Jesus takes it. He thanks God for it. He begins to hand it to the disciples.

Once again, as is so typical in Scripture, we don't see the miracle. It doesn't say, and behold, the loaves began to glow, and holy smoke began to issue forth, and angels descended from on high, and waved wands, and sparks flew out. You can't see the miracle.

Like so many times, it says Jesus distributed and said, give it to everybody. Where's the miracle? When did the miracle take place? Was it when Jesus broke it? Did He suddenly just get surrounded by pieces of bread? None of the disciples that observed this seem to know exactly how it happened. But Jesus kept handing bread to people, and He didn't run out.

Jesus didn't take the five loaves and two fish and put them on a rock and say, Behold! And it turns into a big mountain of pancakes or something stacking up and fish flopping around. If people were writing this, that's how we'd do it. We would Hollywoodize the thing.

This is what all your mythological tales tend to go to. It's just so spectacular. And behold, the people did wonder and gaze.

It's very understated. There is a point of application in this. When we do what we do for the Lord, we don't make a production out of it.

Jesus never makes a big production out of the supernatural work He does in the service of God's will and plan. Never. He didn't jump off the wing of the temple in the sight of all of the people gathered in Jerusalem.

It is as though He is intentionally trying to minimize the amazement and wonder and thunderstruckness of it. Right? And we should remember this. It isn't a spectacle to serve God.

It isn't a Thaumatzio, dumbstruck amazement, gobsmacked amazement to serve God. It's a gobsmacked episode. It's something God needs doing.

Jesus does it, and He does it in the most self-effacing and nondescript manner possible, but it happens. It's a good thing for us to remember. So, they sat down in groups, taking the five loaves and the two fishes.

He looked up to heaven, blessed, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. God works through you. You.

Fill in your name here. You are the bread of life. God hands you some of this bread.

Do you think the disciples went to each of the fifty people in the group? They went to somebody on the edge of the group and said, look here, and it gets passed around. It gets handed from hand to hand, right? They are not coming around with a towel over their arm. They are not a priest.

They didn't say, now file by and I will put the wafer on your tongue. They go to the group of fifty and hand them a stack of bread, and they distribute it to each other, don't they? Parents give it to their children. Brothers give it to their parents, and so on.

It's a distribution among them. It's people to people. Jesus could have made much of Himself by going around and giving it to each group.

Gives it to the disciples. Disciples give it to somebody on the edge of the group, and they spread it. God uses people to make that truth meaningful and accessible and immediate.

He divided the two fish among them all. You think these two little fish slabs, these two little pieces of jerky, five loaves, I figure you rip five loaves into three pieces, and you get fifteen pieces max. A couple of them you rip in half, and so you get one little piece to give to each disciple.

I mean, when He started breaking this bread, it's just, that's one to see on the highlight reel later on, exactly how did that happen. The disciples themselves don't even seem to know. Divided the two fish among them all, and they all ate and were satisfied, and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces.

Elisha feeds a hundred guys with twenty loaves and some sheaves of grain. Pretty good. That's like maybe a tenfold or maybe even just a fivefold multiplication.

You figure one piece of bread each. That's typical if you've ever eaten a Middle Eastern meal. You get one of those pieces of bread, and you use it as a sop.

You pick up other stuff. You make kind of a sandwich out of it. It's like a taco in some ways if you don't break it.

And so if you figure each guy got half a piece of bread, well, then it's just a twofold multiplication. But still, everybody was kind of dazzled. Wow, that's not enough food for a hundred people, and everybody ate and was satisfied, and there was some left over.

Well, here you've got five thousand people from five loaves. Each loaf fed a thousand people. One piece of matzo bread, a thousand people.

One thousand people. Two fish, everybody gets a piece of fish. It's incredible.

Each little piece of fish, 2,500 people got a piece of it. You know how microscopically small that would be? You take a fillet of fish and see if you can slice it into 2,500 pieces. So they ate and were satisfied, and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces.

Now, as I suspected, I did not get to the feeding of the 4,000 this morning. But we're going to see a similar situation come up just a few miracles later. But we're going to look at it next week with what we have seen and observed here in the 5,000.

And we haven't even touched the hem of the garment. As I said, I've got eight pages of notes on this set of miracles. But with what we have learned this morning, when we look at this again next week and look at the feeding of the 4,000, we are going to see some amazing truths emerge and some wonderful applications for us.

Based on what we have looked at this morning, what do we know? God uses small things in big ways. We can miss a wonderful opportunity to be blessed and to be a blessing if we get self-centered and think, I need my time, and become insensitive to the needs of others, even though those others may be, in our eyes, unworthy. If they're sticking around to hear Him teach many things, they need encouragement.

And Jesus encourages them. What a great thing. Can you imagine for the rest of your life? I was there the day He fed us.

There were 5,000 of us. I wonder how many people were there through the day, and some of them left early. All He's going to do is teach.

He's not really doing many healings. I'm in the back. I can't see anyway.

I'm getting hungry. The sun is setting. If I don't leave now, it's going to get dark on me.

What's to stick around for? How many people were there all during the day? It says there was a vast multitude. People had come from every town. I would guess there were a lot more than 5,000 people.

The 5,000 are the ones who stayed. It wouldn't matter how many stayed. Jesus would have fed them all.

But these are the ones who stuck around. They were still there. They were just then

standing up to leave when He fed them.

We want to stick around. The bread of life is worth a bit of self-sacrifice. It's worth a bit of risk.

Will it be risky going home after dark? Maybe so, but when am I going to have another chance to hear Jesus Christ teach many things? I'll avail myself. I'll put myself out. I'll stretch a little bit for this, because whatever else they may have had going on, they may have been insensitive.

They may have initially been there for the wrong reasons, but when they heard Him teach, they wanted to stay. They stayed to the very end, heard the very last word of the lesson. As a result, they are a part of this and forevermore tell their kids and grandkids, I actually ate bread and fish that Jesus Christ broke with His own hands.

And there will be a similar gratefulness and happiness in our lives when we stick with it, when we stick around, when we look for the more important things in our lives. Let's close here in a word of prayer. We'll pick up with the feeding of the 4,000 next week.

Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for this bread that has been broken for us by the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will help us to see its pertinence, to understand it, to incorporate it into our thinking and into our priorities, our goals, our daily activities, that He will remind us to take time to meditate upon it, to pray about it, and to come before Your presence having been washed and cleansed in it.

And we pray that as a result we can live the life to which we have been called, we can shine as lights in the midst of our generation, and we can be thoroughly equipped for every good work, both now and when the Lord Jesus returns to take us to Himself. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.