

JESUS FEEDS THE FIVE THOUSAND

John 6:1-15

Key Verse: 6:9

“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

In today’s passage Jesus feeds a crowd of 5,000 with only five loaves of bread and two fish. This is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels. We can imagine how this event made a big impression on the disciples. Why? Was it because it was such a spectacular miracle? Yes. But there was something very significant behind the miracle. It’s the shepherd’s heart of Jesus. I earnestly pray that we may come to know this heart as we study this passage and grow to be spiritual leaders with the shepherd’s heart of Jesus.

I. THE SHEPHERD’S HEART OF JESUS (1-9)

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).”* According to the other gospels, this event took place right after the disciples’ first evangelistic journey (Mk 6:7,30,31). The field work was an exciting experience for the disciples. By depending on the authority of Jesus, “they drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them” (Mk 6:13). After the journey, Jesus knew that the disciples needed a quiet retreat. So Jesus took them to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee on a boat. As the sun was setting on the western horizon and the boat glided on the placid water, the disciples felt very happy. They were happy to be alone with Jesus away from the milling crowd for the first time. They enjoyed the cool sea breeze and the gentle sound of waves.

However, when they landed on the other side of the Lake, a surprise was waiting for them. A crowd of people had already arrived there ahead of them, and was waiting for Jesus! Why did the crowd follow Jesus? It was because they saw or heard about the miraculous signs of Jesus. They were there hoping to experience another miracle of Jesus. All of them needed Jesus’ help for one thing or another. In the gospels, we find many people suffering from various diseases: the paralyzed, the blind, men with leprosy, and those suffering from demon-possession. These people came to Jesus for help. Nonetheless they disturbed his plan to have a leadership retreat with his disciples at a remote location. Most leaders of today would say in this situation, “You should not interfere with my schedule like this. Come back later during my office hours.” But how did Jesus see the demanding crowd? Look at verse 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?”* Here we learn several things about our Lord Jesus.

First, Jesus had a shepherd’s heart for the people. He understood the agony of the suffering people. Jesus did not see them as nuisance. Instead, he saw them as his own children who needed his care. The Bible teaches us that Jesus accepts all kinds of

people as they are. We can go to Jesus any time and anywhere, knowing that he accepts us as we are.

Matthew 9:36 further explains his shepherd's heart. It says that when Jesus saw the crowds he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. This is the heart of God toward sinners like us. The crowds had many problems. But in Jesus' eyes, their biggest problem was that they had no shepherd who could take care of them. The religious leaders were supposed to be shepherds for them. But they only used the helpless people to advance their own agenda. They used the man with a shriveled hand, a blind man, and a woman they caught in the act of adultery—they used all these people in their wicked attempt to accuse Jesus. The people really needed shepherds who could take care of them. So Jesus took this opportunity to train his disciples to raise them up to be their shepherds.

Second, Jesus wanted Philip to have a shepherd's heart. Look at verse 5 again. He asked Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Jesus knew that the people were very hungry. In Mark 8:3 Jesus says, "If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance." Jesus wanted his disciples to become compassionate shepherds. He wanted them to show their concern for the crowd. So he tested Philip by asking the question, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Jesus hoped that he would answer, "No problem, Sir. I don't know where to buy it, but I will look around. I believe that God helps those who help themselves." But Philip's answer was a disappointing one. He answered, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Philip had an uncanny business sense. He looked at the vast crowd and instantly came up with an estimated cost of feeding them. He would have made an excellent CFO of a company. But his answer revealed that he needed much training to become a shepherd. He should have had a positive attitude in dealing with problems. Instead, when he looked at the situation with calculating eyes, he was overwhelmed by it and became very negative. He compared their financial situation to the sheer number of people to feed. And he said, "It's impossible. Even \$20,000 would not be enough for each one to have a bite."

Philip did not do well in his test when he used his calculating mind. There was another reason for his failure. He began by thinking about what he did not have. He did not have any bread. There were no supermarkets nearby. Above all, he did not have any money in his pocket. He felt bad about his financially challenging situation. He did not think about what he had. He did not think about why Jesus asked such a question. So he became negative.

Let me tell you a funny story. Two men were assigned to explore two mysterious rooms. The first one opened his room and found it filled with many electronic gadgets. But he cried because all the wonderful gadgets would soon go out of style. The other man opened his room and found it full of horse manure. Undaunted, he began to shovel, saying, "I know there's got to be a horse in here somewhere." Philip was not like this man.

Most of all, Philip forgot about Jesus who already had performed many miraculous signs right before their very eyes. In essence, Philip's problem was an

unbelief problem. Even under the seemingly impossible situation he could have had a positive attitude if he remembered Jesus' power and understood his shepherd's heart.

Many young people suffer from anxiety and restlessness because of their calculating, instead of trusting in the Lord. They have so much, but feel as if they don't have anything. They have youth, energy and intelligence. But many think about what they don't have.

When we only focus on what we don't have, we tend to forget what we received from our parents and from God. We forget to thank them. Instead, we become bitter. We compare ourselves with others and complain about what we don't have that others do. Philip failed the test, because he only thought about what he did not have. Actually, Jesus had already decided to feed the crowd of 5,000 people (6). When Jesus asked Philip, "Where shall we buy bread?" it was to test him, to see if he had faith in God and to see if he had a shepherd's heart toward the people.

So the question for us is this: How can we overcome our negative attitude and pass the test that Jesus gives us? How can we become shepherds and shepherdesses who can feed the 8,000 SU students with the spiritual food, that is, the word of God?

II. FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH (8,9)

Look at verse 8. Another disciple appears on the scene. He also heard Jesus' question and even though the question was not directed to him, he wanted to do something in response to the question. He was Andrew. Andrew wasn't popular among the disciples. He was usually known as "Simon Peter's brother" even though he was the one who had led his brother to Jesus. When Andrew brought Peter to him, Jesus only seemed interested in Simon. This time, too, Jesus didn't pay attention to Andrew. Jesus spoke to Philip. In a play or movie, there are main actors and there are extras. Andrew was a perennial extra. But somehow I have an impression from the gospels that Andrew was perfectly happy in this role. Perhaps he said to himself, "I have a Savior who loves me very much, and I have my own brother in a leadership position. Who could ask for anything more?" I like Andrew!

In this incident, however, Andrew caught Jesus' attention. When Philip failed the test, it was Andrew's turn to speak up. Look at verse 9. He said, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" He brought to Jesus five small loaves of bread and two fish which weren't even his own. It is comical to picture Andrew bringing five small loaves and two small fish to Jesus when there were more than 5,000 hungry people to feed. We learn several things from Andrew.

First, Andrew was a man of possibility. Like Philip, Andrew did not have any money. But he did not give up. He began by thinking about what he had. He dug in all of his pockets again and again. When he couldn't find any money, he did not complain about his situation. Instead, he looked around in the crowd. Finally, he spotted a boy with five loaves and two fish. I don't know how, but he somehow persuaded the boy to

give up his lunch. He brought the small lunch bag to Jesus. Like Elijah, who believed God would end a three-year old severe drought when he saw a patch of cloud on the clear sky, Andrew saw a possibility of feeding 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. How could he do that?

Second, Andrew was a man of faith. He had faith in Jesus. No doubt he knew that what he took from the boy wasn't enough to feed 5,000. It wasn't even enough for himself. But he believed that Jesus could do something with it to help the people. He understood Jesus' heart for the people. He believed that Jesus could feed the 5,000 people somehow, because Jesus is the Almighty God. He himself could not do much. But Jesus can do everything. So he brought the five loaves and two fish to Jesus and said, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

Third, Andrew was a man of prayer. Let us read verse 9 again. "*Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?*" This was Andrew's prayer to Jesus. He knew Jesus' heart and desire to feed the hungry people. When he brought the five loaves and two fish, it was his earnest prayer offering. "... but how far will they go among so many?" was his earnest prayer. He meant, "What I bring here is not much. But please use them to feed the hungry crowd." Andrew depended on Jesus' power and prayed that Jesus might feed the hungry people.

Andrew had faith in Jesus that he would accept the five loaves and two fish as his expression of faith and prayer. Indeed, Jesus accepts our five loaves and two fish as we bring them to him as our expression of faith and prayer.

May God help us to be men and women of possibilities by learning to depend on Jesus! Someone compared today's people to vending machines that move only as much as the money you feed. May God help us not to be like vending machines, but to be like Andrew who brought what he had to Jesus with earnest prayer to the Lord!

III. "HAVE THE PEOPLE SIT DOWN" (10-15)

This miracle of Jesus further teaches us about God's way of working and how we can participate in it.

First, co-working (10). When Andrew brought the bread and the fish, Jesus said, "*Have the people sit down.*" We learn that Jesus did not work all by himself. Jesus co-worked with his disciples. A "making-the-people-sit-down" job seems to be trivial compared to the great miracle of Jesus. But it is the way of God. God worked with Moses to bring his people out of Egypt and to lead them to the Promised Land. Jesus worked with the disciples to do his ministry work. To participate or not to participate makes a great difference in God's redemptive history. Sometimes we want to do God's work, but hate to do small or menial jobs. A humble and simple job does not win applause. Rather, we want to do something that has honor and glory. But "make-sit-down" jobs are precious in God's work and history. The point is participation in God's work. The servants at the wedding feast in Cana filled the stone jars with water. It was not a

glamorous job by any means. But they were blessed with the miracle. They found out who Jesus was. I pray that we may participate in the work of God by helping SU students to sit down and study the word of God.

Second, giving thanks (11). 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.”* This verse tells us how Jesus looked at the five loaves and two fish. It was far too small an amount to feed the 5,000 people. But Andrew brought the five loaves and two fish by faith. So Jesus accepted them. Actually, Jesus accepted Andrew’s faith and prayer. Then Jesus thanked God for Andrew’s faith and his five loaves and two fish. Jesus prayed that God would accept his sincere prayer and feed the crowd of 5,000 with Andrew’s five loaves and two fish.

Third, God’s overflowing blessing (12-15). Look at verse 12. *When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.”* Philip calculated the cost of feeding the crowd based on a bite for each person. But Jesus filled the hungry people until they were satisfied. God abundantly blessed Andrew’s five loaves and two fish. When they had all had enough to eat, Jesus 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 that were left over. God’s blessing was overflowing.

A great miracle happened when a man of faith brought five loaves and two fish to Jesus with an earnest prayer. A miracle happens when the compassion of Jesus meets the prayer of a man or woman of faith.

In this passage, we learn that we must live by faith, not by calculation. Philip calculated and was frustrated. But Andrew looked around to find what he had. Most of all, he understood the shepherd’s heart of Jesus. He brought a boy’s lunch to Jesus with the prayer, *“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”* May God help us to be men and women of faith like Andrew!