

## John Chapter 6

There are I believe in the four gospels nearly 30 specific miracles carried out by the Lord Jesus. Each one is important in its own right. However, there is only one miracle which is recorded by all four evangelists, and that is the feeding of the 5,000 in the wilderness. Here then is a miracle to which we should give plenty of consideration.

It is important for several reasons:

1. It illustrates dispensational truths
2. It shows the compassion of the Lord Jesus
3. It puts the words of the disciples to the test
4. It demonstrates the preciousness of divine things

Before we come to the miracle itself in John 6, we read of the Lord going up into a mountain with His disciples.

3 And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples.

The other gospel writers tell us that He went up the mountain after hearing of the death of John the Baptist. He felt keenly the loss of such a faithful servant and I believe He went into the wilderness to mourn. Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His saints.

Let us now consider the miracle in detail:

### **1. It illustrates dispensational truths**

Mountains often speak of kingdoms in the scriptures. This certainly is how we see them in the prophecies of Isaiah and Daniel:

Isaiah 2:2

2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

Daniel 2:35

And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

Both these scriptures look forward to the day when the Lord shall return in power and in glory and shall bring to an end the power of earthly rulers, establishing His own kingdom throughout the whole earth.

The feeding of the 5000 is also typical of the future activities of our great high priest. He is a priest today, after the order of Melchizedek, and as Christians we receive many blessings as a result. To see what Melchizedek priesthood offers Israel, we must look back to Genesis chapter 14:18.

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.

He feeds Israel with bread as illustrated in John chapter 6. In John chapter 2, we see His priesthood typified by the wine He gave to those at the feast in Cana. Wine brings joy to those who drink it, and Christ will bring joy to the nation and the nations once He has established His millennial reign.

10 Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well

drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.

Zechariah chapter 9, verse 9 also speaks of Israel's joy in this day to come.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

These words written by the Jewish prophet were fulfilled nearly 500 years later when the Lord rode into Jerusalem followed by His disciples.

## **2. It shows the compassion of the Lord Jesus**

The compassion of the Lord Jesus for the people is shown in the following two verses:

Matthew 14:

14 And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

Mark 6:

34 And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.

Before He set about trying to feed them, we read that there were two things that touched His heart. In Matthew 14, His heart was moved to heal their sick – He acted in response to their physical needs. Then as a true shepherd, He was moved with compassion because He saw them as sheep that were scattered, not having a shepherd. Mark in his account records the fact that He set them down in ranks, by fifties and by hundreds. He brought order into a situation where before there was nothing but chaos. This is what He will introduce when He sets up His millennial kingdom.

His third response was that He began to teach them many things. When so many had gathered, He took the opportunity to teach them divine truth.

Only after these three actions had been completed did He look to their immediate needs – He fed them with the loaves and fishes.

Though many of these things look forward to a yet future day, what one of us cannot say that He has met at least one of the above things – He may have met our need for healing, He may have brought order into our lives where before there was only chaos. He, through the Spirit of truth, may have taught us many things in His word, or He may have met our immediate material needs.

## **3. It puts the words of the disciples to the test**

Only John records the fact that the Lord turned to Philip and asked him, "Whence shall we buy bread?" Out of the 12 disciples, why did the Lord put this question specifically to Philip? He knew that He was about to feed the multitude with the few loaves and two fish, so again we ask "Why the question, and why Philip?"

John 6:

5 When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?

6 And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.

7 Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.

The answer lies in John chapter 1 – the first time that Philip is mentioned. Philip has been called by the Lord to be one of His disciples. Philip, in turn, finds Nathaniel and tells him about the Lord Jesus. He is the one that Moses wrote about, as well as the many prophets that followed him. If Philip truly believed what he had claimed for the Lord in John chapter 1, he could easily have replied, “I don’t know how it will be done but anything Lord is possible for Thee”. Instead, Philip looks around him, and at the vastness of the crowd, and confesses, “The problem is too big for us. We are powerless. A penny, by the way, is what a labourer would have earned for a day’s labour, so 200 pence represented almost 8 months wages for a labouring man. Even this would not have been enough to give each one a little.

The second disciple that we hear of in John 6 is Andrew. He too has been called by the Lord, and off he goes to call his brother Peter. He too makes a grand statement regarding this man Jesus.

40 One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.

41 He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.

Andrew could also have replied as Philip should have done; instead it is recorded by John alone that Andrew tells us about the resources of a young lad who stood nearby. He had five barley loaves and two small fishes. Note the extra detail recoded here – only by John.

The loaves were not just loaves – they were barley loaves. Barley was cheap to buy as compared with wheat. Revelation chapter 6 tells us:

6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny

Not only were there only two fishes, but John alone tells us that they were small fishes. Our resources are indeed small but by the grace of our Lord Jesus, He can use our limited resources to meet the needs of many.

It is interesting to note in John 21, when the Lord provided the meal, they gathered in 153 great fishes. It matters not the actual number involved – only that they were all counted, and that they were not small fish but great.

It is easy for us to criticise Philip and Andrew but do we not do the same? We come face to face with a problem and we may say like Philip, “The problem is too big for us”, or like Andrew, “Our resources are too small”. Yet like the two disciples, we often make statements about the Lord Jesus, telling ourselves and others about how great He is, yet we too fail the test when problems arise.

In John chapter 12, we read again of these two particular disciples acting together:

20 And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast:

21 The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.

22 Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.

In John 12 we have laid out before us the three companies of God’s people who would be the fruit of the Lord’s death on Calvary. The home in Bethany is typical of the Church of God today. The activities of the church are represented by Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Martha serves, Mary worships, and Lazarus sits with Him at the table – a picture of fellowship.

We then read of the Lord entering Jerusalem, acclaimed as king by His disciples. This will be re-enacted one day by the nation of Israel.

Thirdly, we read of the Greeks who came to Philip with the request, "We would see Jesus". They are typical of the Gentiles who will be brought into the kingdom when Israel is gathered together unto their Messiah.

Thus in chapter 1 of John, Philip brings Nathaniel – an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile, and Andrew brings Peter, soon to be the apostle to the circumcision.

What lesson can we learn from Philip and Andrew in John 6? It is surely this – do not make great claims for the Lord Jesus, for one day He may put us to the test to see if we can live by the words we have spoken.

This was the case with Peter. In the upper room, the Lord tells His disciples that that night they would be scattered – they would be offended or stumbled at Him. Peter answers as we read in Matthew 26:

33 Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.

Mark 14 is similar:

29 But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.

30 And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

31 But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.

Peter is making the proud boast, "Lord, others might let you down but you can depend upon me." As we all know, Peter failed miserably when put to the test. Peter denied his Lord three times in the palace of Caiaphas. In John 21, the Lord stands beside a fire of coals and puts three questions to Peter. The first question is, "Lovest thou Me more than these?" What was the Lord asking Peter? I believe He was saying, "Do you really love Me more than these other disciples do?" In the upper room, that is what Peter claimed but how soon he fell when put to the test.

#### **4. It demonstrates the preciousness of divine things**

All four evangelists record the command given by the Lord Jesus as the miracle comes to an end.

12 When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

13 Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.

Philip was concerned about each one having a little – when the Lord fed the multitude they all ate till they were filled, yet there was much left over. The fragments were only bread crumbs in the eyes of some, yet things which were divinely given were precious and had to be gathered up that nothing be lost. They gathered up 12 baskets full – enough to feed again His people Israel.

Before we leave this incident, we should note the response of the people.

14 Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.

15 When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

In verse 14, they linked Him with "that prophet". This is surely the prophet that God promised to Moses back in Deuteronomy 18:

18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will

put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

Moses was not only a great leader, he was also the doer of great miracles. In Egypt, he brought numerous plagues upon the Egyptians, but in the wilderness, he also brought manna from heaven to feed the nation. When the Lord fed the 5000, many were beginning to ask, "Is this the prophet promised to Moses"?

In verse 15, we learn that some would have gone further and made Him a king. The Lord's response is to go into a mountain place alone. Why was this? One day, He will be crowned in Israel as the king of the Jews. Why did He not allow men to make Him a king in John 6? When He does ascend the throne, it will not be men who will crown Him but God. In Psalm 2, God says, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion". In John 6, they that would have made Him king, only did so because they ate the loaves and were filled. It was by the senses only, not by faith that they so spoke.

From verse 16 to verse 21, we come to the second section of our chapter – the crossing of the sea of Galilee. The Lord has sent His disciples on before Him, so they enter into a ship and set sail without Him. He has remained behind and went up into a mountain alone.

But soon the disciples find themselves in difficulty. A great wind rises up and with it a great storm on the sea. On another occasion, the Lord was with them in the ship and arose to rebuke the wind and the waves, and the great storm became a great calm. But now He was not with them. How were they going to deal with the storm? Some see in this incident a picture of this present dispensation when the Lord comes from the mountain top to help them. It could equally be a picture of the tribulation period when the faithful remnant have to face the storm alone, to be rescued when the Lord comes to their aid. Whether one or both is true, it is good to know that He is always there for us.

The ship arrives at Capernaum. Soon they are joined by others from the other side of the sea. They are puzzled. They had seen only one ship leave and the Lord was not in it. When did He come thither? Yet why were they seeking Him? Not because they perceived the miracles but because they ate the loaves and were filled.

This opens up a lengthy dialogue centred on the subject of bread. Moses had given the people the manna in the wilderness. What sign could He now give them?

The dialogue that follows is not only lengthy but complex. It is similar in some ways to John chapter 17 – the prayer between the upper room and Gethsemane. It is like a garment woven on a loom – various coloured threads appear throughout the garment as the patterns re-appear. So what are the threads to look for? The most commonly repeated thread is, "from heaven". The expression is used no less than eight times in this section. He claimed to be the true bread of God, come down from heaven. The implication of this was not lost upon His audience. "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" How then can He say that He came from heaven? They were in Capernaum – His own city, a town not far from Nazareth where He was brought up. But He was claiming to have His origin in heaven. He was claiming a pre-incarnate existence ie to be divine. He also speaks about Himself as being the source of life. He is the source of physical life – He is the bread of God that gives life to the world. He is the source of eternal life which is given to those that believe in Him. He will also give resurrection life to those who believe in Him. Four times it is said, "I will raise him up at the last day."

And what is it that ensures this everlasting life and guarantees this resurrection life? It is Christ Himself. We must eat His flesh and drink His blood. We must feed on Him, just as Paul later wrote, "To me, to live is Christ" Christ alone can sustain us in our

spiritual lives.

Other great topics are introduced. Election is brought to us in verse 37:

He speaks of the will of the Father, that all those who come to Him should be preserved. The Lord would see to it that nothing be lost – ie by divine preservation. The Father's will was that all who came to Him should receive everlasting life. Everlasting life is only once mentioned once in the whole of the Old Testament (Daniel chapter 12), yet in John 6 it is mentioned four times.

He will speak of His ascension also in verse 62. His omniscience is seen in verse 64. "There are some of you that believe not". There were many disciples present, as well as the twelve. Why were they following Him? For some, it was only for the loaves and fishes. Others maybe thought He was a good man. Others thought perhaps that He was a prophet.

How did they react to this discourse in John 6 when He has made so many bold claims for Himself? From that time forth, many went back and walked no more with Him. We hear much today about the subject of discipleship. Much of it centres upon activity – what we should be doing and what we should not be doing. But here the test is Christ Himself. Do we really believe all that He claims to be? If the answer be yes, then let us devote ourselves to Him and follow Him.

The Lord then challenges the twelve - "Will ye also go away?" Peter replies for them all, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" His words gave eternal life to men.

But one professor remained. No doubt influenced by the wicked one, Judas Iscariot holds his ground. His wicked deed still lay before him to be accomplished.