

Miraculously Feeding Huge Crowds of People



5000+

"The apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done (burying the body of John the Baptist), and what they had taught (when He sent them out without Him in pairs), and He took them aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida, and He said to them, 'Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest awhile', for there were many coming and going and they did not even have time to eat.

So, they departed to a deserted place by boat by themselves. When Jesus heard (about His cousin John the Baptist) being beheaded) He departed from there by boat to a deserted place to be by Himself. After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee which is the Sea of Tiberius, but the multitudes saw them departing and ran there on foot from all the cities. They followed Him and they arrived before them and came together to Him, and when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude, and He was moved by compassion for them because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. A great multitude followed Him because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased, and Jesus went up on a mountain and there He sat with His disciples. Now Passover a feast of the Jews was near and He began to teach them many things. He received them and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God and healed their sick--those who had need of healing.

When the day was far spent, when it was evening His disciples came to Him saying, 'This is a deserted place and the hour is late. Send the multitudes away that they may go into the surrounding country, and villages, and towns, and lodges, and get provisions and buy themselves food.'

But Jesus answered and said to them, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat. How many loaves do you have? Go and see.'

(Jesus) said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread that these may eat?', but this He said to test him for He knew what He would do.

Philip answered Him, 'Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them that every one of them may have a little.'

When they had found out, they said to Him, 'We have here only five loaves

and two fish. Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?! Shall we go and buy food for all these people?!

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, 'There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they among so many?'

He said, 'Bring them here to Me.'

Then He commanded them to make the multitude to sit down on the grass and they did so and made them all sit down. So they sat down in groups, in hundreds and in fifties, and He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to Heaven He blessed and broke, and when He had given thanks, He distributed the loaves to the disciples to set before the multitude, and likewise of the two fish He divided among them all and the disciples gave to the multitudes as much as they wanted.

So when they were filled He said to His disciples, 'Gather up the fragments that remain so that nothing is lost.' So they all ate, and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the leftover fragments that remained, and of the fish. Therefore, they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Now, those who had eaten were about 5000 men, besides women and children.

Then those men when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, 'This is truly the Prophet Who is to come into the world!'

Therefore, when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, immediately (He) made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitudes away (and) He departed again to a mountain by Himself, alone." (MATTHEW 14:13-23 & MARK 6:30-45 & LUKE 9:10-17 & JOHN 6:1-15)

This is one out of only 11 stories included in all four testimonies of Jesus' life in the Bible. It was one of His most amazing miracles, yet when He repeated the same feat with fewer people and more food from which to feed them, His disciples doubted that He would be successful. Jesus did not ever pursue recognition or an audience. He never went about searching for people to whom He could preach or heal. They followed Him whether He liked it or not, often in huge masses. For example, in order to mourn the death of His cousin and rest Jesus tried to be alone with His disciples but the multitudes still followed wherever He went, this time even into a desert. Although the above story primarily is about Jesus providing food for thousands of people with almost nothing with which to work, little is made about the fact that He and the disciples were not allowed sufficient time for themselves to relax and get something to eat before being "on-call" once again. However, we should be mindful that when this event took place, Jesus not only as in mourning, He was very hungry and exhausted as well.

Although Jesus still was inclined to minister to the multitude following Him, His disciples showed only a mock concern for the people's welfare. In reality, they wanted finally to relax and dine without having to share any of their private time together or provisions with other people outside of their group. They couched their own selfishness

with fake consideration for the well being of the multitude. What they truly wanted was time alone to satisfy themselves and be able to rest from their never-ending duty to care for others.

Jesus already knew how His men would react to the predicament, as well as how He would remedy it. As always, He perceived their innermost thoughts without any of them even having to say anything aloud. However, when they did speak it was with incredulity that He expected them to provide something that they considered to be impossible. Not only did they themselves not have enough food for so many people, any place to buy food was very far away and they did not even have nearly enough money to cover the cost if a store had been available. The disciples were not only amazed that Jesus expected them to perform when they were so tired, He evidently expected them to pay for the so-called pleasure of doing so.

Since it was improbable that they went into the desert without enough provisions for themselves, Jesus' disciples most likely had at least some bread and fish. Yet, these grown men allowed a small boy be more generous than they were in offering what he had to Jesus. Interestingly, the disciples never even attempted to give anything from their own supplies. Rather, they took (and maybe even confiscated) the offering of someone else to Him to see how He intended to solve the problem. Even after traveling with Jesus for quite some time, and knowing His attitude about giving, the disciples guarded their own food instead of offering it for whatever He wished to do. They evidently still doubted Him enough to try to take care of themselves by guarding their own territory.

Jesus performed everything in an orderly fashion, and although the disciples demonstrated a lack of generosity He still let them take part in blessing the masses without asking other people to help Him in their places. First, Jesus told His men to organize and settle the crowd by asking the people to sit in manageable groups. Then, He took the food, looked to Heaven, and blessed it. Next, He broke it and began dividing the bread among His disciples, who in turn distributed it throughout the multitude. Finally, Jesus somehow multiplied and divided the fish, which also was dealt to the crowd. There was enough food for every single person to eat enough to be full.

After everyone had eaten, Jesus instructed His men to take baskets and gather up the remaining fragments. Surprisingly, more food was left than they had started with--twelve entire containers. God not only had provided for people's needs amply, He supplied more than they could consume. Not only that, but Jesus did not leave a mess and more than likely He directed that the surplus be given to the poor. The power of God took care of much more than the people even recognized was necessary.

In the evening following this miracle the men who had witnessed it believed that Jesus was their foretold Messiah and wanted to show their devotion and loyalty by making Him their king. However, they did not recognize that He was not to rule over a temporary and visible kingdom, rather an unseen and eternal one. Once he perceived what they were plotting He directed His disciples to get into a boat and go to their next destination. Afterward, He somehow convinced the multitudes to go to their homes while He finally got to be alone with no distractions to mourn His cousin's death, as well as renew Himself in prayer with His Father to be able to continue His mission.

4000+

Furthermore, on another occasion Jesus provided enough food for a crowd that was one fifth smaller than the above one. Why does the Bible take the space to share both stories? Since the account of the larger group came first, it logical to assume that it was the more important of the two incidents and that telling about an almost identical situation was unnecessary. If much of Jesus' active ministry was left out of the gospels, why was this seeming redundancy included in two versions? Because it clearly shows the disciple's continuing lack of faith.

In addition to their already experiencing the greater miracle, this time there was more food for Jesus to reproduce: seven loaves versus five and a few fish instead of only two. One would surmise that Jesus' followers would be eager to see Him demonstrate to these people what He did with the other food. Yet their reactions still were not of absolute faith. They still doubted in His caring for people and His abilities to take care of them, but not as much as before. This story demonstrated a lot about continuing to permit anxiety and physical senses dictate any reactions to the fact that God could and would handle a predicament, especially one already experienced.

"In those days, the multitudes being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said to them, 'I have compassion on the multitude because they now have continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry to their own houses lest they faint on the way, for some of them have come from afar.'

Then His disciples answered and said to Him, 'Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?'"

Jesus said to them, 'How many loaves do you have?' and they said, 'Seven and a few little fish.'

So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground and He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke them, and gave them to His disciples, and the disciples gave to the multitude. So they all ate, and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. Now, those who ate were 4000 men, besides women and children and He sent them away." (MATTHEW 15:32-39 & MARK 8:1-9)

Jesus performed this miracle the same way He did previously. First, He first asked the disciples to feed the people themselves. Second, He got the crowd into smaller groups. Third, He prayed and blessed the food before He divided it. Fourth, He directed the disciples to distribute it, and they cleaned the area. And fifth, they took up more leftovers than the original quantity of bread and fish. There were several noticeable differences though, beside the size of the multitude. That time it was Jesus, not one of His men, who thought about the people needing to eat and the disciples did offer their own rations to feed everyone, instead of trying to hoard them. Evidently, they even had learned something from the previous and similar incident. This time they actually may have been eager to see what Jesus would do, instead of being completely fearful and doubting His abilities.