



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Gospel of Matthew

“The Feeding of the Five Thousand,” Matthew 14:13-21 TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading for this morning is found in Matthew 14:13-21, and this is the account of the feeding of the five thousand, very familiar I am sure, to most of you in the auditorium. We begin with the 13th verse of Matthew chapter 14,

“When Jesus heard of it, he departed from there by a boat to a desert place privately, and when the people had heard of it they followed him on foot out of the cities. And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick. And when it was evening his disciples came to him saying, ‘This is a desert place and the time is now late; send the multitude away that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves food.’ But Jesus said unto them, ‘They need not depart; give them to eat.’ And they say unto him, ‘We have here but five loaves and two fishes.’ He said, ‘Bring them here to me.’ And he commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven he blessed, and broke, and gave the loaves to his disciples and the disciples gave them to the multitude. And they did all eat and were filled. And they took up the fragments that

remained, twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men besides women and children.”

May God bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our Father, we come to Thee this morning in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We give thee thanks for the remembrance of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus, that great event that we have been thinking about over the past few days, particularly.

We thank Thee for the marvel and the miracle of the word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, and we praise Thee that as the apostles who saw him visibly and in material fashion, so we have beheld him in spiritual fashion through the Scriptures and have seen him as the only begotten son of the Father, full of grace and truth. And we praise Thee Lord for all of the blessings that have been our by virtue of the incarnation.

We thank Thee for those other great events in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, and particularly for the death, burial and resurrection – judicial basis upon which our salvation rests. We thank thee for the blood that was shed, for the atonement that was accomplished, and we thank thee for the certainty that we have of eternal life.

And we praise Thee that as we enter into the experiences of life, the salvation, the blessings that we have from Thee, do sufficiently equip us to live a life that is well pleasing in thy site. And we thank Thee for the promise of the constant enablement of the Holy Spirit, and we thank Thee for the enlightenment which has brought home to us our own inability that we may cling to his ability.

And we pray, Lord, that in the days that Thou does give us that through Thy grace we may be enabled to glorify Thee and please Thee.

We pray for this particular assembly and ask Thy blessing upon it, upon it’s leaders, the elders and deacons, upon it’s membership and friends, and we pray O God

that Thou wilt undertake in such a way that Thy name may be honored and glorified, and that Thy name may be seen here.

We pray that Thou wilt strengthen the weak and encourage the people, that Thou will heal the sick in accordance with Thy will, that Thou will also give enablement and strength to those who carry on ministry here. We pray for the ministry of the tapes, which have gone out to so many distant places. We pray O God Thy blessing upon those who in a sacrificial way labor to make it possible for many to hear the ministry of the word of God, to supply all of the needs that exist in that ministry. We pray Thy blessing on the radio ministry in Birmingham, Nashville and Dallas, and we ask O God that Thou will use these messages that go out over the air to encourage the Christians and evangelize those who do not belong to Jesus Christ.

We ask Thy blessing upon our country and its leadership, and we ask Lord in these days of change of administration, that Thou would give wisdom and guidance, and may the testimony of Jesus Christ be freed from any hampering or restraint in the months that lie ahead.

We commit this hour to Thee; we pray Thy blessing upon us as we have fellowship one with another in the Scriptures, and through the things that we study and learn, render praise and worship to Thee. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] The incident that we are looking at in our study of the Scriptures this morning might better be entitled “The Feeding of the 15,000” rather than “the 5,000,” for you will notice that in the 21st verse, Matthew concludes the account that he has given us by saying “and they that have eaten were about 5,000 men besides women and children,” and the word that is used for men here is a word that is used to distinguish the male sex from the female sex, or a grown man from a young man. So that it is evident that there were, according to Matthew’s description here, 5,000 males, and then in addition there were the women and the children. So if we may allow one child and one wife for the

men, we may assume that there were at least fifteen thousand people who were at the feeding of the 5,000.

This is the only miracle that is recorded in all four of our gospels. It is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke, the synoptic gospels, and it is also found in the Gospel of John. That would seem to indicate that this is a rather important miracle in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. In addition, it is the occasion for the great sermon in the Gospel of John on Christ as the bread of life. It is out of the fact of the feeding of the five or fifteen thousand that there develops that tremendous sermon in which the climax of John 6:35 is expressed when the Lord Jesus states, “I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall not hunger and he that believeth in me shall never thirst.”

It is, as you know, in these “I am’s”—and that is the first of them—that the Lord Jesus makes tremendous claims of deity, and in them there are tremendous affirmations of divine revelation. It is evident from an event such as this plus the sermon that goes with it in John 6 that we are dealing with someone that is a unique person.

The liberals have given us many different pictures of the Lord Jesus. For example, the Frenchman, Renon, has called him “the amiable carpenter.” Tolstoy spoke of him as, “A spiritual anarchist.” Schweitzer spoke of him as an eminent cataclysmic. Joseph Klausmann, the Jewish interpreter, has said that he was an unorthodox rabbi, and the German, Otto, has spoken of him as a “charismatic evangelist.”

At the worst, the liberals scaled down the imperial mind of Christ to the level of a well-meaning Sunday school teacher. But the liberal Jesus is not nearly big enough to explain Christianity. The kind of Jesus who said, I am the bread of life, he that cometh to me shall never hunger and he that believeth in me shall never thirst, is not the liberal picture of the Lord Jesus. “Why any man should have troubled to crucify the Christ of liberal Protestantism,” William Temple said a long time ago, “has always been a mystery,” and it surely is. For, if Jesus Christ is only a great teacher, or only an eminent cataclysmic,

or only an unorthodox rabbi, then the things that were done to him are a mystery even to this day.

C. K. Lee, a native Christian leader of China, was in this country a number of years ago, and he spoke one Sunday morning in a liberal church in the state of California. At the conclusion of the message, a young college student asked him a question, which many Bible teachers have been asked, “Why should we export Christianity to China when China already has Confucianism?”

And Mr. Lee replied, “Well there are three reasons why we should export Christianity to China. In the first place Confucius was a teacher and Christ is a Savior, and China needs a Savior more than a teacher. In the second place, Confucius is dead and Christ is alive, and China needs a living Savior. And in the third place, one day Confucius is going to stand before Jesus Christ and be judged by him, and China needs to know Jesus Christ as a living Savior before she has to meet him as a judge.”

These incidents in which our Lord reveals his power and his might, illustrate very beatifically the fact that he is a unique person, and entirely different from the picture presented to him in many of our liberal Protestant pulpits today. With chapter 14 and verse 13 we pass from one feast to another. We pass from Herod’s feast to the Lord’s feast, and there surely is a remarkable contrast between the two.

Remember in the first part of the 14th chapter, Matthew had said that the report of the miracles of the Lord Jesus had come to Herod, and his first response to him had been, John the Baptist had been raised from the dead. And then in a kind of flashback, Matthew tells us how John the Baptist met his end. He describes a feast at which in the midst of the drunken debauchery of it, Salome came and danced before Herod the King, and how she pleased him by her dancing and elicited from him a promise that he would give her whatever she wished up to the half of his kingdom. She went immediately up to Herodias her mother, and Herodias said I want John the Baptist’s head on a platter. She returned with the request of Herod, and while he was put off a little bit by that request,

he nevertheless immediately went through with it, and John the Baptist’s head was presented to Herodias on a platter.

Now that was Herod’s feast, and it was characterized by drinking and debauchery, and by lust and the other things that went to make up that kind of feast. But when we turn to John chapter 6 or to Matthew chapter 14 in which we have the feeding of five thousand, we have a different kind of feast. Thousands of people are gathered outside under the sky, under the sun, and are sitting down upon the green grass, and the Lord Jesus who is the true king of Israel—not the false king—feeds them with five loaves and two little fishes. It is a tremendous contrast, startling contrast between the feasts of the world and the feast of the Lord Jesus.

This passage opens with a statement, “when Jesus heard of it,” and the reference is to the death of John the Baptist. Now that affected the Lord Jesus in a very deep way. The tragic martyrdom of the Baptist so influenced him that he felt necessary to move out from the cities to a place by himself. And so he went over toward the east, on the northern side of the sea of Galilee. He went up into the hills there and found himself a very quiet place and there he began to meditate, no doubt in mourning over the passing of John the Baptist, and also reflection upon the course of John’s ministry and what this would mean for his own ministry.

It is, I think, an insight into the beautiful and perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus. Mark says that he invited the disciples to come apart and rest with him for a while, and so he was not simply by himself. It is necessary to get off by ourselves at times and to reflect upon the truths of holy Scripture. This is one of the arts that we have lost in the 20th century: the art of meditation over holy Scripture. And that is what our Lord and disciples were doing, and Luke says Herod wanted to see him, and there may have been, even on the human level, something of fear of falling into Herod’s hands before his time.

So the Lord Jesus went over to the east up in the mountains or hills, and there was meditating with the disciples over the course of the ministry. The multitudes had heard

that the Lord Jesus was in the hills and so they made their way out there, too. And in the dominions of Herod Phillip, they came upon the Lord Jesus, and the Scriptures tell us that the Lord Jesus came out from the place from where he was mediating, looked out and saw this vast assemblage of people and had compassion upon them. That is the statement of verse 14.

Now I think that is very interesting, because it stresses again this true humanity of the Lord Jesus. He didn’t come out and say, I came for rest, you go home, but as one translator has translated the expression “had compassion upon them,” his heart went out toward them. They were longing for a shepherd, and he was the true shepherd. And so there they found him, and in the course of it we have an expression again of the fact that the Lord Jesus in his human nature are just as you and I are apart from sin.

So when you think of God, you should never think of God simply as an all powerful, all mighty God who has his thunderbolts by his right hand ready to hurl them out at his enemies, but you should also think of God who has compassion upon those who are looking for a shepherd but cannot find him. You should think of God with a tear rolling down his face or with a sigh upon his heart, or you should think of God as a God who can mourn over the passing of John the Baptist.

The conversation with the disciples and the crowd that follows is not understood, I don’t think fully, without turning to the Gospel of John, so I am going to ask you if you will to turn with me to John 6 and let’s read a few verses there, because John gives some of the details of this incident that are not found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. In the 5th verse of the 6th chapter, John writes:

“When Jesus then lifted up his eyes and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Phillip (now this is where it all begins, the conversation between our Lord and the disciples), ‘Phillip where should be buy bread that these may eat?’ And this he said to test him for he himself knew what he

would do. Philip answered him, “200 denari’s worth of bread is not sufficient for them that every one of them may take a little bit. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith unto him, “There is a lad here who hath five barely loaves and two small fishes, but what are they among so many?””

I think we should insert these verses right at this point, because they give us the opening of the encounter between the Lord and the disciples concerning the crowd. The first word you see comes from the Lord Jesus: Philip where are we going to buy bread so as to feed this great multitude of people? It is almost as if we are to understand this as being initiated by the Lord Jesus, so that the desire to feed is something that comes first of all from God.

Now Matthew gives us the first word of the disciples, as “this is a desert place and the time is now late, send the multitude away so that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food.” This was very bad advice of course because food does not come from going away from Jesus – true food comes from coming to him – and in a moment he will say, “Bring them here to me,” that is, speaking of the fishes and the loaves in order that he may multiply them that the multitude may be fed.

The first word of the Lord however in verse 16 is, they don’t have to depart, give them to eat. Now this is another test for them. They have overlooked the source of supply. He has said, where shall we feed this multitude? Philip has said, 200 denarii of food and not enough so that they may have just a little bit, and the Lord Jesus said, they don’t have to depart, you give them to eat. And incidentally, in the original text, that last clause of verse 16, “give them to eat,” contains a great deal of emphasis upon the second person plural, *you* give them to eat, we might translate it. In other words, he was placing the responsibility for the food upon them. This, of course, was an attempt on his part to

make them realize their inability to cope with the situation in order that they might see his ability.

And the natural response should be, we cannot possibly feed them, but perhaps you can, Lord. There is a great deal of personal application of truth here, not only for the individual, but for a local church as well. Because in the final analysis, the Christian life is a life which is lived by a realization of our inability and the Lord Jesus Christ’s ability. And when we come to the place we realize that we, even as Christians, cannot live the Christian life, that we are unable to do it, but that he has ability to transform us and to make our lives well pleasing, then we have come to a principal upon which a Christian life may be lived.

But there is also an application of this to the local church as well, because a local church cannot possibly as a group of people please the Lord until they realize their own inability to do it, and therefore and then turn to him for the ability by which they may carry on a ministry that is well pleasing to him. In the final analysis, the Lord Jesus is the head of not only the individual, but he is the head of the church.

The head of the church does not reside in Nashville. The head of the church does not reside in Richmond or Montreat. The head of the church does not reside in New York, and the head of the church does not reside in Rome. The head of the church resides in heaven, and the head of this church is not the elders. The head of this church is not the officers. The head of this church is not those who have gifts of ministry – I certainly am not the head of this church – the head of the church and it’s local manifestation is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And when we come to the realization as a local church, in order to be successful in the proclamation of the word and the carrying out of our ministry, we need to lay hold of him and maintain contact with him, then we have reached the foundation at which we may be pleasing to him in our corporate testimony. So the Lord Jesus is testing them and trying to teach them their inability and his ability.

The disciple’s reply in verse 17, “We have here but five loaves and two fishes.” Now John gives us more detail, and so since we have read the passage I want to make a few comments in the light of the Johannine account. You’ll remember, Philip had first replied to the Lord Jesus that 200 denarii are not enough to give the people just a little bit of food. Philip was kind of a statistical pessimist. I think he would have been interested in computers. He lived probably before his time. He has already looked out over the crowd and made his calculations: 200 denarii.

Now the Lord Jesus, in another place in the gospels, gives us a parable in which he describes a working man and his wage, and in the course of his description he says that a working man earns about a denarius a day. Now, let’s just for the sake of simple calculation say that a working man’s wage for a day is \$2—that is not much, and that probably is entirely too small for our time—but anything we say would be too little by next week after inflation has taken its toll. But let’s just say it was \$25. 200 denarii is not sufficient to give them just a little bit. He had already figured out that it would take about \$5,000 for this crowd just to have a little snack. So he is a kind of pessimist, but he has a computer in his mind. He probably was too busy figuring out what it would take to pay attention to the spiritual requirements of the situation.

Now Andrew is different, he too is a pessimist – all of them are pessimist – but he is a friendly pessimist. He has already made a friend of the little lad who had the five loaves and the two fishes. Now you mustn’t think of the little lad who had the five loaves and the two fishes as carrying around five of Mrs. Baird’s loaves of bread—that would be rather strange—but remember that the loaves of bread in the days of the Lord Jesus and the apostles were little flat loaves of bread that were something like a stone. In fact, when Satan tempted the Lord Jesus, he said, command that these stones be made bread, and as they looked down on the ground they would have seen the sort of flat stone that you pick up near a lake in order to make it skip across the lake. And the loaves were just

about that size, and that is why he said command that these stones be made bread, for they looked like a loaf of bread.

Therefore, there were five little loaves of bread plus the two fishes. And Andrew has already made friends with this little boy, and as a matter of fact, he evidently made such a friend of him that the little boy had pulled out his lunch and is ready to give it to Andrew. So he says we have five loaves and two little fishes, but then he adds what are these among so many? So he is a pessimist, too.

Now, of course, it wasn’t perhaps a fault to fail to reckon on a miracle, but it was a fault to think that they knew how this multitude could be fed. Someone has suggested that there are two other things found here in this incident, and one of them is that we ought to take stock of our own poverty, and that in this incident that is what we have. Now McLaren has said that, “The recognition of our unfitness is the first prerequisite for fitness.”

Then there is a second thing that is illustrated here, and we could put it in words like these: a little is a lot if the Lord is in it. So five little, small loaves of bread and two little fishes – which were very much like our hor’doves, like sardines – food that small can be made sufficient for the multitude of 15,000 if the hand of God is in it. So the Lord Jesus then replies, “Bring them here to me.”

Matthew alone, incidentally, reports this solution directly. Bring them here to me. In other words, if the insufficient amounts of bread and fish which this little boy has are brought to me, a tremendous transformation might be expected, and that of course is exactly what happens, and what follows is a beautiful picture of grace abounding over unbelief.

Now I think it is rather interesting in the New Testament, when we have the miracles, we never have a true description of what the miracles are made up of. For example, take the resurrection. We are told in the New Testament that they placed the body of our Lord in the sepulcher late Friday afternoon, and then on Sunday morning we

are told that the Lord Jesus was raised from the sepulcher. And the tomb is empty. The stone has been rolled over the door, and then on Sunday morning it is rolled away, miraculously, and the body of the Lord Jesus has come forth – was it swiftly dematerialized so it came out through the rocks of the sepulcher? We are not told. As a matter of fact, we are not told the essential manner of the resurrection. It is not explained to us. The fact of the resurrection is stated, but the explanation of the manner of the resurrection is not there.

The same thing is true with this miracle. We are told – and I think we are to understand this as a miracle, and in a moment we shall pay attention to a couple of other interpretations that have been put on the event – but it does seem on the face of it to be described as a miracle, and yet we are not told anything about the essential manner of this miracle.

For example, we are not told whether the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes took place as it left the hand of the Lord, or as it left the hand of Andrew who had taken it from the little boy, or as it left the hand of the disciples as they gave it to the crowd. We are not told these incidental little details which we would of course like to know about.

We are, however, given the essential facts of the account. I often wonder, did the apostles do this deliberately, did they have some kind of constraint that fell upon their spirit that said don’t describe the manner, or were they perhaps just as ignorant of the manner of these miracles as you and I are ignorant of them?

In the 19th verse, we have the Lord feeding the multitude. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass. And I think this is interesting, too, because the guests are seated before the table is spread with the food, and I think this must have caused some surprise and perhaps some ridicule as well. I can see the disciples as they went out through the crowd saying, sit down, the Lord is going to do something about our hunger. And they sat down and there is no evidence of any food whatsoever, and I am sure that

some of them must have uttered some words of surprise over this: you mean to say that Jesus has some food cached away some where that he has not shown us?

And others are saying, this is ridiculous. We are sitting down and expecting food when there is no food at all. So, I am sure this must that this must have occasioned surprise and ridicule, but it too was a trial of faith. The multiplication probably came through the touch of Jesus Christ, and as he took the five loaves and the two fishes from Andrew who had taken them from the little boy’s lunch pail, he took the loaves and the fish and as he began to distribute them to the disciples, and they acted as waiters for this large crowd, the food kept coming. And multiplication took place, evidently, through the Lord Jesus, but we are not sure of that.

I think it is interesting, too, to notice that the disciples were the means or the agent of this feeding. Now this is not the only miracle that this takes place. There are several other miracles in which the Lord Jesus performed the mighty work, and then he carries out certain details of it through the apostles and disciples. Evidence, perhaps, that a lot of the work of God is done through the instrumentality of his own saints. And finally, in the 20th verse we read: and they did all eat and were filled, and they took up of the fragments that remained 12 baskets full.

One of the commentators has said, “This is omnificent omnipotence; the all-creating power of the Lord God.” Well if we have had the humanity of the Lord Jesus in the 14th verse – and was moved with compassion toward them – here in verse 19, 20 and 21 we have the full deity of the Son of God. Isn’t it striking how in all of these miracles the Lord performs, there is humanity and there is evidence of his deity? For he is one person who possess two natures. One person, two natures; and these two natures express the two sides of the person of the Lord Jesus, just as much man as we are men, a part from sin, and possessed of a full deity, just as much God as the Father is God. And if we do not have both of these aspects of the Son of God, we do not have a true picture of him.

Well now, having read this incidence, would you regard this as a miracle? Would you regard this as a simple miraculous multiplication of the loaves the fishes by the mighty power of the sovereign Christ? Is that the way you would understand it? Well, that’s the way I have presented it to you.

Professor William Barkley, a man whom I respect very much because he has written some very interesting and very useful material in his commentaries and other works, has some rather interesting words concerning the interpretation of the feeding of the 5,000. Professor Barkley is a man whom I have heard lecture and whom I have met, and he has been for many years, I think he has retired now, professor of New Testament at the University of Glasgow in Scotland. He is noted for the simple way in which he has explained the word of God, and for the contributions he has made through the study of the background of the New Testament material for the man who sits in the pew. In Scotland his works are extremely popular and read by many of the lay people and most of the teachers and preachers, and in this country they are extremely popular among the preachers.

But professor Barkley is an anti-supernaturalist. He does not believe in the miraculous. He states for example, concerning this incident here, that there are three ways of looking at it. We can understand it as a simple multiplication of loaves and fishes, and he says we should not be critical or condemnatory of others who must find that as the explanation of the miracle, but that he himself must find another explanation.

He said others understand this miracle as a kind of sacrament, and that what really took place is that they divided up the five loaves and the two fishes into tiny pieces of food, and that each of the 15,000 people was given a little tiny piece of the food as a kind of sacrament – very much as you and I sit around a large table and take a little dip of bread and a little sip of wine in remembrance of the death of our Lord. And that we are to understand this as a kind of sacrament, and what they were really eating was not so much

the physical food which did give them some nourishment, but the spiritual food of the Lord Jesus and we are to understand it in that way.

Now Professor Barkley says that explanation does not really satisfy him, but it is an explanation that has been offered. The one that seems to satisfy Professor Barkley is this. Now we can understand that these people really did have food with them. But they didn’t want to share that food with anybody else. So they were hiding the food that they had and were afraid to bring it out in that mighty multitude. Everybody had food with them, but they were selfish, and they couldn’t bring themselves to bring their food out and share it with others.

But Professor Barkley says, “The Lord Jesus and the disciples provided an illustration for them. They took out their food and they began to share the food that they had brought—after all you wouldn’t expect 5,000 people to travel out on the north side of that lake a good distance from where you could buy food and not bring food with them could you? And so they brought food with them, but didn’t want to share it. And when the disciples shared theirs, then they who had been selfish were encouraged to share theirs also.

“And when all began to share, before they knew what was happening, there was enough and more for everybody.” Then Professor Barkley goes not to say that, “The miracle was not the multiplication of the loaves and fishes; it was the transformation of selfish people into generous people at the touch of Christ”—a very sweet sentiment. “It was a miracle of the birth of love in grudging hearts, it was the miracle of changed men and women with something of Christ in them to banish the selfishness in their hearts.”

If that be so, Professor Barkley says then, “In the realist sense, Christ fed them with himself.” I always think it is rather interesting that a man who is a biblical scholar – Professor Barkley is a scholar – a biblical scholar who in fact denies the deity of the Lord Jesus, but never the less capitalizes the pronouns in reference to him, why do that, if he is

only a man? And he still capitalizes them. Then in the realist sense, Christ fed them with himself and sent his Spirit to dwell within their hearts.

Now that is a very interesting analysis of this particular miracle, but I don’t think it bears any direct relationship to what the texts say. The texts, as a matter of fact, leaves us with the distinct impression that this was a miracle. Now let me show you further, why it leads us to believe this is a miracle. Matthew is not so plain, and you have to notice it, in a sense, behind the scenes, but notice verse 22 of Matthew chapter 14, “And straightway, Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a boat and to go before him onto the other side.”

Now the word, constrained, implies some kind of force, and if you look up the word in the original text you’ll find that it has that force there. He constrained them to get into a boat and go before him onto the other side. Why was that necessary to constrain them to get into a boat and go with him to the other side? Why was it necessary for the Lord Jesus to urge the apostles and the disciples to leave that particular scene and get away from the crowd?

Well, John tells us why, because when this miracle of the feeding of the 15,000 place, John tells us right at the end, that when they saw this miraculous taking of five loaves and two fishes, and the feeding of the massive multitude with them, they cried out, “This is the prophet that should come into the world!” And when Jesus saw that they were about to take hold of him and make him a king, he departed.

In other words, they saw – the crowd, the multitude – in the mighty miracle that was performed evidence of the fact that he was indeed the Messianic king. Now they didn’t understand all of the nature of the Messianic king—that is why he said, let’s go—because they had not yet come to understand that he must suffer for sin. They had not yet come to understand that the cross precedes the kingdom, and they wanted to take him and make him a king then so that he might deliver them from the Roman folk then

without really realizing their need for the forgiveness of sins and the atoning sacrifice, which he would offer.

So he felt it necessary to leave, and he had to constrain the apostles to come with him, because evidently they were caught up in the enthusiasm of the crowd following this miracle that spoke of him as the prophet who should come in the world—the Messianic prophet—and the king who would reign over the earth throughout the millennial kingdom.

Now I think you can see that the crowd did not understand this as simply the transformation of selfish people into unselfish people, and the very thought of what Matthew describes in verse 22, and John in chapter 6 verse 14 and 15 about their desire to make him a king, bears the emptiness of the specious logic of Professor Barkley. No, this was a miracle. It was a mighty miracle performed by the Lord, and in fact was a kind of a Messianic miracle as we shall see in just a moment.

Well, let me conclude by making a few comments. First of all, this miracle emphasizes the qualifications of the Lord Jesus for the Davidic throne. Jewish tradition had said that when the Messiah should come, “he would feed the people of God,” and you will remember that in several of the parables the Lord Jesus tells, he speaks about a Messianic banquet in which the Messiah shall feed the people. You will find this referred to in the Old Testament and the New Testament also. So, the idea that emerges first from the feeding of the 15,000 in the minds of those who observed is this man is the promised king, and there was a recognition, then, of the qualifications for the Davidic throne in the Son of God. Now, they from wrong motives recognized it, but nevertheless it was there.

There is also, here, I think a beautiful lesson on the sufficiency of the Lord for his people, and I believe that this is seen most in the interpretive sermon that follows in the Gospel of John. We don’t have time of course to turn to that sermon because it is a rather lengthy sermon with a lot of very interesting things in it, but the essence of it is found in

the 35th verse when the Lord Jesus said, “I am the bread of life, he that cometh to me shall never hunger, he that believeth in me shall never thirst.”

I am the bread of life. Notice the exclusive nature of that claim: I am the bread of life; there is no other bread of life but me. Now, that means that the Lord Jesus is sufficient for salvation. The very process of making bread illustrates the meaning of “I am the bread of life”. In ancient times when you made bread the first thing that you had to do was to cut down the grain in the field, and you know very well if you’ve read the Old Testament very much that references made to the fact that the Messiah would be cut off and have nothing.

And then after the grain is cut down, it is bruised in order that the chaff might be separated from the grains of wheat, and so it is crushed, and that suggests to us so beautifully that he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. And then of course, in order to make bread, you had to take the grain and put it in the oven and there bake it. And there is nothing that more beautifully, to my mind at least, suggest the sufferings at the cross at Calvary, where the wrath of God like the flames of divine judgment, burn in the soul and spirit of the Son of God, causing him to cry out, “My God, my God why has thou forsaken me?” For there the sinless one became sin, that sinners might have righteousness through him. And so in the cutting and the bruising and the baking of the bread, there is reflected the ministry of the Lord Jesus who was cut down, bruised, baked in the fires of divine judgment that he might truly be the spiritual bread of life.

But John also goes on to point out in the 6th chapter in the 56th verse of that particular sermon, that the Lord Jesus is not someone who is not eaten once and for all, not someone who is drunk once for all, but this eating of this flesh and drinking of his blood is something that continues. In other words, fellowship and communion with him is expressed by that figure too: he that eateth (notice the present tense) my flesh and

drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him. So that the partaking of the Son of God in eating and drinking by which we enter into the possession of life is followed by the constant feeding upon him in order that that spiritual life that we have may be sustained.

And I think the striking thing about Christianity is that we cannot do without Jesus Christ. We cannot do without him for salvation, we cannot do without him for sustenance, we cannot say, I have been saved by Christ and now I don’t need him any longer because now I have salvation. You can take Plato’s teaching and do as you like with Plato, but you cannot take Christ’s teaching and do what you like with Christ.

When he says I am the bread of life, he means he is the bread of life for the entrance into the life and for the continuance in that life. Socrates and Plato held up their philosophies and said, “Consider these.” Budda and Mohammed enunciated their teachings and said, “Follow these.” But the Lord Jesus said, “Follow me.” So that we come into relationship with him and possess life through faith in him and his atoning sacrifice, that is followed by constant following of him, expressed in John’s vivid metaphor as eating his flesh and drinking his blood—communion.

Arenaetus was once asked what Jesus Christ brought that other religious leaders did not, and he said, “He brought himself.” And the striking fact of Christianity is that we are never rid of Jesus Christ in Christianity. Christianity is Christ, Christ as our Savior from sin and Christ as our deliver, Christ as our sustainer, and Christ ultimately as the one with whom we have fellowship throughout all eternity.

I think there is a lesson for seeking souls, here. Now we are not told in the miracle itself of this, we are told in the sermon that followed. But you will remember that 6th chapter and 35th verse goes something like this, “I am the bread of life, he that cometh to me shall never hunger, he that believeth in me shall never thirst.” Now notice, I am the bread of life, he that cometh shall never hunger. What does that mean? Well that means that when you come you have eaten, so that coming and eating are synonymous. And further, he that believeth in me shall never thirst. So that believing is the same as

satisfying one’s thirst, the same as drinking. So you see that eating and drinking and believing and coming – all of these are expressions of the same thing. They describe the means by which we appropriate Jesus Christ.

So we believe in Jesus Christ when we eat his flesh and drink his blood, or when we drink his blood and eat his flesh we believe in him, and we come to him. So that eating, drinking, and believing and coming – all of these express the ways by which we appropriate him. Augustine said *crede et mandepaste*; “believe, and you have eaten,” so that the response to the message of the Lord Jesus is simple trust in him. It is turning away from all trust in anything else – the church, our good works, our culture, our education, our denomination, whatever we may want, whatever we may have put trust in – to the objective of the work of the Lord Jesus who died for sinners at the cross at Calvary.

And when by the grace of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we have been turned from other trusts to the trust that brings life, that brings repentance, faith and justification of life, then we can be, as John puts it, sure that we have everlasting life.

In the 24th cantor of the *Pardiso* of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante has a telling passage in which he envisions himself being interrogated in paradise by St. Peter on the profession of faith. “Good Christian, speak and manifest thyself, what thing is faith?” he is asked. Dante answers, “Wherever I have followed on, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the argument of things which are not seen, and this I take to be its essence.”

And then Peter replies, “Right well hath now been traversed this coin’s alloy and weight, but tell me if thy hast it in thy purse?” Isn’t that interesting? Do you have it in your pocket book?

And Dante answers, “Yea, so bright and round I have it, that for me there is no perhaps in its impression.” And when God the Holy Spirit has brought us to the trust in Jesus Christ, and the assurance of that trust so that there is no perhaps, then we have reached, by the grace of God and the enablement of God, the place where we have life

and the assurance of life, and the joy of the possession of life through the bread of life, the Lord Jesus.

Do you have it? Is it so certainly yours that it is really in your pocketbook, and there is no perhaps about it? Is it more real to you than that check you got yesterday morning or that you gave? If you are here today and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus, we invite you to come to him who is the bread of life, and who offers life to all who by the grace of God the Holy Spirit have been convinced of their own sin and need, of their guilt and their condemnation. And if God the Holy Spirit has brought you to that place, then you are a fit subject for the gift of eternal life.

And if you are at that place we invite you to turn to him. It is a very simple thing to receive eternal life. No more difficult than to take the piece of bread and the little fish from the hands of the disciples, within the heart to say to the Lord Jesus, to the Father, Father I thank Thee that Thou has given the Son to be the bread of life. By Thy grace I see that having him is to have life, and I take him as my own personal Savior, abandoning all trust in any other trust – the church, culture, good works, whatever it may be – and rely upon him alone for my salvation. May God give you grace to make that decision. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege and opportunity to hear the word of God, to read it, to study it, to hear these meaningful eternal and divine words that the Lord Jesus has spoken.

And we pray, O God that through the Holy Spirit Thou would work in the hearts of each one of us, enabling us by grace to lay hold of him the particular need that we each have.

May grace, mercy and peace go with us, and O Father again we pray for any who may be here without Christ. O, give no rest or peace until they rest in him.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

“The Feeding of the 5,000” by S. Lewis Johnson
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