

In the Fulness of Time – Part 98

by Dr. Thomas O. Figart

Feeding the Five Thousand. Matthew 14:15-21

This is the only miracle of Christ (in addition to His own resurrection) which is recorded in all four Gospels. There are seven direct statements from the lips of Christ giving the full picture of this miracle showing His creative power.

Proving: “Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” John 6:5

The people had walked a long way to see and hear Jesus. In His compassion Jesus had healed their sick, and in His concern for their souls: *“as sheep not having a shepherd, he began to teach them many things”* (Mark 6:34). Now it was evening, and even His disciples became anxious about the need for food. Their solution was that the multitude be sent into the nearest villages to buy food for themselves. The initial reply of Jesus was directed to Philip, as quoted above. The account continues: *“And this he said to test him; for he himself knew what he would do”* (John 6:6). Unfortunately, Philip did not pass the test; he reasoned that more than seven months of wages at a denarius per day for 200 working days would not have been enough to feed a crowd of thousands. Yet, Philip and all the other disciples had seen Jesus work mighty miracles before; why could he not believe in the sufficiency of His power to supply this need? Not long after this, in Matthew 16:5-12, Jesus referred back to this miraculous feeding, when the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and in addition, misunderstood what Jesus said about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus rebuked them, saying: *“O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, nor remember the five loaves of the five thousand, And how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?”*

While Jesus was giving them a lesson in interpreting His words, at the same time He was surprised that they had not even learned the lesson of faith in His works! Still later, in 17:19-20, immediately after the glorious experience of the Transfiguration, when they asked why they could not cast out demons from the child, Jesus affirmed that it was because of their unbelief: *“For verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Move from here to yonder place and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you.”*

Promising: "But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart."

Matthew 14:16

After proving their lack of faith, Jesus then signified that the multitudes would not be required to walk to the nearest villages for food. His own question, "*Whence shall we buy bread?*" was forever overshadowed by His promise of grace: "*They need not depart.*" Jesus used the same word employed twice by the disciples when they said "*send away (apoluson) the crowd that they may go*" (*apolthontes*). There is no need for them to go when they are in the presence of the One Who created wine from water! Right at this point Jesus could have turned to Philip, as He did later, and said: "*Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father*" (John 14:9). Whether it is God the Father or God the Son, when either one makes a promise, there is no doubt of its fulfillment. As far back as their father Abraham: "*He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, And being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able to perform*" (Romans 4:20-21).

Providing: "Give ye them to eat." Matthew 14:16; Mark 6:47; Luke 9:13.

In all three passages Jesus used the same emphatic statement: "*Ye, ye give them to eat*" (*dote, autois humeis phagein*). Christ wanted to use the human instruments as the agents of supply. Could Jesus have literally rained the bread and fish into their midst? Certainly! Yet, He wanted His disciples to be a part of the process. This would not be the first time, nor the last, when God worked in this way. The Old Testament provision of Manna in Exodus 16:4 was rained from heaven; nevertheless, the LORD said unto Moses: "*The people shall go out and gather a certain amount every day.*" While all the details are not identical, the command to the Israelites does illustrate the utilization of human instrumentality. Was not this also the case when Lazarus was restored to life? Jesus worked the miracle, but when Lazarus came forth from the tomb bound from head to toe with grave clothes, the Lord said to them, "*Loose him and let him go!*" (John 11:44). No doubt the disciples were still unable to comprehend that they should feed the multitude, for the answer to the next question from the Lord still gives evidence of their inadequacy.

Producing: "How many loaves have ye? Go and see." Mark 6:38.

It was Andrew who discovered the lad with his five barley loaves and two small fishes, but even Andrew questioned the usefulness of such a small thing, saying: "*What are they among so many?*" (John 6:9). Just imagine what Ghazi, the servant of Elisha would have said to this! He had much more to work with; twenty loaves plus ears of grain; yet, he asked "*What, shall I set this before a hundred men?*" (2 Kings 4:42-43). The answer was essentially the same: "*Give the people, that they may eat; for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall have some left.*" The basic principle is found in 1 Samuel 14:6: "*There is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few.*" In Zechariah 4:10: "*Who hath despised the day of small things?*"

When the LORD asked Moses to go down to Egypt and deliver His people, Moses made one excuse after another, telling the LORD all the things he *could not do!* Then the LORD said: “*What is that in thine hand?*” In effect, God was asking Moses, “*How many loaves have you? What do you have that I can use?*”

Presenting: “Bring them here unto me.” Matthew 14:18

Whatever little they found, even five loaves and two fishes, could never have supplied the need until it was presented to Christ. The rod of Moses could do no miracle until it became “*The rod of God*” in his hand. Then it could be lifted up over the Red Sea and the waters were divided (Exodus 14:16); it could strike the rock and waters came gushing forth (Exodus 17:5-6), and as long as it was held high over Moses’ head, Israel prevailed over Amalek (Exodus 17:9-10).

One of David’s five smooth stones in his sling became the mighty weapon to destroy Goliath the giant (1 Samuel 17:40). The poor widow’s two mites were worth a king’s ransom for she presented her all to the Lord! The Apostle Paul reminds us that we are to “*present your bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.*” Only then will we be able to “*prove what is that good and acceptable, and perfect will of God*” (Romans 12:1-2).

Presiding: “Make them sit down by fifties in a company.” Luke 9:14; John 6:10

Though the disciples helped with the distribution of the food, it was Christ Who was in charge. To facilitate matters and to assure that all would be fed, Christ instructed the disciples to do all things decently and in order. Then, remembering that only God could supply their need, Jesus took the five loaves and two fishes and looked up to heaven, blessed the food, broke it, and gave it to the disciples. Further details are not given, but it must be inferred that He did this with each basketful until all twelve were full, and from that point onward, the food miraculously multiplied along the way, the disciples walking through the pathways made by the people as “*they sat down in ranks, by hundreds and by fifties*” (Mark 6:40). Though the total number is not given, five thousand men plus women and children must have included a minimum of fifteen thousand, even allowing one woman and one child per man. Each of the Twelve must have administered food to more than a thousand!

Preserving: “Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.” John 6:12

The Gospels are specific in recording that “*all*” were included. In the distribution of the loaves and fishes, Mark 6:41 mentions that Jesus “*broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, to set before them, and the two fishes divided he among them all.*” The distribution was made easy because they were sitting in groups. Mark 6:39 uses two curious sets of double words, *sunposia sumposia* (“*drinking party by drinking party*” or “*company by company*”). Then in Mark 6:40, *prasiai prasiai* (“*garden plot by garden plot*” or “*division by division*”). In the participation: “*they did all eat*” (Matthew 14:20) and concerning satisfaction: “*they were all filled*” (Luke 9:17)

Not only were all sufficiently cared for, there was food left over. The “*fragments*”

(*klasmaton*) were not half-eaten pieces, but broken pieces as originally distributed. The Savior wanted nothing to be lost. It has been suggested that those twelve small wicker baskets were filled in order to provide enough for Jesus and the twelve disciples. Be that as it may, it certainly does agree with Ephesians 3:20: “*Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,*” or Philippians 4:19: “*But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*”

And He promises to care for us until that day, when, “***in the fulness of time,***” Christ will take us home to heaven!