

## Teaching Points

Tonight we're going to cover the fourth "sign" in John's gospel. This is the story of Christ miraculously feeding the multitude. As with the other miracles, this sign both demonstrates Christ's deity and illustrates several aspects of His saving work.

John tells us that this took place after Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee. The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) include the detail that this occurred in a deserted area where Christ had withdrawn with His disciples so they could rest a little. Instead of taking some time to repose, Christ and His disciples ended up meeting a great multitude of needy people. Rather than turning them away in order to rest as scheduled, Jesus chose to meet the crowd's needs. Mark 14 sums up Christ's work that day as teaching and feeding the people. He met their spiritual and physical needs.

The miracle itself takes place in response to the needs of the crowd. They've been listening to Jesus teach all day and now they're hungry. Mark 6:35-36, ***"When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, 'This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat.'"***

Notice how the crowd is brought to a place where there isn't food readily available. The disciples recognize this and urge Jesus to ***"Send them away"*** so they can eat. Also notice how the disciples assume that the people have to provide for themselves. ***"Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages AND BUY THEMSELVES bread..."*** (These details are helpful even though John doesn't include them in his record. This is a good example of how helpful it is to compare the various gospel accounts. Some writers include information that really enhance our understanding of what happened. The gospels do not contradict each other - but rather **complement** each other.)

John 6:6 tells us that Jesus already knew what He was going to do. His mind is set on this miracle - but first He wants to test His disciples. In verse 5 He asks Philip ***"Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?"***

**Discussion Question:** Why does Jesus ask Philip this question? Why not just tell him what's about to happen?

**Thoughts:** *This is one of many examples of Christ drawing out the hearts of His disciples. Jesus often asked questions as a method of teaching and training. Here, the question seems intended to draw out the logical thought processes of the disciples. Philip does the math and rightly assesses the situation - stating that it would cost a lot of money to feed this huge crowd. He's right. And yet, Christ is about to show Him that He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all*

*that we think (Ephesians 3:20). Basically, Jesus wants Philip to state the obvious regarding their lack of resources so that He can show Philip His ability to provide. This is a picture of Christ's sufficiency in the midst of our deficiency.*

When Jesus tells the disciples to **"Make the people sit down."** (v. 10), He's sending them a message. It's as if He's saying, "These people don't need to go anywhere else to get bread. What they need is Me. Make them sit down and I'll take care of the rest." Philip has made it clear that they don't have enough money. Andrew has made it clear that the five barley loaves and few small fish belonging to a young boy present are not enough. So the stage is set for Jesus to show them that He is enough.

The process of feeding the crowd is very illustrative. Jesus takes the bread into His hands and gives thanks (v. 11) and then He distributes the loaves to His disciples, who distribute them to the crowd. Christ is the source. The miracle takes place while the bread is in His hands. But notice how Jesus doesn't get up and feed everyone one by one. Instead, He puts the bread in the hands of His disciples who are instructed to distribute to the people.

**Discussion Question:** What is the significance of Jesus involving the disciples in the miracle?

**Thoughts:** *We know that God can just rain down bread from heaven (like the manna in Exodus), but here we see that He delights in using us in the process. This miracle involved them seeing and handling the food that Christ miraculously provided. Imagine the impact this would have had on the disciples as they kept coming back to Jesus over and over again and the bread and fish kept coming. This is also a picture of how the apostles will be responsible for "feeding" the church by preaching the gospel and spreading the word of Christ later on in their lives.*

Verses 13-14 sum up the miracle. First, we see that Christ not only fed the crowd - but there were leftovers! He provided an abundance of food for the people who had nothing to eat. This is consistent with the nature of God's grace. He lavishes grace and mercy on His people. Ephesians 1:7-8, **"In [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us..."** The twelve baskets full of leftovers (v. 13) show that Christ gave more than the people could handle. There is never any lack in God's provision for us. Jesus was able to keep giving even when the people couldn't receive any more.

Finally, verse 14 tells us the reaction of the crowd. When they saw this sign they said, **"This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."** Some commentators observe that this is the high point of Christ's popularity with the crowds. In verse 15, we read that they were ready to **"come and take Him by force to make Him king..."** Sadly, we'll see that this fervor doesn't last. This is the same crowd who complains

when Jesus tells them later on in chapter 6 that He is the bread of life. It seems these people were willing to eat the physical bread that Christ miraculously provided, but they weren't willing to receive Him as the true bread of life.

### **Prayer Focus**

Praise God for His provision. Make sure we start with the grace He gives in saving us. Then praise Him for all the physical needs He takes care of.

Let's pray that we remain hungry to receive what Christ gives. We know that His grace is sufficient for us - so let's "sit down" in His presence and not go elsewhere to "buy bread for ourselves."