

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

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[0 : 0 0] This, the feeding of the 5,000, is the only miracle of Jesus which is recorded in all four Gospels, the only one. What does it tell us that the feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle recorded in all the Gospels? It tells us surely that this was the most significant miracle Jesus performed, that this, more than any other, tells us who Jesus is and why Jesus came.

Each of the Gospel writers has their own reason for including this miracle, but put together, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, they present a picture to us of a Jesus who, rather like the God of the Old Testament, feeds His people in the wilderness. Jesus provides for His people, even when the odds are against Him, and He'll provide for us too when we are spiritually hungry and cannot see a way ahead. Matthew wants to emphasize the continuity between the God of the Old Testament and Jesus. That's his slant on the feeding of the 5,000. Mark wants us to use the miracle to help us to answer the question, who is Jesus? John uses it to reinforce the message that Jesus is the bread of life. But Luke has his own reason for including this miracle. Luke 9 started with the account of Jesus sending out the 12 disciples on mission. As we've seen throughout our studies in

Luke's Gospel, Jesus anticipates that when He has gone away, He will accomplish His mission of building His church through these disciples. And so from verse 1 through 6, Jesus sends them out on mission, commanding them to preach the good news of the kingdom of God and to heal the sick and the diseased.

The emphasis is on Jesus working through His disciples. Now, this should come as no surprise to us. Luke didn't just write the Gospel of Luke, which records the ministry of Jesus until His resurrection.

He also wrote the book of Acts, which records the ministry of Jesus through His disciples in the early church. So in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is preparing His disciples so He can work through them to grow and expand the early church. Now, this is all very interesting. But what does it mean for us today?

[2 : 5 3] It means that the heavenly Jesus at the Father's right hand is still at work through His church, growing and expanding His kingdom through the Word and the work of the Gospel. The heavenly Christ, who is at the Father's right hand, is still working through His church to grow and expand His kingdom through the Word and work of the Gospel. The heavenly Jesus wants to work through me and through you, through our words about Him, through our works for Him here in Thordwood and Glasgow and beyond.

The heavenly Jesus is working through us to feed spiritually hungry people lost in the wilderness of their sin through the proclamation of His Word. Back to our passage in Luke 9. In the context of Jesus' preparing His disciples for mission through the feeding of the 5,000, we see three things.

First, the call to mission never ends. Second, the need for mission never ends. Third, the power for mission never ends. The call to mission never ends, first of all. The call to mission never ends never ends. Our passage in verse 10 begins with the disciples returning from the mission upon which Jesus had sent them earlier. He'd sent them out to preach and heal, and now they'd come back to tell Him what they'd done. It had been a busy time. You can imagine the disciples must have been tired. So Jesus took them and He withdrew to a town called Bethsaida. Bethsaida was situated on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and was the hometown of three of the disciples, Peter, Andrew, and Philip.

So Jesus takes His disciples for some R&R; after their busy mission. But the crowds, when they had learned of Jesus' withdrawal, followed Him. Jesus and His disciples may have been tired after their mission, but the people were desperate, so they followed. We can imagine the response of the disciples when they saw the crowds coming over the hill toward them, said to each other, we've been out on mission for Jesus. We're tired. Can these people not give us a break? Perhaps that would be our response.

We've only got so much to give after all. But the truth is, you know, that mission never ends. Even when we're tired and we feel we've got nothing left to give, we are still on mission for Jesus.

[5 : 57] The crowds, the disciples were probably not very happy to see the crowds, but we would have Jesus, in verse 11, that He welcomed them and He spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing. If you go back to Jesus sending out of His disciples on mission in verse 2, we read, He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. Jesus is now engaging in the very mission upon which He had sent His disciples, proclaiming both by word and work the kingdom of God. But the key phrase is this, He welcomed them. He welcomed them. Even though He had withdrawn with His disciples, for Jesus' mission never ends. They came to Him and He healed them. They came to hear Him preach and He proclaimed to them the kingdom of God. Even at His most tired, He was on mission.

The disciples needed to understand the same thing. The mission of God never ends. The mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God by word and work, the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, never ends. It is the church's constant call.

The Kenyan runner, Elliot Kipchoge, is the greatest marathon runner of all time. Kipchoge is the first man to run a marathon in under two hours. For Kipchoge, the training never ends. Kipchoge carefully monitors everything he does to make sure that nothing gets in the way. He runs twice a day.

He works on core weight exercises. He has a strict pattern of sleep. He has a carefully balanced diet. He needs to if he wants to be at the top of his game. Every aspect of Elliot Kipchoge's life, day or night, sleeping or eating, running or walking, is geared toward his mission of being the greatest marathon runner in the world. In the same way, the mission of the gospel never ends.

Whatever we're engaged in, we're on mission for Jesus. I clearly remember the address the late principal Donald MacLeod gave to me and my fellow students on the night of our graduation from the Free Church College. He looked at us in the eyes and said, remember, gentlemen, you are preachers. You are preachers in your dreams, and you are preachers in your nightmares. You are preachers in your dreams, and you are preachers in your nightmares. For the church, the mission never ends. We're on mission for Christ always.

[9 : 04] Whatever we are, whatever we're doing, however we're feeling, we're still on mission when life is a nightmare for us. The apostle Paul was in prison, but he was still on mission for Christ.

He spoke to his guards and his fellow prisoners about Jesus and wrote letters to the churches he had helped plant. He poured himself out for his Lord, and we too are always on mission. Well, it's easy to say this when we're well and we've got our health, but what about those times when our health has failed and we're unwell? Yes, then too, because, you know, the way we suffer is in itself a witness to the grace of Christ at work in us, even if we fail to say a word.

Even when we're on holiday, we're on mission for Christ. You know, even the simple act of bowing your head and saying grace over a meal in a towel is an evangelistic action because others see and others take note. We're on mission at home and at work. We're on mission at our leisure clubs and our social clubs, in our colleges, universities. We're never going to retire from mission.

If ever someone should say, well, I've done enough for Jesus. Give me a break. We show that we never understood how much Jesus has done for us. For as long as the church exists, we're on mission for Him, and for as long as each one of us live here, we're on mission for Jesus.

Thanks be to Him for the privilege of proclaiming the gospel never ends, and it is a privilege.

[11 : 05] Thanks be to Him because Jesus works through His church every day to grow His kingdom on earth. The call to mission never ends. Second, the need for mission never ends. The need for mission never ends.

The public ministry of Jesus lasted for three years. His heavenly ministry has been ongoing for 2,000 years since. But for as long as this world lasts, there will always be a need for mission.

Jesus and His disciples had intended to withdraw for a rest, but a large crowd followed them to Bethsaida. The mission, you see, followed Jesus wherever He went because people followed Him wherever He went.

He, who had already showed Himself capable of meeting need, was crowded by needy people. And the need for mission never ends. Suppose this passage just mentioned that there was a great crowd of people following Jesus. We'd still come to this conclusion because every human being, every one of us, has needs unique to ourselves. We have a habit of looking at other people, the person sitting beside you in your chair today, and wrongly thinking, that person doesn't have any problems in their lives. Not like I do. It's not true. Every face here hides a heartache. Every face hides a heartache.

All of us have needs. Perhaps some of them are known to others, but most are known only to ourselves, chief of which is our need of God and His satisfying grace. But then from our passage, there's more.

[12 : 48] Many in the crowd that day, as we learn from verse 11, had need of healing, we read, had need of healing. To some extent, all of us have need of the healing only the gospel can bring. But some of us, shall we say, maybe need more work than others. Maybe our needs are more complex than the needs of others.

Maybe we're from backgrounds which are less ordinary, and our minds work in different ways. Perhaps some of us come from broken families. Others were addicted to various substances.

Still others struggle with poor mental health. These add to the need for mission because if the gospel can't fix everyone, it can't fix anyone. But even more than that, the crowds had been with Jesus for so long that day that they were starving. There wasn't enough food to go around. There was an immediate problem. It was the hunger of the people. There were at least 5,000 people present because the number here quoted mentions only the men. And all these people are desperately hungry.

The need of the people was clear and obvious. The need for mission literally was on Jesus' doorstep. There are people, every one of which has needs. There are sick people, every one of which has complex needs. And there are hungry people, every one of which has immediate needs. Some of these needs are physical. Some of them are spiritual. So, the need for the mission of the gospel, which brings healing and wholeness through Christ, never ends.

By virtue of me being a minister, I spend a fair bit of time in hospitals. Hospitals are really busy places. You've got nurses, you've got doctors, you've got cleaners, you've got staff. They're always on the go, and the wards are always full of patients as well. Later on, I'll be going to visit Kenneth Alla in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. And I'll stand, stand at the entrance to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, the coldest place in the world. It's colder even than the Antarctic Ocean. You quickly realize this hospital never stops. There's always need in Glasgow. So, the hospitals are always busy.

[15 : 19] For as long as we live in this broken world, sorry, David Lockington, you're going to be in a job. People will always have dodgy eyes. And if you're a doctor, you're always going to be in work. There will always be a need for hospitals. In the same way, there will always be a need for mission.

For the proclamation of the glory of God and His Son. Jesus said, the poor you will always have with you. The spiritually poor, the economically poor, the physically poor. For as long as this world lasts, they will always be with us. So, there will always be a need for us to share the good news of Christ.

We know that for all of life's problems, Christ is the ultimate answer. Do we not? We alone have water in a spiritual desert, and it's our privilege to share that water with the parched and thirsty who live round about us. The need for mission has actually never been greater. We live in a society where everyone tries to find satisfaction in anything but God. By virtue of communication technology, we've never been more connected with our world. But by virtue of our spiritual poverty, we've never been so lonely.

There's never been a greater need for the good news of Jesus, which brings God's presence to the lonely, God's hope to the despairing, and God's forgiveness to the guilty. For as long as this world lasts, the church's mandate for mission will never end, because there will always be new people to reach and new opportunities for mission. The heavenly Christ, from the right hand of the Father, He sees the aching, painful need of our world. He sees its spiritual poverty and its extreme violence and its aching despair, and He has chosen to meet its needs through the gospel preached by the church.

Just like He fed the 5,000 by a mighty miracle of power, but used the disciples to distribute that miraculously produced bread and fish, so He uses the church today to distribute and spread the miraculous gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ, which alone can change lives and bring ultimate satisfaction to the human heart.

[17 : 45] Let's open our eyes to the need of the world around us, the spiritual poverty of those who walk up and down Crow Road every morning and every evening, whose lives are occupied only with work, family, and leisure, and have no thought for the deeper realities of this life. Let's open our eyes to the misery of those whose lives are dominated by substance abuse, homelessness, loneliness, mental anguish.

The need begins here among us, for every one of us here in this building this morning has complex, immediate, and chronic needs as Christians, needs which only Jesus can meet.

Listen to these wonderful words spoken by the greatest African theologian to have ever lived, Saint Augustine of Hippo. He said, the church is not a museum for saints. It is a hospital for sinners. The church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners. In museums, things always stay the same. In hospitals, things are busy and change all the time. Thanks be to God that He uses us in His divine and loving mission of healing the sick through the proclamation of the gospel of His Son. The need for mission never ends.

Well, finally, the power for mission never ends. The power for mission never ends. With just five loaves and two fish, Jesus fed a crowd of 5,000 people at least. Five loaves, two fish. He looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. And then He began to break the loaves, gave them to His disciples to distribute to the crowd. The bread kept on coming. Before long, the whole crowd was fed and satisfied, and 12 basketfuls of fragments were gathered up. There may or may not be significance in the number 12, but the key theme is this. As far as Luke is concerned, there was more than enough to feed the whole crowd. If you had given the problem of feeding a crowd like this with only five loaves and two fish to an accountant, He'd have said, can it be done? You don't need to be an accountant to realize that such a thing is impossible. But for the Jesus who raises the dead and gives the blind their sight, nothing is impossible. What happened here was the power of heaven working through Jesus, and the whole crowd gathered in that desolate place, i.e. wilderness, was fed and satisfied.

This episode has an uncanny resemblance to how when their Jewish forebears were wandering through the wilderness after their miraculous deliverance from Egypt, God fed them with a bread-like substance called manna. But what we're interested in is how Jesus looked up into heaven, and then He blessed the food, and then He gave it to disciples to distribute to the crowd. What's being described here is how God's power works through the church. In the first instance, God's power works through Jesus. He looks up into heaven, and God's power works through Him to miraculously produce this multiplication of bread.

[21 : 26] Jesus becomes the conduit of God's power on earth. But then secondly, Jesus presents His disciples with the opportunity to distribute the grace of His powerful miracle to the needy crowd. We see the link, do we not? The power of God works through Jesus. The power of Jesus, which is the power of God, is distributed and exercised by the disciples who represent the church. The miraculous power for this miracle does not come from the disciples, but from Jesus. But Jesus chooses to channel His power through the disciples. He feeds the crowd with miraculously produced bread and fish, but He feeds them by calling upon the disciples to distribute the bread and fish. Jesus calls His church to be His channel of satisfying and life-giving grace. He produces the bread, and He calls His disciples to be the channels of His miraculous grace. Throughout the book of Acts, as we'll see in probably about five years time, the disciples perform miracles. So, Paul raises a young man from the dead, and Peter makes a lame man walk. But what connects all these miracles done by the disciples is that in their own words, they do them in the name of Jesus Christ. In other words, the power does not come from them, it comes through them. The grace for new life and vigor doesn't come from Peter and Paul. It comes from the heavenly Jesus at the right hand of the Father working powerfully through them.

So, I'm glad the children are out. I hope I'm not bursting any bubbles here with this illustration. But over the festive period, I watched an episode of The Chase, in which the celebrity puppet Basil Brush was a contestant. Maybe you saw it as well. I love Basil Brush, boom, boom, and all that.

When it comes, when it came to Basil Brush's turn to answer questions, do you suppose it was a real fox answering questions from Bradley Walsh? Or was it the guy with his hand up the puppet's back?

Actually, Basil Brush and his team did rather well, defeated the chaser. But it wasn't because the fabric and cloth which make up Basil Brush's puppet is really clever. It's because the puppeteer knew the answers. Sorry if I burst your bubble there. I want to be careful with that illustration because we are not puppets in God's hands, and He treats us as intelligent agents with free will. But in the same way, the power to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ with the result that at least some people are savingly affected, it does not come from us. It comes from Him. When a man or a woman is converted to the preaching of the Word of God, the power is not that of the preachers, but that of the heavenly Christ working through the preacher. It has to be this way, lest the preacher should claim the glory for Himself. And as God says, I will share My glory with no other.

The thing is that because Christ has been raised and is now in heaven, He is still at work in His church. He is ministering in power to the church's words and works. His power is available to us, to all of us.

[25 : 15] Every time we serve others in His name, even if it's only suffering well, it is He who is working through us, and who knows what He with His power will do. He who fed the 5,000 with just five loaves and two fish can do amazing things through us. He can transform our lives and the lives of our loved ones. He can change our city and our world, and all because He promises to work through His church, to build His church. Without being misunderstood, the question for us is this, will we let Him work through us? Will we pray every morning, Lord, will You work through me this day to bring hope to the Jesus sparing, your life to the spiritually dead, and Your forgiveness to the guilty? Will You let Him work through you? Will we be mission-focused, which in this sense means will we be repenting of our own sin and letting Him work through us so that the church here, as it did in Acts, will enjoy days of renewal and refreshing from heaven. The call to mission never ends, and the need for mission never ends, and the power for mission never ends. As we close, I want to introduce a fourth never end very quickly, and that is the message of mission never ends. The message of mission never ends.

In verse 17, we read of the crowd, they all ate and were satisfied. They all ate and were satisfied. The message of the mission is that Jesus alone can satisfy every craving and need of the human soul.

Jesus alone can satisfy every craving and need of the human soul. He gives us hope and joy and love, forgiveness, meaning, and freedom. The world around us promises to satisfy us, but leaves us emptier than we were before. But Jesus and Jesus alone can satisfy us. He fills us with His grace because on the cross He emptied Himself of His glory. He fills us with His grace because on the cross He emptied Himself of His glory. This is the message of mission the church proclaims.

Once we were empty, but now we are full, and all because we met Jesus. He and He alone can feed the hungry soul. He alone can make sense of this world in which we live.

Everywhere we look in our wonderful city of Glasgow, there's spiritual emptiness and poverty. And the heavenly Jesus looks over our city with great compassion and calls us as His church to be those through whom He shall satisfy the spiritually hungry through the proclamation both by word and work of His glorious gospel. He has given us the bread in our hands.

[28 : 31] He has multiplied the bread for us so that all of Glasgow can hear and be satisfied. Let's go then with the good news of Jesus and feed the hungry of our city and of our world.