



Seven signs from the Gospel of John

The Super-abundance of God JOHN 6:1-15



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We're making our way through the seven miraculous signs John records in his Gospel - seven miracles John has chosen to reveal the majesty and glory of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Today we've come to the fourth miraculous sign—perhaps the most famous miracle ever performed by Jesus—when Jesus took 5 small loaves and 2 small fish and multiplied them miraculously to feed a crowd of perhaps 20,000 people with food to spare! I say 20,000 people, because John tells us there were 5000 men. If we add children and wives we must surely have a crowd of some 20,000 or more.

There are some unique aspects of this miracle which we should note:

It's the only miracle recorded in all four of the Gospels! There must be something special about the only miracle recorded by all the Gospel writers

Second, this miracle reveals more about Jesus' mission than other of his miracles do—for it teaches us that he came to feed our hungry souls. Although it was physical Hovis-like bread that Jesus multiplied for the crowds, the deeper meaning of this miracle is that Jesus is spiritual bread come down from heaven to feed our souls and whoever "eats him" - which means comes to him and believes in him - will gain eternal life. If your soul is hungry and your heart is empty, Jesus calls you this morning to come to him and to believe in him.

The third unique feature of this miracle is that no other miracle was seen by so many people. Some 20,000 people witnessed a miracle all at once!

So we have here a very special miracle! Not surprisingly, therefore, no miracle has been so attacked or reinterpreted. Liberals, who deny the supernatural, try to explain away this miracle by suggesting that the generosity of the lad inspired everyone in the crowd to bring out food they had secretly brought with them! It is a ridiculous idea in which the liberals invent a greater miracle to explain away the one Scripture records!

But let's retell the true story and then rejoice in the super-abundance of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ! An enormous crowd was fed until they could eat no more- and twelve baskets of extra food were left over!

The miracle took place on the far shore of the sea of Galilee near Bethsaida. A crowd of people had followed Jesus there, because they had seen his wonderful healing miracles. Jesus had gone there to get some rest, but since that was not going to happen Jesus decided to feed the crowd. But, he was going to use this event to spur his disciples onto greater faith. That's what Jesus does for us today. He uses crisis experiences to spur us on to deeper faith.

The magnitude of the problem!

Let's not underestimate the size of the problem.

There's the size of the crowd. Feeding some 20,000 people or more, until they are full is an overwhelming task! If you've ever catered for a wedding feast of even a hundred people you will know the preparation and resources required! We're talking about a crowd 200x bigger than the average number of guests invited to a wedding in the UK!

Then there are the severe time constraints. The evening is drawing on - vast quantities of food must be found in a short period of time.

And there are no shops on the shores of lake Galilee! Yes, further afield in the surrounding villages, but there were no supermarkets on the beach!

The situation was potentially dangerous: if the people were sent home without food, some of the weak and young may faint along the way.

But there's nothing better to test our faith and build our trust in the Lord than a crisis. Maybe that's the situation some listener finds themselves in today and the Lord has led you to a "word in season."

The first possible solution – money

"Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Jesus says to disciple Philip. This question is a test! Will Philip reply, "Jesus, we don't need money, we've seen you turn water into wine, you can perform a miracle and provide food for these people?" That's how Philip should have responded to the test, but he doesn't. Instead he gets out his calculator - or perhaps his abacus! - and does a quick calculation, "Every loaf of medium Warburton's contains 20 slices ... suppose each person gets a slice ...that adds up to..."

"8 months wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite."

Although Philip runs with the idea that money could solve this crisis, at least he realises, in the end, that this problem is beyond the reach of the kind of money that can be gathered in a short time.

When a problem overwhelms us, instead of immediately turning to the Lord in prayer, do we not, sometimes at least, turn to money and what money can buy? Only to discover that money can't do it? 70% of the adult population, some 45 million people, do the national lottery regular basis because the world has bought into the common view, expressed by

Solomon in Ecclesiastes 10:19, that “Money is the answer for everything.” But there are many problems in life that money can’t solve!

Well, the other disciples are racking their brains for alternative fixes...

Andrew, comes up with a second solution to the crisis —human resourcefulness

If money can’t solve the problem, perhaps they can search out and find a supply of food themselves. Andrew finds a lad who is willing to share his food: “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish...”

But again - and to his credit - Andrew realises that human resourcefulness can’t solve this one for he adds, “..but how far will they go among so many?”

What both Philip and Andrew should have done – and what we should do in moments of crisis - is to turn to Jesus immediately and instinctively and ask him to do the impossible, instead of turning to money or to human help!

Oh, what peace we often forfeit
Oh, what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer

The good thing is that both Philip and Andrew came to realise that the problem was beyond the power of money and human resourcefulness to solve.

What happened next?

Jesus instructed his disciples to organise the crowd to sit down on the grass, picnic style, we might say. Then he took the five small loaves and gave thanks to God for them.

And his example is one of the reasons Christians “say grace” before a meal. We’re following the example of Jesus, we’re wanting to acknowledge that God is the giver of every good gift.

And then Jesus took those small loaves and began to break them into pieces and put them in the baskets held by the disciples. And as he broke them they multiplied miraculously and supernaturally! A small amount of bread was turned into a very large amount of bread. Bread that wasn’t there before was supernaturally formed as Jesus divided out the 5 loaves and 2 fish. Everyone ate as much as they wanted to! This was a feast of abundance! They ate until they could eat no more! The disciples collected up the leftovers and they filled 12 baskets!

Why does John record that the crowd was made up of “5000 men”, rather than “20,000 men women and children?” Because of what happened next, not because he was sexist.

When the people saw this sign, they were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah predicted by the OT Scriptures. But their vision of Messiah-ship was very different than Jesus’s. They saw the Messiah as a military figure who would beat the Romans in war, and rule triumphant over the world on a throne in Jerusalem. They were determined to make Jesus their king. And the

5000 men who witnessed this miracle could provide a sizable army to start the revolution: “Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.”

Let’s draw out three wonderful lessons from this miracle. First,

(1) God is teaching us that his Son is divine

Only God can make feed 20,000 with a packed lunch! In the great “bread making” miracle of the Old Testament, when God provided manna from heaven, daily bread from heaven for the people as they travelled through the wilderness, God said: “I will rain down bread from heaven for you.” (Exodus 16:4) Moses did not make the bread, God did; only God can make miracle bread! So when Jesus makes supernatural bread we are being told through his actions without words that he too is God.

Do you believe that Jesus is God? He is not merely a good teacher who lived a good life, he is God come in human flesh, and this miracle is designed to persuade you to believe that so that in believing it, you may have eternal life.

(2) God wants to multiply our meagre gifts

Lesson 2, God wants to multiply our meagre gifts. Andrew and the lad brought a tiny meal for one, but Jesus multiplied it into a meal for tens of thousands!

In the 1950s an ordinary American lady by the name of Dorothy Clapp, began to pray for the students of her local high school across the street, “I can’t do much but I can pray for the students.” Through her prayers a student at the school by the name of George Verwer was converted. Who is George Verwer? He’s the passionate evangelist who started a worldwide missionary society, Operation Mobilisation, whose ships and missionaries have reached millions of people around the world with the Good News. The “little prayers” of Dorothy Clapp reaped a global harvest.

Some 1900 years before Dorothy Clapp, an anonymous old man was walking along a seashore in the middle east, when he began chatting to a young man, with whom he shared the Gospel. This young man, by the name of Justin Martyr was also converted and became a mighty writer and defender of the Christian faith!

What can I do for Christ, you ask? “I only have a few small loaves and a few small fish?” We all feel that way at times don’t we? But if are willing to lay small gifts at the feet of Jesus, he can multiply them a thousand-fold for his glory!

What does the Lord want to teach us through the feeding of the 5000? (i) That Jesus is the divine Son of God (ii) that we should bring the little we have to him and watch what he does with it!

But in the third place, God wants to teach us that whenever he supplies a need he does so superabundantly!

(3) God always gives superabundantly!

The crowd did not have just a bite to eat, their tummies were filled, and on top of that twelve baskets, not one or two baskets, were left over!

When God gives he always gives generously, lavishly, superabundantly!

We see this characteristic of God most revealed when he gave his one and only begotten and loved Son to save us from our sin: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

We have grown immune to the deep generosity of those words—God so loved a rebellious world that he gave up the Son he loved!

Parents would you give up a precious child? No you wouldn't - and you couldn't!

But when God planned our salvation, heaven generously gave its best. And that generosity set the pattern for all of God's superabundant giving. “He who did not spare his Son but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things” (Romans 8:32)

He forgives our sins abundantly!

Not only does God forgive sins, he forgives ALL sins, (Psalm 103:3) and then he FORGETS them too! “I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” Hebrews 8:12.

He gives wisdom abundantly!

Have you some great decision to make? “If any of you lacks wisdom he should ask God who gives generously without finding fault” (James 1:5)

He provides abundantly for our material needs. Perhaps I am speaking to someone who is fearful of giving time or money to the Lord's work, lest your own supply dwindles? So you just hold on to your money and time with a tight grasp? You have never yet discovered how God works! If you give, he will give back even more liberally.

Many years ago, when Yvonne and I were church planting and had four small kids but very little money, a visiting preacher came by and we wanted to thank him for his Word among us. Yvonne went to town to buy him a gift. We could not afford much but we wanted to be generous. And this verse came to mind: “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Luke 6:38)

If you give, Jesus says, God will give back super generously. But if you hold back, you will never experience the superabundance of God's generosity.

Anyway, Yvonne bought a generous gift for the visiting speaker though we could not afford it. A short time later, we had a totally unexpected gift worth at least 5 x as much as we had spent! And we saw that gift as a direct fulfilment of the promise: “Give, and it will be given to

you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:38)

This wonderful miracle:

- Reveals the divine glory of Jesus Christ
- It encourages us to bring our small gifts to God fully expecting him to multiply them!
- And it reminds us of the boundless generosity of God towards us.

He gives us more grace when the burdens grow greater,

He sends us more strength when the labours increase.

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,

His power no boundary known unto men,

For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,

He giveth and giveth and giveth again.