



Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life

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Of the Seventy

When Jesus Christ was on the earth, He performed many miracles such as turning water into wine, healing the sick and disabled, and even raising Lazarus from the dead. The miracle witnessed by the largest audience was likely the feeding of the 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes. This miracle is described in all four Gospels (see Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:34–44; Luke 9:12–17; John 6:5–14). Let us examine some of the details of this miraculous story and discuss why it is relevant in our day.

The Savior's Compassion

The Savior performed this miracle because of His compassion for the people. Mark wrote that as Jesus looked over the crowd of people eagerly listening to His words, He “was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd” (Mark 6:34). He was aware that “the day was now far spent” and that, being in “a desert place” (Mark 6:35), the people did not have access to food.

Yet Jesus withheld His power to perform the miracle for a time, deciding to test His disciples first. He asked Philip, “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” (John 6:5).



Why did He ask Philip this question when “he himself knew what he would do” (John 6:6)? Perhaps

He wanted His disciples to fully recognize that they could not feed that many people with the money and time given to them. If the vast multitude was to be fed, it would require a miracle.

Then the disciples brought the food one boy had, the only food available to them: five barley loaves and two small fishes. I like to think that perhaps this boy was hungry but saved the food for his great Teacher instead of worrying about himself. This might have contributed to the great setting of the miracle.

“And They Sat Down in Ranks”

Jesus Christ deliberately accomplished one more task before performing the miracle: He commanded His disciples “to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties” (Mark 6:39–40). Why did He ask the people to sit down like this? Certainly He wanted to ensure that the process of distributing food was orderly. Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles adds to our understanding:



Jesus taught the people not to focus on physical bread, but to seek for much more important bread: “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you.”

Jesus fed more than 5,000 people with only five loaves and two fishes—a divine act. He declared Himself the “bread of life”—a divine teaching.

“There was nothing informal or unorganized about our Lord’s planning or performance. The assembled hosts were seated in a systematic way by companies and in ranks. His beneficence was not promiscuous largess scattered to a mob. Rather he was providing necessary and otherwise unavailable food to an inquiring congregation of hearers. Then too, there was to be no question left in anyone’s mind as to what actually took place. The apostles were to distribute the loaves and fishes in an orderly way, treating all with fairness and impartiality.”¹

In addition, I believe that—as with Philip—the Lord wanted the people to notice just how vast the multitude was when the miracle was

performed. He may have wanted to ensure that there were no arguments about the number of people who participated in this great miracle.

The number of people in the crowd was actually more than 5,000 because women and children were not counted. Therefore, many more than 5,000 people were miraculously fed with the five loaves and two fishes.

After the Savior took the five loaves and fishes, “he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves” (Mark 6:41) and then gave them to His disciples to pass to the people. They then distributed the fishes. The people did not take just a little food, worrying about a shortage. Instead, they took “as much as they would” (John 6:11) and “did all eat, and were filled” (Mark 6:42).

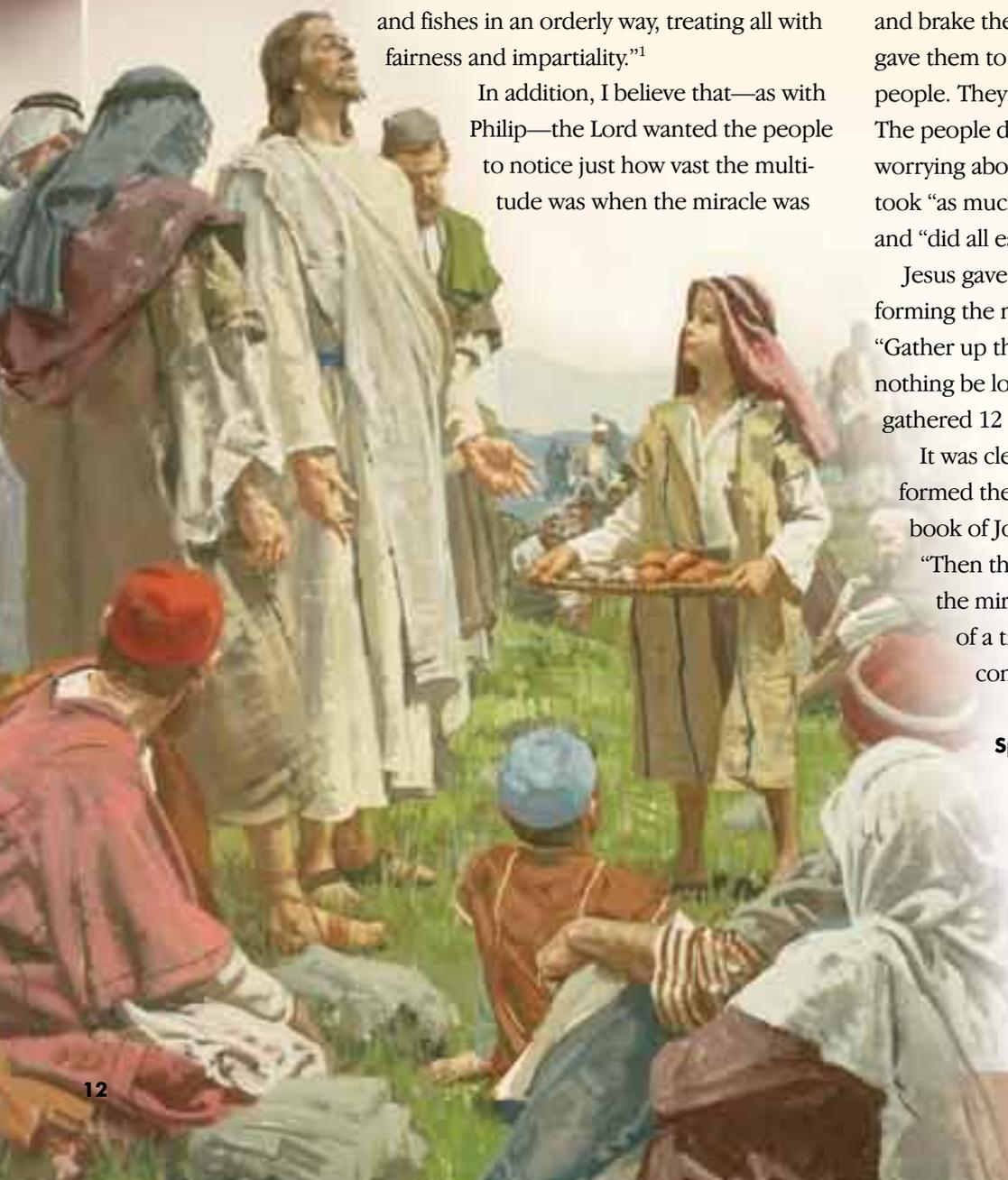
Jesus gave further instruction after performing the miracle. He told His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost” (John 6:12). The disciples gathered 12 baskets of food!

It was clear that by His power Jesus performed the miracle. The account in the book of John ends with this comment:

“Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world” (John 6:14).

Spiritual Nourishment

The story does not end there. All of these events were only a prelude to what the Savior taught afterward. He performed this miracle in a dramatic way so the people clearly understood that He has great power, and they



were thus better prepared to accept His teaching—which was so much more important than eating the loaves and the fishes.

A short time after performing this miracle, Jesus taught the people not to focus on physical bread but to seek for much more important bread: “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you” (John 6:27).

The people were confused about what He said. Their minds were still on the loaves they had eaten. They could not understand the meaning of the term “bread of life.”

Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

He continued to explain: “I am that bread of life. . . . This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever” (John 6:48, 50–51).

Some people murmured because of His saying. They thought they knew Jesus, son of Joseph the carpenter. They forgot the power by which Jesus had performed such a great miracle. Many chose to leave Him. Jesus asked His Twelve Apostles, “Will ye also go away?” (John 6:67). Peter answered with a testimony that was powerful in its simplicity: “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

Even though the Savior had prepared the people well for being taught His divine nature and mission, they still did not understand the significance of the miracle or of Jesus’s teaching that He is the Bread of Life. But the Twelve, led by Peter, assured Him of their testimonies. This must have given the Lord great comfort.



Knowing that Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life—the way by which all can receive eternal life—we have an important responsibility. We should seek to help people come to Him.

Relevance in Our Day

Today, some may think the miracle of the loaves and fishes is only an ancient story and is not relevant in our day. In so doing, they miss the point of this miraculous story and do not understand the significance of the “bread of life.”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “In our contemporary success and sophistication we too may walk away from the vitally crucial bread of eternal life; we may actually *choose* to be spiritually malnourished, willfully indulging in a kind of spiritual anorexia.”²

The Bible Dictionary explains that miracles are “an important element in the work of Jesus Christ, being

not only divine acts, but forming also a part of the divine teaching” (732; see also Guide to the Scriptures, “Miracle,” 165). The miracle of the loaves and fishes is a good example of this definition. Jesus fed more than 5,000 people with only five loaves and two fishes—a divine act. He declared Himself the “bread of life”—a divine teaching.

Knowing that Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life—the way by which all can receive eternal life—we have an important responsibility. We should seek to help people come to Him and partake of His word, like the people who were filled with the loaves and fishes. Our friends may not know they are hungry in spirit. They may try to consume many things to satisfy their spiritual hunger, and as a result, they may feel frustrated and lost. Let us help them know how they can be spiritually filled—by coming unto Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. ■

NOTES

1. *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (1966–73), 1:344.
2. “He Hath Filled the Hungry with Good Things,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 65.