

**Introduction:** God's Holy Spirit selected seven signs from an innumerable number of miracles Jesus performed during his ministry on earth to be recorded in the Word, John's Gospel. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, stated the reason for this was, "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in his name." **John 20:31**. We read now of

### **The Seventh Sign of John: Jesus feeds the 5000 John 6:1-15, 26-27**

The setting for the story of this seventh sign in John is the Sea of Galilee, which John clarifies for those readers who may not know Israel, calling it also by its Roman name, the Sea of Tiberias. Tiberias was a new city on the west shore of the sea named after the Roman Emperor Tiberias, founded in about A.D. 26 by Herod Antipas, the regional ruler of Galilee and son of Herod the Great. Jesus has returned to Galilee from Jerusalem.

This story, the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle Jesus performed that is recorded in all four Gospels. Therefore we can conclude this to be a very important occurrence. It occurred during the Passover season about one year before Christ's death [John 6:4]. We can also conclude that after two years of ministry wherever Jesus went large crowds gathered because the multitude continually followed Jesus. The reason they kept following him was that they continually saw signs. Jesus performed miracle after miracle after miracle witnessed by his disciples, usually up close, and by the great crowds following him from as close as they could get to him. And if they didn't see it themselves, word soon got around.

One of the fascinating features of Christ's earthly ministry was His way with these great crowds of people who follow him en masse, whom he often speaks to teaching or preaching. Although the experience of receiving life in his name, eternal life, is an individual encounter and people enter the kingdom one by one, yet he appeals to the crowd as a whole because Jesus continued to show compassion to the sick, one by one whom he met and healed as verse 2 tells us. So this large crowd is following Him, because they see these signs which He was performing on those who were sick. But would they ever, one by one, come to understand the true significance of these signs?

As a 'sign' the significance of the action of the miracle, rather than the marvel, was to point to Jesus as the Saviour, Son of God. Jesus Christ revealed his glory to his disciples, initially by the miracles he performed throughout his three year ministry and later, at the end of it, on his death and resurrection. That was on another hill, back to our story.

Jesus went up on a mountainside, and sat down with His disciples. It would have been a nice setting because it was springtime but minus the sight of new born lambs bouncing around. Instead it was the unsummoned crowd coming toward Jesus and his disciples. As Jesus looks up and sees this large crowd approaching he says to Philip, probably because he was the disciple who was a local since he came from nearby Bethsaida "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"

Last week we learnt how Jesus would minister to the whole person through the sign of the paralysed man being healed at the pool, mentally-emotionally, physically and spiritually. Here again, Jesus' words convey to one and all that his compassion was not simply for humanity's man's sickness, infirmities and spiritual lostness but that there is another dimension or area of concern we can add which is his practical concern for people. So Jesus turns to Philip for a course of action. If anyone of the disciples knew where to get food for the multitude that sought Jesus out it would have been Philip. Jesus was only doing testing Philip because he wanted to use this opportunity to strengthen his faith, along with the other disciples of course. By asking Philip for a human solution, knowing that there was none, Jesus was only doing this in order to highlight the powerful and miraculous act that He was about to perform, assign that was to point to himself as Saviour and Son of God, not just a mere prophet or miracle worker. The one whom his disciples and all who were to follow could believe in and put their faith and receive the gift of LIFE, eternal life.

Now Jesus knew what he intended to do to answer this dilemma before He involved Philip. So how is Philip going to do as far as the test goes? What would he say and what plan of action would he come up with to feed this large crowd? No matter what his answer is to be I think we can safely say that this is one lesson that Phillip would never forget.

Philip's answer was, "It would take eight month's wages to buy enough bread for each person in the crowd to have a bite."

When Jesus asked Philip where they could buy a great amount of bread Philip started assessing the probable cost. He was the logical thinker of the group, the dollars and cents man. His reply stresses the hopelessness of the situation judged from the meager resources of the group. Eight months wages would not buy enough bread to give this crowd a little taste. Philip not only fails to come up with a solution, but he actually points out the hopeless impossibility of providing for the crowd. Jesus wanted to teach him here along with the rest of the disciples that financial resources are not the most important ones. We can limit what God does in us by assuming what is and is not possible. To apply this lesson to our own lives today as individuals and even as a church we can ask ourselves this important question. Is there some impossible task that you believe God wants you to do? Don't let your estimate of what can't be done keep you from taking on the task. God can do the miraculous; trust Him to provide the resources, mental-emotional, spiritual and of course, practical resources as well.

And what were those resources that were practical and on hand that day? Well, Simon Peter's brother Andrew was put there looking and who and what does he find amongst the great throng of people and bring to Jesus? A boy with five barley loaves and two fish. But just how far will they go among so many he says?

In contrast to Philip's pessimism, Andrew presented to Jesus a young man who had volunteered his humble lunch, knowing it was not going to go far, but at least it was something. The disciples are contrasted with the youngster who brought what he had. They certainly had more resources than the boy, but they knew they didn't have enough, so they didn't offer anything at all. The boy gave what little he had, and it made all the difference. If we offer nothing to God, He will have nothing to use. But He can take what little we have and turn it into something great. We can see here that in performing His miracles, Jesus was able to work through people, for instance, by taking what a young boy offered and using it to accomplish one of the most spectacular miracles recorded in the Gospels. Age is no barrier to Christ. Never think you are too young or old to be of service to Him.

At certain times in life we may feel insignificant and useless. Surrounded by people with greater talents, abilities or resources than our own, we are tempted in our weak moments just to settle back and let somebody else do the work. We reason that what we have to offer won't make much difference anyway. We forget the truth suggested by our Lord's use of the five loaves and two small fish to feed a multitude. Each of us has something important to offer in His service.

We each put our faith in Jesus and by believing that he is the Christ the Son of God we receive the gift of life in his name. Each of us then with the miraculous gift of eternal life that we have experienced and been filled with, can offer our lives, our faith and our resources in Christ's service as his followers whether we are 8 years old or 88 years old. Just like the bread and the fishes that Jesus has been given to work with, something to bless, something in his hands that Jesus takes charge of, so are our lives, offered in his service so that he might continue his work, multiplying his effect in the world through each successive generation of believers, just as he did the miracle of multiplying the five small loaves and two small fish that he was to feed 5000 men, but when you include women and children the total number could have been around 10,000.

Jesus began this with thanksgiving, followed by the miracle of multiplication and provision. Jesus changed the offered bread into more bread so that each person could eat until they were satisfied. Making for us the point that God gives in abundance, that God takes whatever we can offer Him in time, ability, or resources and multiplies its effectiveness beyond our wildest expectations. If you take the first step in making yourself available to God, with that miraculous gift of life that you have within, God will show you how greatly you can be used to advance the work of His kingdom as a believer and follower of Christ.

Jesus set a good example. He produced tons of food to feed more than 5,000 people by miraculously multiplying a small boy's lunch. Then after all had finished eating, He told His disciples to gather up the leftovers so that nothing would be wasted. I'm not saying that we must eat everything that is set before us so that it won't be wasted. That wouldn't be good for our health or our waistline. But we can use good sense and conserve our God-given resources with the welfare of others in mind. In other

words, when you are blessed with an abundance of resources, share it don't waste it.

Now the crowd's reaction begins in verse 14. After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." They say this because Jesus has just recreated the miracle of Moses! The provision of manna and quail for the Israelites wandering 40 years in the wilderness after the exodus from slavery in Egypt. So, the crowd interprets his miracle as messianic. To identify Him as "the Prophet who is to come into the world" is a reference to Deuteronomy 18:15–19, which prophesies that a prophet like Moses will someday return. They were correct in understanding who He was, but so wrong in understanding the kingdom Jesus came to establish. The sign pointed to Him but the food was to point to Him also as the food of eternal life (v. 27).

Verse 15 reveals that their misinterpretation leads to the wrong idea of Jesus' kingdom. Jesus perceiving that they intended to come and take Him by force and make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone. The crowd has no clue what they have just witnessed. In their arrogance they wish to exploit it like a marketing company exploits a new household invention. They want Jesus for their own ends. They want Him to miraculously provide the necessities of life for them. Jesus rejected the world's version of king and kingdom. This miracle, rightly understood, points to Jesus as the Messiah and to a heavenly kingdom instead of an earthly kingdom as the crowd that experienced the miracle wanted. He who is already King has come to open His kingdom to men, but men in their blindness try to force Him to be the kind of king they want. When they fail to get Him to be the kind of king they want, they also tragically reject the kingdom He offers and of course the life, the eternal life that goes with it through belief in his name. The crowd had therefore failed to understand and respond appropriately to these signs which should serve as a warning to us.

I will close this morning with a story from the life of George Mueller, a German who lived and worked in England for 70 years in the 1800's because he stands out as one of the most remarkable "men of faith" of his century because he took his gift of life and served Christ with it

ministering to orphan's, stirring up the complacency that existed in the Victorian era toward a new spirit of caring and faith. His amazing achievement was the founding of orphanages for 2000 destitute children who were to experience Christian love and life, together with a good education, and what's more, work to follow. George's resource that he served God with every day of his ministry was that of trusting in God and putting all his faith and belief in the Son, his saviour, to provide all his needs, which was the individual needs of all his orphans. His influence spread far and wide and even beyond his life on this earth, long after his death. Here's the story.

The housemother of the orphanage informed George Mueller. "The children are dressed and ready for school. But there is no food for them to eat," George asked her to take the 300 children into the dining room and have them sit at the tables. He thanked God for the food and waited. George knew God would provide food for the children as he always did. Within minutes, a baker knocked on the door. "Mr. Mueller," he said, "last night I could not sleep. Somehow I knew that you would need bread this morning. I got up and baked three batches for you. I will bring it in."

Soon, there was another knock at the door. It was the milkman. His cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. The milk would spoil by the time the wheel was fixed. He asked George if he could use some free milk. George smiled as the milkman brought in ten large cans of milk. It was just enough for the 300 thirsty children.

To conclude may we each understand that this miracle of provision, just as Jesus' multiplication and provision of more than enough food for a crowd of more than 5000 people, was George Mueller's way of pointing believers to a life of faith that could be lived by trusting in God and his Son our Saviour who can supply all our human needs both practical and spiritual alike. George believed that if he could demonstrate this through his work with orphans then Christians everywhere would be lead to deeper and more effective faith. The faith that begins with believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. And with that life and faith within be challenged as George Mueller was to base your whole life's work on it in service of the Saviour, committed to influencing the world for him.

The question is will we see our true needs and look to Him to provide them. Jesus is the hope of the 2nd Exodus, which will lead to freedom from slavery to sin, self and satan.