

# Feeding of the five thousand

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Let us look at the passage John 6: 1-15 together, and consider some principles arising from this, which may help us to live a life of increasing quality in our walk with God.

In this incident, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His greatness, His love and His power, performed a miracle to feed a great multitude.

**John 6: 1-15**

- 1 After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias).
- 2 And a great multitude was following Him, because they were seeing the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.
- 3 And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.
- 4 Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.
- 5 Jesus therefore lifting up His eyes, and seeing that a great multitude was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?"
- 6 And this He was saying to test him; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.
- 7 Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little."
- 8 One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him,
- 9 "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?"
- 10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.
- 11 Jesus therefore took the loaves; and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted.
- 12 And when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost."
- 13 And so they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, which were left over by those who had eaten.
- 14 When therefore the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is of a truth the Prophet who is to come into the world."
- 15 Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

We see here a great multitude came to the Lord Jesus, following Him as they saw Him performing the miracles, healing the sick, teaching them, helping them to understand God's ways. In verse 5, the Lord Jesus asked Philip this question, "Where are we to buy bread that these may eat?" He did this to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.

**Being tested**

The Lord Jesus asked Philip this question because He wanted to test him. What was the intention of the test? From the context, the likely reason is that the Lord Jesus wanted to reveal the way that Philip would

respond to a situation like this. Such a test brings with it other implications that are helpful for our learning. As Philip answered the question, it revealed what was in his heart, the state of his life.

In our lives, God also tests us. Sometimes He allows us to go through difficulties and sufferings. How we respond, how we react will help us understand ourselves, what kind of life we have developed. It can help us to recognize our limitations, to know our need of God and to come to Him. The Lord wants us to develop the highest quality of life possible, and to produce that, He often brings us through many tests to help us recognize our deficiencies so that we can correct ourselves and build up our lives during our time on earth.

### **Active involvement**

Another helpful aspect that we can appreciate from this situation is the importance of active involvement. Very often in life, as we learn to love the Lord and walk with Him, we may become passive and merely wait for Him to act. We may think, "Whatever He wants to do He can do; whatever He wants to accomplish, we can trust that He will bring it to pass." At times we may ask the Lord, "Lord, please deal with this situation", without seeking to understand what is meaningful for us to do in that situation. The Lord wants to have a dialogue with us, to consider together what the issues are and how to respond. God does not want a group of slaves to do His will, but He wants a group of people who understand His ways, who love Him, who think in oneness with His purposes, who understand and appreciate what God ultimately intends to do and who share the desires of His heart and move together with Him. The highest quality of this is expressed in a friendship relationship with God. (Some aspects of this kind of relationship are considered in the article, [P3-A-FSP-S01-003-R00](#), "Higher levels of friendship".)

In order to produce that kind of relationship, God brings us through many kinds of situations of life to help us understand ourselves.

In this incident, we see Philip's response in verse 7, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." Philip's basic response is that "it is not practical for us to buy bread for this multitude because even if we can obtain two hundred denarii worth of bread, it will still not be enough for them". It was not enough because Philip was thinking along the natural plane. When the Lord Jesus asked him where they could buy bread for the people, his response was that two hundred denarii would not be enough.

### **Natural thinking**

We may say that it is very understandable and acceptable that as human beings living on this earth, we should bear in mind our physical limitations. However, in the context where the disciples knew that the Lord Jesus was not an ordinary man, not a mere man, then the response is not appropriate. In other parts of the Scriptures, we can see that the Lord Jesus was not pleased with this kind of response.

In Matthew 16: 5-12 we again see a situation where the disciples responded to the Lord Jesus primarily on the basis of a natural way of thinking.

#### **Matthew 16: 5-12**

- 5 And the disciples came to the other side and had forgotten to take bread.
- 6 And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."
- 7 And they began to discuss among themselves, saying, "*It is* because we took no bread.
- 8 But Jesus, aware of this, said, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?"
- 9 "Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up?"
- 10 "Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets you took up?"

- 11 How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."
- 12 Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

When the Lord Jesus mentioned leaven, they rapidly thought about bread. And they began to discuss among themselves, saying, "*It is* because we took no bread." That was their natural way of response. They thought basically in the natural plane. The Lord Jesus was not pleased with them. He said, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?" The way they responded was an indication that they were men of little faith. They did not appreciate the unseen realm; they did not sufficiently appreciate who the Lord Jesus really was, in their practical considerations.

When the Lord Jesus rebuked them and pointed out to them that He was not talking about bread, they were able to recognize that He was referring to the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. If they had been more conscious of, and alert to, the moral and spiritual realm, they would have been able to recognize what the Lord Jesus was talking about. However, they were so used to living by the natural plane that when the Lord Jesus referred to leaven, they readily thought about bread.

### **Consciousness of our walk with God**

During our time on earth, we constantly encounter things of this earth that we have to deal with, for example, a job, neighbours, relationships, and responsibilities in society. Yet, it is in such mundane day-to-day responsibilities that God expects us to maintain a spiritual outlook, to maintain a consciousness that God is with us, that our life is not meant to be lived solely in the natural plane. Even in the context of what people may call "bread and butter issues of life", God does intend that we look at life from a spiritual point of view, to recognize that each

moment of our life has an eternal significance, that when God allows us to live on this earth, He wants to build within us a spiritual, eternal quality of life, and not merely for us to earn a living, to have enough materially to live each day, to fulfil our earthly obligations. If we live by faith, we will look beyond the physical realm, and look at what God is seeking to do, and recognize that beyond all these earthly things, there are far greater implications and important issues at stake.

And so, when the Lord Jesus questioned Philip, we can say that at the natural level, two hundred denarii are indeed not sufficient to buy the bread for all these people, but did Philip recognize what was on the Lord's heart? Did he appreciate what the Lord Jesus was thinking about? Would he bring the matter before the Lord in discussion in the moral and spiritual plane? Instead, his answer was limited to the earthly and the natural.

As we go through life on earth, we too must remember this very important principle: no matter what kind of situations we may be in, we know that in reality, if God is with us, each moment of our life is intended to help us rise to a higher plane of living, a deeper walk with God and a greater understanding of spiritual and eternal issues. Sometimes we may think that there are only physical and earthly matters to deal with. However, even in times when we may be doing work that is monotonous, there are important qualities that the Lord wants to develop within us. For example, patience, endurance and perseverance are very important qualities that need to be developed. If we are impatient, we give up more easily in situations that involve routine and continuous labour. Even as we consider this passage of the feeding of the five thousand, we should be looking to God to help us understand and live by the moral and spiritual realities being considered.

## Doing what we can

In the incident of the feeding of the five thousand, one of the disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to the Lord Jesus, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" The conduct of Andrew may appear to be a contradiction. On the one hand, he brought to the Lord Jesus' attention that there was a lad who had five barley loaves and two fish. On the other hand, he seemed to regard this as of no help in this situation. Why did Andrew do this?

If we turn to John 1: 35-42 we may gain more insight regarding Andrew. This passage tells us that Andrew was one of the disciples of John the Baptist.

### John 1: 35-42

- 35 Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples,  
 36 and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"  
 37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.  
 38 And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?"  
 39 He said to them, "Come, and you will see." They came therefore and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.  
 40 One of the two who heard John *speak*, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.  
 41 He found first his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated means Christ).  
 42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

Andrew heard the testimony of John concerning the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God. As he heard the testimony, Andrew responded and wanted to know more about the Lord Jesus and he followed Him. When Andrew recognized the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, he looked for Simon his brother and he brought him to the Lord Jesus. He took initiative to bring Simon to the Lord Jesus, who then changed Simon's name to Peter, and made him one of His disciples. Peter subsequently became an important apostle in the work of God.

So then as we look at John chapter 6, this incident could very likely be an expression of this kind of initiative, as Andrew sought to do what he could to help. Although it seemed to be insignificant, he brought the lad to the Lord Jesus to see what He would do about it.

This principle is important for us too. In many situations, we may not know clearly what God intends to do, but that does not mean that there is nothing we can contribute. The Lord wants us to do our part to the degree we are able to understand, and not to wait passively for God to do whatever He wants to do, or for events to take place. Even though it may be similar to bringing a lad with five loaves of bread to feed five thousand (a seemingly impossible situation), when we bring it to the Lord, the situation changes. We should therefore bear in mind that whatever we can contribute in God's kingdom, though at times it may seem so insignificant, when done with the correct attitude, with love for God and for others, it will often bear very significant fruit that we may not anticipate.

### **Importance of healthy initiative**

Many of us tend to be passive. We are willing to serve God, but we often do so only when we are specifically called upon. It is a good thing to be willing to serve when called upon, but if we love God deeply, we will also be consciously looking to the Lord to take initiative, to do things that we understand are helpful and meaningful before the Lord. This is an important aspect of a growing relationship with God, where we are willing to offer ourselves, to contribute our part, to take initiative to promote the building of God's kingdom, but with a very important qualification. We notice that Andrew brought all these to the Lord Jesus: he did not act independently and he did not insist on how things should be done. He took initiative, but he was fully submitted to the Lord's authority. He was prepared to obey the Lord and to respond



to Him as the Lord would decide and choose. And so while he took the initiative, it was in the framework of God's instructions, God's final authority, and God's way of doing things. Such initiative is neither an impulsive act, a hasty response based on emotional grounds, nor a well-calculated decision for our own ambitions and according to our own ideas, but an expression of our love for God and our oneness with Him. It involves a humble and prayerful spirit and it includes being genuinely open to what others in the body of Christ may share with us, especially those who love God deeply. This is very important in Christian living and service.

### **Significance of little things**

Let us now consider the presence of this boy or lad, who had these five barley loaves and two fish. In the midst of more than five thousand people there was this boy with a few barley loaves and two fish. He might have seemed so insignificant. His five barley loaves and two fish would also have seemed so insignificant. However, what is insignificant in the eyes of men can at times be very significant in the Lord's work. In ways that we do not so readily appreciate, God may take the things that are insignificant in this world in order to shame the things that appear great in the eyes of men. (The apostle Paul emphasized this in 1 Corinthians 1: 26-31.) Though the boy may be young and his possessions meagre, we see that in one sense he and his possessions were at the centre of the Lord's blessings: it was through his five barley loaves and two fish that all these people were fed. However, true value is present only when the moral attitude of heart is positive and meaningful.

It is reasonable for us to infer that the disciples of the Lord did not compel this boy to part with his five barley loaves and his two fish (and the Lord Jesus would not have approved of that) and that he willingly

gave them to the Lord. For the boy himself, the five barley loaves and two fish would be sufficient for his own needs. The others might not have enough to eat, but for him, five barley loaves and two fish would be an adequate meal. He was willing to part with his own needs, the little that he had, so as to contribute to the needs of others.

This reminds me of the incident (recorded in Mark 12: 41-44), where the Lord Jesus saw many people giving to the treasury for the temple and a poor widow gave two small copper coins, which were “all she had to live on”. The Lord Jesus showed great appreciation for what she did because although the amount was only two small copper coins, they represented the sacrificial spirit in her heart, the love for God that motivated her to do so. Likewise, if in reality, this lad gave up what he had in a similar spirit of sacrifice, it would be of great value in the eyes of God.

## **God as our Provider**

Let us now look at verses 10 and 11.

- 10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.
- 11 Jesus therefore took the loaves; and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted.

Let us take note of the three words, “having given thanks”, which help us to appreciate the significance of a healthy consciousness of our relationship with God. The Lord Jesus lived His life as the perfect Man, in full submission to God, and we see a deep sense of appreciation of God and fellowship with Him. When He gave thanks, it was an expression of the consciousness of God in daily life and the recognition of God as our Provider. When He did so, it was also as an example to all of us, to help us maintain a healthy spirit of thankfulness towards God.

Throughout the world, Christians practise giving thanks for their food, probably seeking to follow this example of the Lord Jesus. However, such a practice can very readily degenerate into a routine with very little meaning, unless we are careful to maintain a deeply thankful spirit towards God in all areas of our lives. It is when we are grateful to God within our hearts that our outward expressions of thankfulness become meaningful and pleasing to God. God told the people of Israel, when their hearts were not right, that He was displeased with their outward sacrifices (Isaiah 1: 11-17).

### **Being responsible**

When we give thanks to God for His provision of our needs, we express our dependence on Him in our daily lives. When we are wholesome, this consciousness of God as our Provider will be accompanied by a healthy sense of our own responsibility.

There is a frame that I once received as a gift, which I found very helpful as a portrayal of the importance of a wholesome approach in life. It was a plaque on which these words "Give us this day our daily bread" were written, and there was a picture of a man ploughing his field. The words "Give us this day our daily bread" are an expression of our dependence on God, our recognition that it is He who provides for us, and we are thankful to Him. At the same time, the picture shows a man ploughing the field, indicating that he must do his part. If God wants him to plough the field, he will do so in co-operation with God, and not expect God to provide for him while he lives in idleness. What we occupy ourselves with should arise from a healthy walk with God, as we understand what is appropriate and helpful for us at this stage and context of our lives – the important principle is that we are willing to do our part faithfully, while maintaining a spirit of dependence on God and thankfulness to Him.

## **God multiplying what we give**

In the incident of the feeding of the five thousand, we see this important principle: although God can provide the five thousand with abundant food by Himself, He chose to work through a situation when man contributed something towards this outcome. In verse 11, we read, “Jesus therefore took the loaves; and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted.” Although there were only five barley loaves and two fish, this was sufficient to feed the five thousand men as well as the women and children (Matthew 14: 21). These five barley loaves were ordinary barley loaves. However, there was multiplication of the loaves of bread such that they could feed the five thousand. This is obviously because God specially worked in the situation to supply the need: He multiplied what was offered to Him. It was the power of God at work, and He did so in the context of what was offered by man.

Some may think that if the Lord Jesus wanted to do something more spectacular, more convincing to people, He should have fed the multitude without making use of any visible material. But He did not do it this way. In many situations in life, God is in reality working in a very powerful and definite way, but not in the spectacular manner that we may think would be more helpful for us. Our co-operation with God has much meaning in God’s ways of working. God is willing to work powerfully for our good, but He wants man to work with Him. So, if we are prepared to offer what we have and entrust ourselves to God, to co-operate with Him, then God’s life and God’s power can come to us such that there can be a continual manifestation of God’s life and power in the things that we do.

If we consider our offering to God only from the point of view of our physical human lives, we may say we are only offering “dust”.

Physically, we were made from the dust and when we die physically, we go back to the dust. In reality, we know that we are not just physical components that will go back to the dust. God has made us with a great moral and spiritual potential in our lives where we can develop in moral character, in spiritual consciousness, life and power, in being deeply united with God.

If we want to offer our lives to God, we need to recognize that in ourselves, on our own, without the life of God working in us when we depend on Him, there is no moral value. The apostle Paul says in Romans 7: 18, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh..." However, when we offer our lives to God in a spirit of dependence on Him, no longer going our own way, no longer depending on our own abilities and what we have, and what we can do, then God can transform that which is valueless in ourselves to something which is of eternal and great value. We can then co-operate with God, with what we have, but living by His power and His life.

In many situations of life, we may feel rather helpless and think that there is very little that we can contribute. However, if we offer what we have to God in the right way, submit to Him, trust Him and depend on Him, God will work through us such that very meaningful contribution may proceed from our lives. For example, you may think that over the past five years you have helped only one person spiritually, and it may seem to be such an insignificant thing. However, if there is quality in your help and you have done so in fellowship with God, it is possible that in the next fifteen years, God may work through that person to help thousands or millions of others. Your life may have encouraged that person to develop with determination and zeal, to trust God deeply and to help others with effectiveness. Sometimes we may see the consequence, but at other times we may not. However, in the

spiritual realm, whatever is offered to God meaningfully will never be wasted. We should however, bear in mind that it is not primarily the number of people we influence that God is ultimately concerned about, but the quality of our lives and the quality of influence that proceeds from our lives.

## **Gathering up the fragments**

In this incident, the Lord Jesus told the disciples to gather up the fragments that remained. We may wonder why He did so. Was it because He did not want the people to litter the place? Or, was it because He wanted to keep the fragments so as to remind the disciples that God can supply very abundantly? When we read such a passage, we may have our own ideas as to what the intention was. It is important for us to look at the context in order to understand the primary meaning intended. In this instance, the Lord Jesus Himself told the disciples the reason.

In verse 12, the Lord Jesus said, “Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost.” It could also be that He had in mind that the people should not litter the place. It could also be that He wanted them to remember that He could provide abundantly. There is indication of this as the Lord Jesus subsequently reminded His disciples of the fragments that were gathered (Matthew 16: 5-12) – it was a reminder to them that He supplied abundantly. However, in this context, the reason given is that nothing may be lost. The fragments are a reminder to us of the importance of not being wasteful. While many people in the world are without adequate food, there are also many others who throw away large amounts of edible food because they have not exercised care not to be wasteful.

In verse 13 we read, “And so they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, which were left over by those who had eaten.” The people had eaten and were satisfied – they were provided with “as much as they wanted”. What did the Lord Jesus do with the leftover fragments? Since the purpose of gathering them was that “nothing may be lost”, we can deduce that they were put to good use. They could have been distributed later to other people, or the disciples could have used them as they travelled from place to place.

In our own lives, God may also at times provide for us abundantly, and we may have much more than what we need at that point of time. What do we do with what we have that is in excess of our need? In the physical realm, much of what we have may be wasted. We must not assume that God will always provide for us abundantly. If we are not careful in the way we treat the abundance that we have now, it is possible that we may in the future be in great need and God may not provide for us as He has done so previously. The way we respond to situations affects how God deals with us. God has promised that He will take care of us, but these promises are always conditional upon the correct attitude of heart on our part. (Even when our attitude is right, God may at times still bring us through situations of physical need and suffering. However, in such situations, we can be healthily confident that God will take care of us such that our lives will continue to be meaningful.)

When Joseph was in Egypt, God told him that there would be seven years of plenty in harvesting of the crops, which would be followed by seven years of famine. When Joseph was asked by Pharaoh to deal with this problem, he stored up abundantly during the years of plenty and this food supplied the needs of the people of Egypt during the years of famine. A proper storage or keeping of the excess that God has given to us can become useful in future times of need. If we assume

that our situation will always be the same, we may be alarmed when it does not turn out that way. On the other hand, many may use this as an excuse to store up plentifully for themselves, instead of using what they have for the needs of others and in service in the kingdom of God, as He may desire. Wise use and wise management as well as consideration for the future is part of Christian responsibility. However, the most important issue is to walk faithfully with God, identified with His will and trusting Him in all circumstances.

Although it is important for us not to waste, we must also be wise, because sometimes when we try not to waste, we may in reality cause harm in other ways. For example, we may be in a situation where there is much leftover food, and if this is not eaten, it will be wasted. In order not to waste the food, we may eat beyond what is helpful for our body. If this becomes habitual, it may cause harm to our body as well as our spiritual discipline. Similarly, we may keep many things that are not needed at the moment, thinking that they may become useful some day. While this can at times be prudent and helpful, it may also create significant problems when many items are accumulated over many years and affect hygiene and effective use of space in the home. We therefore need to be wise, and to discard items that are not useful, or to give them away if they are useful to others.

The attitude of the apostle as expressed in Philippians 4: 12 is helpful for our learning.

**Philippians 4: 12**

I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

Paul's life involved varied changing circumstances. There were times when he had plenty and there were times when he had very little



in the material realm, but Paul had learnt contentment in God in the midst of different circumstances. He was very conscious of the needs of others, and in times of prosperity, Paul would have made good use of what he had to help others. In times of poverty and physical hardship, Paul could rejoice in God and trust Him to provide for him what was suitable in his context of service to God. This is the kind of attitude that we should have as we go through life.

Sometimes we may think that we can trust God whatever the situation and God will always provide for us. However, if we do not have the same kind of attitude as Paul such that in times of prosperity we make good use of the things that God has given to us, then in times of great hardship, we may pray very hard and God may not supply our needs in a manner that we hope for. God may want us to go through a very hard time to learn the lesson well, to appreciate things with the right spirit.

### **Application in the moral and spiritual realm**

Let us now consider the principle of “gathering up the fragments” in the realm of the spiritual and the moral, which is far more important. Although the Lord Jesus provided for the physical needs of the people, His concern for them was primarily in the realm of the moral and spiritual. (We see this expressed in John 6: 27, when He said, “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, *even* God, has set His seal”.)

This principle of wastage is very important in the spiritual and moral realm. How do we spend our time? What do we concentrate on? How do we make use of the opportunities that we have? How do we expend our energy and our resources? God will hold us accountable for the way that we live. If we waste away our time, for example, if we let many opportunities go by, if we expend our energy on many things that

are useless or of little value, this is actually a very serious waste. When the Lord Jesus said, "Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost", we should bear in mind that this kind of attitude should also apply in the moral and spiritual realm.

For example, today we may learn a spiritual principle, which we may not see as immediately applicable to our present situation. Do we, in recognition that it is something valuable from God, store it up with the desire that in the future we may continue to meditate on it and to learn to apply it at the appropriate time? When the people had their fill of the food, the fragments were not so relevant to them at that point of time, but they would soon be hungry again and the fragments would then be valuable to them.

In the spiritual realm, we may receive more abundantly than we are able to effectively apply to our lives at this point of time. If we are diligent to store them in our heart, they will help us in time to come; otherwise, we may suffer spiritually as a result of this waste. For example, when we receive helpful teaching on how we can respond well in times of pain and suffering, we may not pay much attention because we are not going through pain and suffering at that point of time. When suffering and pain comes our way, we may not know how to apply this teaching that we have not stored up in our heart – it has gone to waste. On the other hand, if we had listened well, sought the Lord to help us appreciate the spiritual reality involved, pondered over the meaning and implications involved, this will be helpful to us in our time of need. Whatever we learn well will multiply within our hearts and we can apply it in ever deepening measure.

In the physical realm, there are many people starving while others are wasting food. This also occurs in the spiritual realm. There are many people in the world who are hungry for the Scriptures, but they

do not have the Scriptures. They long for the Scriptures as well as opportunities to learn from preaching, teaching and fellowship, and helpful Christian literature, but they have little of it. On the other hand, there are many Christians who have many copies of the Scriptures and helpful Christian literature, many opportunities to learn from preaching, teaching and fellowship, but who waste away so much of the opportunities that are available. All this goes to waste and God will hold us accountable for that waste not only with regard to the effect on our own lives but also the loss of our contribution to the needs of others.

We should ponder over these areas for ourselves as we take stock, whether we have been allowing so much in our lives to go to waste. Every moment of time that passes by will never come back. It will never be the same again. Every moment of our life, we are changing. What kind of changes takes place within us during the time span that we have on earth has great and long-lasting significance for us.

### **Impact on the people**

Let us now consider verse 14 and ponder over the impact that this miracle had on the people of Israel. We are told, “When therefore the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, ‘This is of a truth the Prophet who is to come into the world.’” This miracle that the Lord Jesus performed had a helpful impact in the sense that it bore witness to who He was, that He was the Prophet that was prophesied in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 18: 15, Moses told the people of Israel, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.” The people of Israel were looking forward to the coming of this Prophet. When the Lord Jesus performed the miracle, the people were able to recognize that He was this Prophet that the Scriptures prophesied would come into the world. Although they could recognize

this reality, their heart response was very different from what this recognition should mean for their lives.

John 6: 15 tells us, “Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.” Moses had told the people of Israel that they were to listen to this Prophet. However, we see here that while they recognized Him as the Prophet, they were not seeking to listen to Him. Instead, they wanted to make use of Him. In Deuteronomy 18: 19, God said, “And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.” It was a very solemn thing. This Prophet would have the authority of God and all the Jews were required to submit to Him, but here, they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king. They wanted to make use of Him for their own ends. Some may explain that it was because they wanted power to be able to overcome their oppressors and to become an independent nation again. They may have looked upon the Messiah as someone who would deliver them from their enemies in the physical realm. Whatever it was, it was not a proper submission to the Prophet that God had sent into the world. The proper response would be to listen to Him, to hear what He had to say regarding God’s instructions as to how they were to live their lives. However, they did not respond well, and instead of listening to Him, they were seeking to do things their own way.

### **Living by the truth**

This issue is of significant relevance to us. We recognize that God is the perfect almighty God and we must submit to Him. However, in daily living, in reality we want God to do our bidding, we want God to perform miracles for us, we want God to do things as we want them to be done, rather than submit ourselves to God and say, “Lord, what would You want me to do?” and learn to listen to Him.

We see then that on the one hand they recognized the authority of this Prophet, on the other hand, in practical living it was the opposite. This is also true in many Christian lives. We need to take heed to this. In verses 26 and 27, the Lord Jesus told them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, *even* God, has set His seal."

Why did the Lord Jesus say, "...not because you saw signs"? We have seen that verse 14 explains that when they saw this sign, they recognized Him as the Prophet. So the meaning is that they were now coming to the Lord Jesus, not because they saw the miracle and having recognized Him as the Prophet, they wanted to listen to His instructions. Instead, they came because they benefited from the bread that they had eaten and were now seeking the Lord Jesus for more benefits in the material and physical realm. On the one hand, they saw the sign, and to varying degrees, recognized Him as the Prophet; on the other hand, they ate of the loaves and they were filled and they wanted more of that which is perishable. They were concentrating on the earthly and the temporal rather than the spiritual and eternal. In that kind of spirit, they wanted to make Him king. The Lord Jesus taught them that they should seek for "the food which endures to eternal life".

We notice in verse 28, "They said therefore to Him, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?'" They seemed to be interested in the spiritual realm. There seemed to be a positive response, and they asked the question, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?' The Lord Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." This meant that they should submit to and trust in Him, the Messiah that God had promised, and sent into the world.

However, verse 30 tells us that they questioned Him further: “They said therefore to Him, ‘What then do You do for a sign, that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?’” They had just seen the Lord Jesus perform the miracle and had come to believe that He was the Prophet that God had promised, and yet, when the Lord Jesus instructed them to pursue the spiritual and eternal, they asked for more signs. Although there may be different degrees of recognition, their response was not in line with a healthy spirit of submission to God and His ways.

In our lives, we also recognize who God is, in varying degrees, but sufficient for us to meaningfully submit to Him and trust Him. However, we may also ask God to show us more and more of His presence and His working before we will commit ourselves fully to Him. This is often a reflection of an improper response to God, an unwillingness to live by what we already know because of the cost of such a commitment. In such a state, we remain in doubt and instability throughout our lives. On the other hand, if we meaningfully and sufficiently give of our lives to the God we already know, He will increasingly reveal Himself to us and we will know Him more and more deeply. The more deeply we respond to God, the more we will know Him and the less room there will be for doubt. The doubts that we have are very often related to the quality of our response towards God.

It is therefore important for us to ponder over the way we respond in our lives. As God reveals Himself to us, how do we respond? Do we live by the truth that we have come to recognize, or do we acknowledge what we believe but continue to live contrary to what we profess?

### **Moral emphasis in daily conduct**

Arising from the incident of the feeding of the five thousand, the Lord Jesus spoke to the Jews regarding the moral, the spiritual and the

eternal. That was His primary concern for them. We have seen Him telling the Jews to concentrate on “the food which endures to eternal life”, rather than the physical bread and other material things. In verse 33, He said, “For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.” He referred to bread and He compared Himself to the bread – the bread of God. He went on to explain what true food is. In verse 35, He said, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” In verse 55, He said, “For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink.”

In the midst of our daily situations of life, we should learn to be more conscious of the importance of the moral and spiritual realm, rather than being preoccupied with merely fulfilling our earthly responsibilities or being immersed in the activities of the world. This will help us in our spiritual development, a better appreciation of God at work in our daily life and a helpful awareness of the spiritual battles taking place. This can increase the quality of our response to the situations that we go through and our relationships with others.

In His daily life, the positive moral and spiritual consciousness and direction is clearly seen in the Lord Jesus. In Matthew 14: 14, we read, “And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and felt compassion for them, and healed their sick.” The Lord Jesus healed the sick because He had compassion for them – He loved them and cared for them, and this motivated Him to heal them. He did not perform the miracles in order to create excitement among the people, but because He truly cared for their well-being and was therefore conscious of their needs in the midst of His busyness. (At the same time, the miracles were a testimony to His divine character and authority, so that mankind may find help through Him.) If we look at Matthew 15: 32, we see the same expression in the feeding of the four thousand.

**Matthew 15: 32**

And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, "I feel compassion for the multitude, because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not wish to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way."

The Lord Jesus performed the miracle here because of compassion for them. He did not want to send them away as some of them may faint along the way. He had compassion for them and He provided for them. As He provided for them, He performed a miracle and that miracle was a testimony that He was the Christ, the Messiah.

In our lives, we should appreciate that God may perform miracles in our lives where it is meaningful to do so, if we are continuously submitted to Him to do His will. However, our concentration should be on the moral and spiritual reality and the quality of being that God wants us to develop. We must not seek for outward spectacular and dramatic events that excite us, yet have confidence that where it is meaningful and appropriate, we can healthily trust God to work in the situation. It is a very dangerous thing if we seek for spectacular and unusual experiences with the desire to draw attention to ourselves or to prove that we are spiritual Christians. This is very dangerous because it is the heart of self-centredness, and allows the evil one to work very readily in us. If we are faithful to God and we seek to walk humbly with Him, He will enable us to do the things that we should and we can trust Him to undertake for whatever is good for that situation.

In the life of the Lord Jesus, there are other major considerations, because He is the Son of God, the Messiah, the One specially anointed by God to be the Saviour of the world. It is therefore meaningful and appropriate for God to undertake for situations for Him to manifest His glory and His power and His majesty in the midst of the expressions of His love for mankind.



We are also called to be a testimony of the greatness, the power and the love of God, to help men know that God is at work, that He cares for them, and that they must submit to Him. God will work in our lives according to His perfect wisdom, that which is appropriate for us in our contexts. If we are faithful in our walk with God, He will lead us through situations where there will be manifestations of the life and the power of God so that men may recognize who He is. This requires that we walk by faith, submitting to God and trusting Him.

## **Summary**

The Lord appreciates a meaningful relationship with us where He can discuss with us and help us to grow and develop quality lives. In the course of doing so, He may often put us to the test, and teach us how to respond well to situations. He may allow us to go through difficult times to help us recognize our deficiencies, and to take steps to correct ourselves with His help.

He also wants to teach us not to be preoccupied with the things of this world, to think of life from the natural point of view, but with eyes of faith, to look beyond the visible and the physical, to see God, to know that He is watching over our lives, that each step we take has significance and meaning for eternity, and to learn to walk with God with the consciousness of His presence.

We must also learn to do our part, although sometimes it may seem so insignificant, to take initiative prayerfully and humbly, and always in submission to God, and to know that even though we may seem so insignificant, yet every member of the body of Christ is significant in the eyes of God. Every one of us has a function in the body of Christ and God wants us to work together, with the proper working of each individual part in the body of Christ.

We should also cultivate a healthy spirit of thankfulness to God at all times. As we offer Him whatever we have, in faith and submission to His will, we can see God's power manifested, as God multiplies what we have offered Him, in the context of His grace and love.

We also learn from the gathering up of the fragments that we should not waste, yet we need to be wise as we seek not to waste, whether in the physical realm or, more importantly, in the moral and spiritual realm, and with regard to our time, our resources, and the focus of our attention.

We also considered the importance of living by the truth that we have come to recognize. If we do recognize that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, if we recognize that God is almighty, our Saviour, our God and King, let us live by that truth and submit to Him accordingly. We must not seek God's power to satisfy our own selfish desires.

In the midst of daily situations, we must concentrate on the moral and spiritual meaning and direction in our lives, motivated by love and what is truly pleasing before God.