

INTRODUCTION

So, how well do you know your Bible? I was going to say, "Let's play final jeopardy." But to obey copyright laws, let's play a final round of Bible Trivia. The category is the New Testament. The answer is: "Besides the Resurrection, the only miracle to be recorded in all four Gospel Accounts." You have 15 seconds. Alright, who would like to take a go at it? What is the feeding of the 5,000? Correct. Of all the recorded miracles of Jesus this is the only one recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

You could call this the world's first all-you-can-eat buffet. The people ate all they wanted and there was plenty of food left over.

Some people love all-you-can-eat buffets, and some people don't care for them. There was a guy who was at a Chinese buffet. When he walked up to the food line, a lid popped up on one of the pots and two eyes stared out at him, and then the lid lowered back into place. He stood there and it happened again. Lid popped up, two eyes stared out and then the lid closed. The man went to report it to the manager. The manager said, "Oh, don't worry. That's just Peking duck."

I've told you that John's Gospel account is built around seven signs, miracles that he highlights. This is sign #4.

John 6:1-15 (CSV). "After this, Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). A huge crowd was following him because they saw the signs that he was performing by healing the sick. Jesus went up a mountain and sat down there with his disciples."

"Now the Passover, a Jewish festival, was near. So when Jesus looked up and noticed a huge crowd coming toward him, he asked Philip, 'Where will we buy bread so that these people can eat?' He asked this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do."

"Philip answered him, 'Two hundred denarii worth of bread wouldn't be enough for each of them to have a little.'"

"One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 'There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish—but what are they for so many?' Jesus said, 'Have the people sit down.'"

"There was plenty of grass in that place; so they sat down. The men numbered about five thousand. Then Jesus took the loaves, and after giving thanks he distributed them to those who were seated—so also with the fish, as much as they wanted."

"When they were full, he told his disciples, 'Collect the leftovers so that nothing is wasted.' So they collected them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces from the five barley loaves that were left over by those who had eaten."

“When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, “This truly is the Prophet who is to come into the world.””

“Therefore, when Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”

** Luke adds that Jesus has the people sit down in groups of fifty*

I’ve just returned again from Israel and my very favorite part of the country is in Galilee where Jesus performed this miracle. To this day, most of the land is still full of gently rolling hills and valleys. There are rocky outcroppings, and I can easily see how 5,000 people could sit down on these grassy hills and be fed. James Tissot is a British painter, and I think he does a good job of capturing what the scene must have looked like as the people are seating in organized groups and the disciples were serving them. The original copy of this painting can be seen in the Brooklyn Museum of Art.



*The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes
James Tissot (c. 1886-1896)
Opaque watercolor over graphite on gray wove paper*

By the way, I love how Jesus was an organizer. He divided the crowd into smaller groups. That’s exactly why we have Sunday Morning Bible Study groups here; it’s hard to relate personally to 5,000 people, but when you put them in groups of 50, there can be personal interaction.

Every miracle teaches a spiritual lesson. In fact, on April 7, we'll read in John 6 where Jesus refers to this miracle and calls himself the Bread of life. So, let's consider three spiritual lessons we can learn from the world's first all you can eat—and more buffet.

1. THERE ISN'T A PROBLEM TOO BIG FOR GOD TO SOLVE.

They faced a big problem. It was late, they were isolated, and the people were hungry. So Jesus turned to Phillip and asked, "Where will we buy bread so that these people can eat?" He asked this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. (John 6:5-6 CSB)

Did you notice, Jesus wasn't asking for advice. He already knew what He would do, so He was just testing Phillip. And when you find yourself in the middle of a problem you may hear the voice of the Holy Spirit asking, "What are you going to do?" God is testing you to trust Him. That afternoon, they were facing two basic problems.

PROBLEM #1: Lack of food.

There were five thousand men, plus women and children, all of them had been following Jesus all day. It was late and they were tired and hungry. On the surface, you would think their main problem was a lack of food. But as we'll see in the moment, that was just the surface problem, there was a deeper spiritual problem.

Is there any area of your life that seems to be lacking today? Where is an area of shortage for you? You may be facing a lack of financial resources. Or you may be facing a lack of confidence. Maybe you have a shortage of peace. You could have a lack of joy, or a lack of purpose in your life. Where ever there is a problem of shortage in your life, God wants to provide His plenty for your poverty.

Dallas Willard is one of my favorite authors. He died in 2013. His former pastor took some of his audio teachings on the 23rd Psalm and has just published them a month ago. I love the title of the book. It's called *Life without Lack: Living in the Fullness of the 23rd Psalm*.

Here's a short quote from the introduction: "The title of this book—Life Without Lack—reflects the truth found in these words: 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.' It describes the life we all desire—a life in which we want for nothing, or better yet, lack nothing. The Psalmist is portraying a life we were meant to enjoy, one that is eminently available to us. But do you believe this verse is actually true? Few people act as if it were." (*Living Without Lack*, p. 3) There was a lack of food that day, but there was a bigger problem.

PROBLEM#2: Lack of faith.

The real problem wasn't a lack of food, it was a lack of faith. When you face a shortage, how do you react? Peter Lord was the pastor of a Baptist Church in Titusville, Florida for over 30 years. He's almost 90 years old and still teaching God's Word. I once heard Peter Lord say there are three different ways that Christians approach a problem. First, there are the Feelers—they go

by what they feel should be done, they go by emotion. Second, there are the Figurers. They say, "Here's the problem, and here's the calculated solution." But Peter Lord said the best way to face a problem isn't as a feeler or a figurer, but as a faither.

We see these approaches in this miracle. In Mark's account the disciples come up with a solution. They said, "Send all the people away to the surrounding villages and let them buy food." They felt that this would be the best solution. Do you make decisions based primarily on your feelings?

And then of course, we meet the figurer. Philip must have been the CPA in the group. Jesus asked him, "Where can we buy food for these people?" Philip whipped out his iAbacus and started his calculation. He said, "5,000 men...add in wives and children...let's make it 15,000 people. Multiply that by \$3 per person, the cost of a meal purchased in bulk. He turned to Jesus and said, "Lord, the numbers don't lie. It would take about \$45,000 to feed this crowd." And he probably thought, "And we don't have anywhere near that amount."

And that's the way some people approach a crisis. Their first question is, "How much is it going to cost?" I've been a pastor for over forty years and through the years I've sat in hundreds of meetings to discuss the Lord's work. There have always been some well-meaning people whose first question was always, "How much is it going to cost?" I've always tried to lovingly tell these people that the first question we should be asking is, "What does God want?" Because where God guides, God provides. The Bible says we walk by faith not by sight.

I thank God that our church is filled with faithers. Through the years, we have tackled projects with the firm believe that God would provide. Over twenty years ago when we heard that this Worship Center was going to cost around \$28 million, we smiled and said, "Jehovah Jireh. God will provide." And He did.

When we planned the construction of the Lighthouse and CrossWalk, we learned that it was going to cost \$40 million, but our folks didn't back away. We smiled and said, "Jehovah, Jireh, God will provide." And He did. We've been debt free now for several years. And folks, I don't know yet what the price tag on the new Recreation Complex will be, but I do know that whatever it is, God will provide. We walk by faith, not by sight!

We ought to pray that God will give us eyes of faith to look beyond the problems to see the possibilities. It's like the lady who was living in a retirement center. She was a widow. There was a new resident, a nice-looking man whose wife had died a few months before. The lady saw him sitting alone in the cafeteria, so she said, "May I join you?" He said, "Sure." They sat down and had a delightful conversation. Then the lady said, "You know I can't help staring at you because you remind me so much of my third husband." He said, "Really, how many times have you been married?" She smiled and said, "Twice." That's what I call living by faith!

2. THERE ISN'T A PERSON TOO SMALL FOR GOD TO USE.

Andrew said, "There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish—but what are they for so many?" (John 6:9 CSB) This is a perfect example of when we keep on speaking, we mess up. Andrew said, "Lord, here's a boy with five loaves and two fishes." If he had stopped there, it would have been a great profession of faith. But he kept on talking and lost his blessing, "But what are they among so many?" Oooh, you almost had it there Andrew.

Among the 15,000 people there, this little boy was willing to offer what he had to Jesus. He was just a little lad with a little lunch. When you think of five loaves and two fishes, don't think about five big loaves and two nice sized tilapias. The language is very clear here that this was a meager meal. Barley loaves were the cheapest kind of bread. And the word for fish means very small fish. They were like sardines, just big enough to give a little taste when spread on the barley muffins. Today we would have called it the miracle of the muffins and the minnows.

I've got to say that in over forty years of being a pastor, I've never met anyone who was too small for God to use. But I've known people who were too big for God to use. They were so full of themselves that they thought they were doing God a favor by showing up.

Have you ever noticed that God delights to use small things? Zechariah was correct when he wrote, "Who dares despise the day of small things." (Zechariah 4:10 NIV) God used a little boy named David to kill a giant. God used a teenage girl in Nazareth to give birth to His Son. And God used that baby in a manger to become the Savior of the World.

You may be thinking, "God can't use me." But here's the truth: God can use you. God can use you NOW. God can use you NOW with what you have. And God can use you now with what you have to bring glory to His name.

God saved a lanky teenager from a dairy farm in North Carolina to preach the Gospel to millions of people. So, for all of you who volunteer to work with children and youth, I want you to thank you and I want you to stay faithful because you could be molding the next world-changer in your classroom.

3. THERE IS PLENTY WHEN JESUS CONTROLS WHAT WE GIVE HIM.

In Mark's account we read: "He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed and broke the loaves. He kept giving them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. Everyone ate and was satisfied. They picked up twelve baskets full of pieces of bread and fish." (Mark 6:41-43 CSB)

In this miracle Jesus was teaching us a powerful lesson about what happens when we surrender what we have to Him. Notice from those verses in Mark, Jesus did four simple things. He took the food; He blessed the food; He broke the food; and He multiplied the food so everyone could be satisfied. In these four simple steps, I see a powerful cycle of blessing. I call it God's cycle of plenty. These are four steps you can apply to your relationship with God right now.

Step 1: Jesus takes what we give him.

I love the fact that the little lad didn't hold back. There is no indication that he said, "Lord, you can have one of the fish and two of the loaves." He gave it all. That's the key. When he transferred ownership of what he had to Jesus, then Jesus turned that snack into an all-you-can eat buffet. The first step you must take is to transfer ownership of what you have to Jesus. He takes what we give Him.

God already owns all the wealth in the universe. You and I don't own anything. He has just allowed us to manage a part of His wealth for a short period of time. But God wants us to transfer ownership of ALL we have back into His hands.

That's something my family has always done. In every house we've occupied, we had a prayer of dedication acknowledging that God is the owner of our home, not us, not the mortgage company. God owns our home and we want Him to use it for His glory. Some of you have been kind enough to invite me into your new home and pray a prayer of dedication, giving it to God. It's the same with vehicles. Every new vehicle we've gotten, we've given it to God. "This is your vehicle, thank you for allowing us to have to travel to serve You."

Consider all your assets and your abilities. Have you come to a place where you say, "God this all belongs to you? I transfer ownership of my treasure, time, and talents?" He will take what we give Him.

STEP 2: Jesus blesses what He takes.

John tells us that Jesus gave thanks for the food. It was only a tiny amount, but Jesus said, "Thank you, Father for this food." We spend much of our time asking God for more rather than thanking Him for what we already have.

There's a principle in the Bible that what you give to God, He gives back to you with His blessing on it. In Exodus 3 God told Moses to toss down his shepherd's staff. When Moses surrendered it, God gave it back to Him, but after that it was a rod that God used to perform miracles.

There's a beautiful story in John 12 about how Mary, the sister of Martha, came to Jesus during a meal. She took a pint of very expensive perfume and poured it on the feet of Jesus. The cost of the perfume was an entire year of wages. Then Mary wiped His feet with her hair. Mary gave it all to Jesus, but what do you think Mary carried with her when she left Jesus? She carried with her on her hair and hands that beautiful fragrance—and it lingered for days. She gave it all, and she received a blessing in return. What you give to God, He blesses, and that blessing comes back to you.

STEP 3: Jesus breaks what He blesses.

After Jesus looked to heaven and thanked God for the food, He broke it. It was in this act of breaking the bread that He was able to multiply it. God uses broken things. In our materialistic culture, a broken object becomes less valuable, but in God's economy, brokenness only increases the value. The bread had to be broken before it could be multiplied; The alabaster vase Mary brought to Jesus had to be broken before the fragrance of the perfume could be released. The roof above Jesus had to be broken up before the friends could lower the paralyzed man to Jesus; and the body of Jesus had to be broken before our sins could be forgiven. David, was a broken man, who prayed in Psalm 51:17, "The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. You will not despise a broken and humbled heart, God." God values broken things and broken people.

Early in the 20th Century, a spiritual awakening spread like wildfire in Wales. It started with a blacksmith named Evan Roberts who prayed this prayer over and over again, "God, bend me. Break me. Conform me to the image of your son." If we want to see revival we should be praying, "God, bend me. Break me. Make me like Jesus."

STEP 4: Jesus multiplies what He breaks.

Jesus is the Savior of the Surplus. He is the Provider of the Plenty. King David didn't sing, "My cup is full." He sang, "My cup runs over!" Jesus took the minnows and muffins and turned it into an all-you-can-eat buffet. If the little boy had kept his lunch to himself he would have only had two minnows and five muffins. That might not have filled up a growing boy. But because he gave it to Jesus, he got to eat all he wanted.

I love the lesson of the leftovers. I just imagine when Andrew brought the lad with five loaves and two fish that Peter might have thought, "Good, well, at least the staff can be fed." But then Jesus kept breaking and multiplying, and handing it off to the disciples to distribute. I wonder if every time he came back for another serving, Peter wondered, "Will there be any left for us?" And finally when everyone had eaten all they wanted, the disciples picked up the leftovers. And how many baskets of leftovers were there? Twelve. One for each disciple. When I used to imagine this story I thought the left overs were scraps, a fish tail here, a crumb of bread there. But the word used is "portions" or "servings." There were twelve baskets of servings. Because with Jesus, there is always enough—and more. That's God's cycle of plenty.

Do you need some multiplication in your life? God can multiply your blessings, He can multiply your effectiveness. He can multiply your influence. But it starts by surrendering all you are and all you have to Him. There isn't a problem too big for God to solve. And there isn't a person or a gift too small for God to use. And there is always PLENTY when Jesus controls what we give Him. There's no limit to what God can do when you place yourself in His loving hands.

CONCLUSION

Years ago a famous violinist was scheduled to perform a concert using a priceless Stradivarius violin. The concert hall was packed and when he carefully removed the violin from the case, there were "oohs and ahs" from the audience as they saw the priceless instrument.

For the next fifteen minutes, the musician thrilled the audience. He made the violin sound as beautiful as a mother singing a lullaby to her children. He could make it sound like the laughter of a child and the weeping of a woman.

The people sat on the edge of their seats and drank in every heavenly note. As he finished the first section, the audience jumped to its feet and applauded. To their surprise and horror the violinist suddenly smashed the violin on the floor. The shocked audience was silenced. The musician walked off stage and returned carrying another case. He opened it, removed the violin and said, "This is the real Stradivarius. What I was playing before was a \$50 violin I bought at a pawnshop. I just wanted you to know that it is not the instrument; it is the artist who draws the bow across the strings that makes the music. He resumed the concert, but this time the audience focused on the ability of the musician, not the instrument itself.

That's like us. We are all like the cheap fiddle. We think we're just an insignificant meal of minnows and muffins. But in the hands of the Master, our lives can become a buffet of blessings to others.

OUTLINE

1. THERE ISN'T A PROBLEM TOO BIG FOR GOD TO SOLVE.

"Where will we buy bread so that these people can eat?" He asked this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. *John 6:5-6 CSB*

Problem #1: Lack of food

PROBLEM#2: Lack of faith

2. THERE ISN'T A PERSON TOO SMALL FOR GOD TO USE.

Andrew said, "There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish—but what are they for so many?" *John 6:9 CSB*

3. THERE IS PLENTY WHEN JESUS CONTROLS WHAT WE GIVE HIM.

"He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed and broke the loaves. He kept giving them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. Everyone ate and was satisfied. They picked up twelve baskets full of pieces of bread and fish." *Mark 6:41-43 CSB*

TAKE-AWAY TRUTH

Step 1: Jesus takes what we give him.

Step 2: Jesus blesses what He takes.

Step 3: Jesus breaks what He blesses.

Step 4: Jesus multiplies what He breaks.

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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