

Exegetical Notes, John 6:5-13
“The Inadequate Does the Impossible”

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen, Pastor, Cornerstone Fellowship
101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19329
610-384-1375
charleshjensen@aol.com

Introduction: The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle story recorded in all four Gospels. Though the story is told almost word for word in each of the Gospels, today we look at John’s version. As we begin this study it is important to ask why God caused this miracle story to be repeated four times in the Bible. Apparently, it has some very important message to convey.

John 6:5-13

Verse 5-6

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

- This “great crowd” had followed Jesus to a remote place because of the miracles they saw him do. See verse 2.
- Seeing the crowd, Jesus asked Philip, one of his disciples, where they could buy enough bread to feed so many. He may have addressed this question to Philip because Philip was from Bethsaida, a town on the far shore of the Sea of Galilee. However, the question was asked as a test for Philip and the other disciples. Through this question Jesus was raising their attention to a potential problem and to his power to resolve such dilemmas as this.
- As the text says, Jesus was not baffled by the problem. He already knew how he would resolve the situation.

Verse 7

Philip answered him, “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

- Philip's answer to the question indicates the impossibility of the situation that Jesus presented. Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of a year's salary would not touch the problem even a little. Therefore, we see that there is no way that the disciples can hope to buy enough bread for this crowd. It is impossible. It cannot be done and therefore should not be attempted.
- Notice that there is no obligation for anyone to buy bread to feed the crowd. They are not asking for bread. Jesus alone sees the need and desires to help.

Verse 8-9

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

- Andrew identifies a resource which might be used to address the situation, a boy's lunch composed of five small barley loaves and two small fish.
- The word small which appears before the nouns, bread and fish, are diminutives. Their purpose is to devalue the bread and the fish. They answer the question, "how far will they go?" Clearly, they will not go far enough.
- Barley loaves were the bread of common people. This is basic necessity food not really good fare.

Verse 10

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them.

- First, Jesus organized the crowd. He imposed order on the situation. He had everyone sit down. When the crowd was seated there were about 5,000 men present plus women and children. Thus this is not the feeding of 5,000 but instead the feeding of 5,000 men plus all the women and children there present.

Verse 11

Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

- Second, Jesus took the inadequate resource, the five loaves and two fish. He does not call the miracle out of thin air, although

he could have done so. Instead, he chooses to work with what is offered, though the offering is clearly inadequate to the need.

- Next, he thanks God for the five loaves and the two fish even though they are inadequate resources to solve the problem.
- Fourth, he distributed them to those who were seated. The text implies that those who were not seated were not served. The text says that those who were seated received “as much as they wanted.”
- Jesus took that which was inadequate and used it to do that which was impossible.

Verse 12-13

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

- Again the text makes it clear that everyone had all they wanted to eat.
- Jesus then told his disciples to pick up the pieces of bread that had been left by the crowd. These were not crumbs that fell off as the loaves were eaten, but the pieces of loaves of bread that were left unfinished when the crowd had broken off all they wanted to eat. The disciples collected 12 baskets full of leftovers. This was one basket full of bread for each disciple. What was left over was greater than what had been used to begin the miracle.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The Inadequate Does the Impossible*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)