

GOSPEL OF JOHN 7

Miracles

"A great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick..."

The feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels – apparently it made a large impression on the disciples and those they disciplined for it to turn up in so many accounts. It is, without question, a very great miracle for Jesus to turn two littlesardine-like fish and five small cakes of barley bread into a meal that completely satisfied 5,000 men (and likely a crowd of up to 20,000 people total, including women and children).¹ But, unlike the crowd, we must not miss the significance of why John and the other gospel writers included this story and what we are meant to learn about the Savior.

John gives several details about the miracle, some of which are not recorded in the other gospels and therefore, complement the other writers' accounts. All of them, however, seem to agree that Jesus had purposed to get away and debrief with His disciples after the training mission they had just been on and to pray and spend time with His father after the traumatic news of his cousin (John the Baptizer)'s murder at the hands of Herod. John particularly emphasizes that the crowds followed Him "because they saw the miraculous signs He performed on the sick."² John mentions soon after this that this all happened at the time of the Feast of Passover. This reference sets the stage for the emotional nature of the crowd that we see later in verses 14 and 15. Passover was the celebration of the Lord's deliverance of the nation of Israel from the power of Pharaoh in Egypt hundreds of years before. It was similar to the Jewish 4th of July and people would have been traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate. This explains both the large number of the crowd and their assumptions in verses 14 and 15.

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Imagine, our nation being once again under the rule of an oppressive regime as it was during the time of King George III. Would July 4th not bring with it a remembrance of our great heroes like George Washington and their commitment to the freedom we once enjoyed? In the same way, the Jews were looking for a Messiah, one who they thought would break Rome's yoke from their necks and free them to live as they pleased, just as Moses had led them out of Egypt and to the Promised Land. The crowd had followed Jesus because He had provided supernaturally for their healing. In this passage, He provides again (supernaturally) to satisfy their physical hunger through the loaves and fish, and they are convinced that He could be the one they have been waiting for and their thoughts probably ran along these lines: "This man has power, marvelous power. If we can harness him and his power to our dreams, things will begin to happen."³ "They were eager to support Jesus when he gave them what they wanted. He had healed them and fed them; they would thereupon have made him their leader. There is such a thing as bought loyalty."⁴ The crowd loved Jesus and followed Him for what He could offer them.

Another reason John, and all the gospel authors, may have mentioned the specific number of men fed is that 5,000 men would have constituted a significant fighting force of potentially eager and willing recruits as they

Pre-Article Questions:

1. If you met with your prayer partner from last week, do you have any thoughts, questions, or comments from last week's study?
2. What do you think about the idea of God doing something miraculous in our lifetimes?

1. Carson, D.A. p. 270.

2. John 6:2 NIV

3. Barclay, William. p. 241.

4. Carson, D.A.

rose on the emotional tide of the Passover and longed for freedom.⁵ John even tells us that Jesus knew that the people intended to seize Him and make Him king by force. Scholar D.A. Carson relates the possibility this way: “Surely nothing could prevent such a person from being the powerful liberator that so many children of Israel longed for. And if he was unwilling to assume the prerogatives and responsibilities of such leadership, they were more than willing to force the issue by fomenting a rebellion, crowning him king and daring the authorities to respond – thus forcing him to assume the mantle they had in mind for him.”⁶

All this manipulation of Jesus for the purposes of the crowd might astonish or offend you, but before you allow yourself to pass judgment, take a moment to examine your own heart and motives when approaching the Savior. “When we want comfort in sorrow, when we want strength in difficulty, when we want peace in turmoil... there is no one so wonderful as Jesus, and we talk to him and walk with him and open our hearts to him. But when he comes to us with some stern demand for sacrifice, with some challenge to effort, with the offer of some cross, we will have nothing to do with him. When we examine our own hearts, it may be we will find that we too love Jesus for what we can get out of him.”⁷ Our wants, perceived needs, and desires shout loudly for our attention, affection, and subservience. However, bowing to the demands of our flesh will only result in the fulfillment of Jesus’ teaching: “Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it...”⁸ We must, as Jesus taught, allow the Holy Spirit to renew our minds, forsaking old selfish ambitions, and lose our lives if we would preserve them.

John 6:1-15, NIV

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias),² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near. ⁵ 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?” ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” ⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, ⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). 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. ¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. 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.” ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

Study Questions:

1. Would anyone like to share a time when they personally experienced something miraculous?
2. How did the celebration of the Passover stir the hearts of the people of Israel? Optional: Read Exodus 12:1-28 to aid in your discussion on the origin of Passover.
3. What were some of the needs that Jesus had met for the people of Galilee and Judea at this point?

5. Carson, D.A. p. 270.

6. Carson, D.A. p. 272.

7. Barclay, William. p. 240-241.

8. Luke 17:33 NIV

Study Questions:

4. Read Matthew 14:9-21 and Mark 6:30-44, in what ways was Jesus' response to the crowds unexpected and important as an example to His disciples both then and now?
5. Does the information that Jesus likely fed around 20,000 people including women and children change your impression of this miracle? If so, how?
6. In what ways do you relate to the people in this passage? Are you like Philip? Andrew? The boy with the fish and loaves? The crowd? Explain.
7. How does Jesus' choice to use the little boy's lunch encourage you to offer Jesus what you have, however small?
8. Why did Jesus refuse to play into the crowd's expectations for Him to be their political Messiah?
9. In what ways does this story support John's main message, found in John 20:31?
10. Read 1 Corinthians 9:26-27, and Matthew 10:38-39. Do you find yourself shrinking back from Him when He requires something of you, challenges you, or asks you to take up your cross and follow? Explain.
11. Can you describe a time in your life when you felt like the crowd, wanting Jesus only for what He could offer you? How would you describe your relationship with God now?

Prayer Partner Assignment:

Meeting with a brother or sister from your small group over a meal to get to know one another more and answer a few questions:

- Read John Chapter 6 again
- What does this chapter teach us about Jesus?
- What does this chapter teach us about Jesus' Kingdom?
- What specifically from this chapter challenges you and why?
- What questions or comments do you have for Life Group next week about this chapter? (Make note of them to ask at the beginning of next week's study)

End your time in prayer for one another if possible and set up another time to meet again outside of small group.