

*10 And when the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. And taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida. 11 But the multitudes were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing.*

*12 And the day began to decline, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." 13 But He said to them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." 14 (For there were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, "Have them recline to eat in groups of about fifty each." 15 And they did so, and had them all recline. 16 And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the multitude. 17 And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.*

This morning we come to the single miracle with exception of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which is given by all four of the gospel writers.

From that we're going to surmise that this particular event is extremely important in the life and ministry of Jesus. We want to talk about that from a historical context as well as a spiritual one. Why is this miracle important?

And as a bonus, from this particular miracle I draw my entire philosophy of ministry. You didn't know I had a philosophy of ministry, did you. I do, and it's based right here.

But first, let's try to find where we are in the big picture of the life and times of Jesus the Messiah. Last week we talked about multiplication. How the body of Christ left on this earth grows and multiplies until He comes again in His glory.

After a year to 18 months of the disciples watching Jesus teach about the

authority to reign of God, in this world where Satan reigns, the Kingdom of God, and watching Him do miracles of power over every thing that is created, everything that IS lies within His power to effect. Storms, disease, demons, death, all lie under the authority of His voice.

In this world where Satan rules and chaos dwells, Jesus has authority over all of it. He has power over everything. The authority to reign of God in this world as opposed to Satan who currently rules is summed up in one word. Jesus. He is over everything in the created realm. Physical, Spiritual, all of it lies under His command. His voice controls all of creation.

And He relegated a portion of that authority to His 12 disciples who would become the apostles of the church, and He sent them out 2X2 to preach about the Kingdom and to heal the sick and to cast out demons.

They have gone on their first mission canvassing Galilee with power and preaching, and then at a given time, they have returned together and that's where we begin our study this morning.

So it's a turning point for the disciples. First time preaching without Jesus being there doing everything. First taste of how the good news will march on without Him doing it all. Responsibility transferred, or at least the possibilities of that tasted. Things are changing.

But there's more to what's changing in this fulcrum of the life of Jesus. Now bear in mind that He has this all under control. Every moment is under the sovereign plan and control of His Father in heaven. Nothing that happens is un-premeditated, unplanned. We may be surprised, the disciples may be surprised, but Jesus and His Father are not caught by surprise.

The other massive sea change that occurs at this timepoint, this juncture is that the massive crowd who is pressing in on Him and His chosen disciples will decide to take Him by force and make Him be king. For all the wrong reasons.

There are little bits and facets of the full diamond that each of the four authors will tell us. So we'll draw from all four gospels a little bit this morning to try to see the full diamond in 3 dimensions. Let's begin.

*10 And when the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. And taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida.*

The 12 have returned and their desire and His is for them to give Him a blow by blow account of all that has happened in this first little taste of ministry.

Notice first of all the words "*all that they had done.*" That will be important later. Their perspective even at this point in the ministry with the powers given to them for miracles and preaching is that they are doing it. *they gave an account to Him of all that they had done*

How do you think that was going for them with 20000 people pressing in from all sides. How do you have a relaxed time of reflection and sharing with Jesus. How does Jesus have some one on one with these all important men who will be the foundations of the Authority to Reign of God in Satans world. How can any meaningful teaching and sharing go on with 20,000 people around?

This is the opposite of intimacy with the 12. They need one on one with Jesus and each other. And so Jesus says, let's get out of here. Probably the best words they ever heard.

*And taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida.*

Mark tells us; 6:31 *And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) 32 And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves.*

Jesus says, let's get out of here. Let's go to some place where we can have a

moment of rest. Can you imagine a sweeter thought. Time alone with Jesus to rest and reflect and learn from Him, to relay stories of their first missionary experiences and to have His input. To get away from the crowds and confusion and continuous interruptions.

They couldn't even get 5 minutes to eat! Jesus says let's get out of here. Best idea *ever*.

Bethsaida = house of fish. It is lost to us exactly where this is, but the best guess is that there was a fishing village right at the inlet of the Jordan river into the sea of Galilee. Just a village and then just beyond, this desolate place, removed from the village, it's just a grassy area used only for animals grazing. Perhaps the village is in sight, but the idea is we're going to land over there and relax a little. Reflect a little. That must have sounded so good.

*vs 11a But the multitudes were aware of this and followed Him;*

Mark says; 6:33 *And the people saw them going, and many recognized them, and they ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them.*

If we're right in our assumption of where Bethsaida was, it's about 5 miles from Capernaum, east along the top of the lake. And Mark says the people saw Him leave and they literally ran the 5 miles to this desolate grassy place and actually got there before Jesus did.

And John in his gospel tells us why; 6: 2 *And a great multitude was following Him, because they were seeing the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.*

This is the Jesus show. Miracles upon miracles upon miracles. Nothing like this has happened in this world before or after Jesus. Astonishing miracles. The people are the mice, Jesus is the pied piper. They want to see the miracles. All of this is building to something.

Luke isn't going to get us there, but John does. Luke has other purposes to take us through in his method of relaying the story. John gets to the bottom line. The next day Jesus says the only food I'm offering ultimately is my body and my blood. My body is the food of life. Eat me for eternal life. My blood is shed for your sins. Drink my blood for forgiveness of sins. And all 20000 of them go away.

The disciples would have loved for Him to disperse that crowd so they can have that time alone they so were looking forward to. Get rid of them. The next day Jesus teaches them the difficult truth they don't want to hear, and they disperse. All of them. To the point that Jesus turns to the 12 and says, are you going to leave me too?

That's the juncture we are at in the big picture. Massive turning point. But we're getting ahead of ourselves, let's get back to the story as it unfolds.

*11 But the multitudes were aware of this and followed Him;* (remember, they got there before He did, they're waiting for Him as the boat lands)

This has to be a tremendous disappointment for the disciples, the 12, who were looking forward to the relaxing one on one. The 20000 people you were trying to get away from beat you to where you were going.

There must have been a near mutiny. The guy at the rudder must have been like, whoops, lets do a 180 and keep on going. Let's go out into the middle and just float for a while. Let's go anywhere but here.

How do I know that? Am I putting words in their mouths? Perhaps. It doesn't say any of that. But I know all too well my own selfish degraded flesh and what it wants. I know my heart would sink as we round a noll to enter a cove and all of a sudden the 20,000 people we were trying to get away from come into view. I know exactly what Jim's flesh would say. Noooo!! Let's get out of here!

But the next words in Luke's account are 180 degrees out from my selfish

fleshy person. *and welcoming them*, Jesus welcomes the 20,000 people we were trying to get away from.

The rudder guy would be steering for a 180 turn and I'd be rowing like a mad man, but the boat glides right into the shore and Jesus *welcomes* the crowds, the 20,000.

Again, Mark adds something incredibly important to the full story. 6: 34 *And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd;*

In my selfishness I see 20,000 reasons to go some place else. Jesus sees 20,000 people who are like sheep with no shepherd.

What happens to sheep that have no shepherd? Sheep with no shepherd are the most pitiful things on earth. They wander and get lost. They can't find food. They can't find water. They follow any possible leader to their doom. They have no defenses against their predators.

And that's a picture of a world full of people who are dumb and blind when it comes to knowing God. Helpless as sheep. But that isn't the full problem. Satan is a predator that rips God's lost sheep to pieces. And they're helpless to do anything about his torment. Confusion is the norm for lost sheep. Sheep with no shepherd. Confusion and destruction.

This week a group of lawyers in New York City argued in court for a *person* named Happy who is an elephant. Happy they say, is a person, and has inalienable rights of personhood. They say the new york zoo has detained her illegally without habeus corpus for over 40 years.

Meanwhile, on the same day last week that this was argued in court, over 3,000 human babies were murdered. Elephants are persons with all the rights of personhood. Humans can be murdered en-masse. Human babies have zero rights to even be alive.

That's what having Satan as ruler of this world has produced. If you think elephants have rights and human babies should be summarily slaughtered, you are a sheep without a shepherd.

I tend to have a bad reaction against people who are driving all of Satan's causes. I have a difficult time loving them. Jesus, on the other hand, looks out at 20,000 people in the predicament of being lost sheep with no shepherd, and His heart is full of love for them. To Jesus, it's heartbreaking what Satan is doing to His Father's sheep.

You'll have to pray for me. He's correct. I'm at fault. People who think elephants are persons and helpless little babies have no personhood and should be slaughtered are not the enemy, they're the mission field. And as we'll see together, Jesus says, "**you feed *them*.**"

*and welcoming them, He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing.*

Satan is the predator. Jesus is the good shepherd. He pities their plight. He heals their diseases and broken hearts. He speaks to them of a time when the evil predator will be crushed and the good shepherd will rule over this creation. That's the kingdom of God. The authority to reign of God, instead of Satan and evil and sin.

The day starts with the disciples and Jesus and rest and learning, but now the disciples are out of the picture. Except that like selfish me, they are getting a lesson that God loves lost sheep. Even in the most inconvenient times imaginable, God loves lost sheep. Jesus welcomes the lost sheep and spends all day being a good shepherd. The disciples are watching from a distance. Again.

*12 And the day began to decline, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place."*

Am I reading too much into that if I wonder out loud if perhaps the disciples have had about enough of *sheep-feeding* on what was supposed to be their day away.

The day is spent Jesus. Our day, that we didn't get with you alone, is gone. And it makes good sense to get rid of these people. Tell them to leave. Time's up. We're just thinking about their well being. It's time they left. Time for the good shepherd to shepherd them out of here. No resources here. *“Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place.”*

*13 But He said to them, “You give them something to eat!”*

You give them something to eat. Right. 20,000 people. 12 rag tag nobodies from central nowhere. You give them something to eat.

I told you earlier that I draw my philosophy of ministry from this passage. When Peter freaked out during the first part of the trial of Jesus after the Jews had him taken captive in the garden, and the little slave girl said she was pretty sure she'd seen Peter hanging around Jesus before, he was one of them, and Peter freaks out and curses while he deny's Christ and the rooster crows.

And when the Lord restored him later, after his heart is broken and Satan sifts him in the sifter for a while, what did Jesus ask him 3 times? Remember? Peter do you love me? yes. Feed my sheep. Peter do you love me? yes. Peter, feed my lambs. Peter do you like me a lot? Lord, you know I love you. You know all things. Well then, Feed my sheep.

Jesus wants shepherds after He is gone who can feed His sheep. This story illustrates on a physical level how that works. How it's even possible to consider shepherding His sheep. *13 But He said to them, “You give them something to eat!”*

That must have hit them like a stun gun. *“You give them something to eat!”* ? Are you kidding me? We don't have the resources for that! Exactly.

*And they said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people.”*

Where did the five loaves and two fish come from? Did somebody pack a lunch for one? Again, the other gospel writers fill in some gaps. Mark says;

*6: 37 But He answered and said to them, “You give them something to eat!” And they said to Him, “Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?”*

200 denarii is 200 days wages. In our economy, that might be \$50,000 for 25,000 people, remember there are women and children plus the 5000 men Matthew says. So that's \$2 or maybe a little more for each hungry person. You might get a tiny portion for everyone. Not to mention we don't have 200 denarii.

John adds some color. He shows us that Jesus is using this as a teaching moment for the disciples that really wish 20,000 people would just go somewhere, not here. In John 6 it says;

*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?”*

Philip is the one that's good at rapid mathematical calculations. Hey Philip, where can we get some bread for these folks.

*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.”*

Philip is like, it would take \$50,000 dollars that we don't have to even get

enough for a crummy meal that wouldn't satisfy anybody. A Rodeo burger with no fries and no drink for everybody. \$50,000

In other words, reality check Jesus, we can't do this. We have no resources to do what you just said. "*You give them something to eat?*" Yeah, that's impossible. We can't do it. Again, from John 6. Philips the money guy, Andrew is the faith guy. Obviously.

*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?"*

Now we've got the need defined and also the available resources. NEED = 20,000 hungry people is the need. SUPPLY = 5 Ritz crackers and a couple of Mackerels is what we've got for supply. The gap between the need and the supply is what, class. Impossible. Impossible. We can't get there. Gap is too wide.

*14 (For there were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, "Have them recline to eat in groups of about fifty each." 15 And they did so, and had them all recline. 16 And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the multitude.*

First He tells them to give them something to eat. Then He has them tell them to sit in groups of 50's and hundreds and get ready to eat. *15 And they did so, and had them all recline.*

*He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them* The miracle is defined by the word kept. He kept giving them. The disciples are the servers. They take basket after basket after basket of fish that never swam and barley that never grew out to the multitude.

*17 And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.* Hmmm. 12 baskets, 12

disciples.

The miracle is astonishing. The Lord Jesus feeds thousands by making something out of nothing. Barley that never grew. Fish that never swam. Baskets and baskets full. And unlike anything that they might have purchased even if they had 200 days wages, the meal created out of nothing filled their needs completely. They all ate and were *satisfied*. Not a morsel to hold them over. A full meal that was satisfying.

That's as far as Luke goes. John continues the odyssey for us. The following day after Jesus walks on water to get to His disciples the crowd welcomes Jesus and what's on their mind? Breakfast. Breakfast. They were satisfied like never before the evening before. Full bellies. Satisfaction.

The want to make Jesus be king. Full bellies. Excellent medical plan. Drive out the Romans. Make Israel Great Again. They all had their red MIGA hats on. Yay Jesus!

And Jesus tells them, no, no, no, it isn't about the physical now and now. I'm here to supply your dead spirits with life. I'm not going to give you physical bread that satisfy's your bellies. I'm going to give you spiritual bread that satisfy's you souls.

You can read John chapter 6. The people aren't going to have it, and the discussion gets more and more difficult culminating in Jesus saying;  
53 . . . *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. 54 “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 “For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 56 “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me. 58 “This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate, and died, he who eats this bread shall live forever.”*

Same time frame, next day. And the crowd's reaction is: Who can listen to this. They said it was a difficult saying. Our generation might say, it's the ramblings of a mad man. The disciples got their wish. Crowd dispersed. But they're probably almost as confused as the crowd that left.

Jesus body, broken for us, is the bread that gives us spiritual life. Jesus blood that was shed for us is the drink that gives us forgiveness of sins. Unlike physical food that satisfies for a brief moment and then you're wishing for breakfast, the Spirit satisfies us forever.

But, there is a sense that similar to the physical, the bread and drink goes into our bodies, on a spiritual level, the body and blood of Christ must be taken into us. Spiritually. We ask Him to come into us. Into our hearts. The Holy Spirit indwells us. We have a real spiritual connection. Christ is in you, and you are in Christ if the Holy Spirit lives inside your heart. Ask Him to come in. He will.

One final thought for us. I said that I draw my philosophy of ministry from this event. Here's briefly how I see my place in ministry;

I've got nothing. Nothing to give. I'm not well endowed with talents and good looks and commanding presence that would naturally draw people to me for leadership or learning. Almost zero, and I understand that and have understood that for a very long time.

No natural gifts. And I'm pretty beat up, really. I have a long standing inferiority complex. I'm naturally shy and reserved. Also for a very long time. But am I any different from these 12 nobodies that Jesus says, "*You give them something to eat.*"

The parallels are a perfect match. They had abilities different from mine. I picture Peter as sort of a buff construction worker man's man kind of a guy. John, the beatnik poet with a goa-tee. James the son of thunder that would have called fire down from heaven on the same crowd. All of them, just like me, in one sense.

He says, "You give them something to eat." And he tells them, feed my sheep, feed my lambs, and what we all have in common is the gap between the resources and the size of the need. Impossible gap. 20,000 hungry people. 5 biscuits and 2 fish.

Everyone of us, no matter how well endowed with natural gifts has that same gap between our resources and the need. Because we're talking about spiritual hunger, spiritual needs, not physical. And none of the physical natural gifts helps in the spiritual world.

The good looking tall naturally gifted folks are just as bankrupt as I am to supply a spiritual need. The playing field is level. And once you understand that, you give the fish and loaves, you give whatever it is you have to offer, to Jesus, and He supplies.

If I didn't understand that, I'd have never touched this pulpit and this responsibility with a ten foot pole. There's no way I'd do this. Ever! Last thing on my mind. But I do understand. He can take the poorest offering imagineable and turn it into food for thousands. He's still in the business of turning a pittance into a feast.

That's my philosophy of ministry, and that's why I stick to this book like glue. I'm painfully aware that I'm bankrupt. But I've got Jesus, and I've got His book.