

**Text: John 6:1-14**

**Title: “How a Child’s Lunch Fed a Huge Crowd”**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Let’s open our Bibles to John 6. As you’re turning let me encourage you about something that will take place next Sunday night at 6:00pm. We’ll have the next in our series called Faith’s Foundation Series. Our guest speaker will be Dr. Craig Blaising and I’ve asked him to talk about something that is becoming quite a hot topic in churches around America ... “Calvinism vs Arminianism: What’s the Difference?” Those may be words you’ve never heard, but they are important. That debate is very prominent today and many people are confused. Where do we as Baptists land in the debate? Well Dr. Blaising will help us sort out the differences in these two doctrinal systems next Sunday evening.

Read John 6:1-6.

This morning I’m beginning a brief series of messages entitled “The Making of a Miracle.” We’re going to look at some of the more prominent miracles in the Bible. Specifically we’ll look at some of the miracles in which God moved in such a way that dramatically affected an entire group of people. I want us to understand the conditions that were present for God to do such a great work.

I’m reminded of the time in the Gospels where Jesus went to his hometown of Nazareth and we’re told that...

**Mark 6:5-6 (NIV) - He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. <sup>6</sup> And he was amazed at their lack of faith.**

Here was a town where the people of God shouldn’t have had any trouble trusting Jesus; yet Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith. On the other hand, there are times when God sees the conditions are right and He does miraculous things. And that’s what we need God to do in the weeks to come.

We as a church have a great challenge before us in “For the Children ... For God’s Glory.” We are attempting to build a \$5 million preschool/children’s building, and to have it completely paid for when it is finished. This is greater than anything we’ve ever attempted, and some could look at that and say, “It’s impossible.” And I would agree, humanly speaking. But with God all things are possible.

People ask, “Do you believe in miracles?” No, not really. Miracles can be deceptive. People can do some pretty phenomenal things. Even Satan can deceptively pull off phenomenal things. So I really don’t believe in miracles. I believe in God who has the power to exceedingly abundantly beyond all we could ever ask or imagine.

And I’m so glad that we serve a God who still works miracles. There are many who believe the age of miracles has passed. Some are so rationalistic and humanistic that there’s no room for miracles in their weak faith. I’m glad God still moves in supernatural ways.

And the Bible records hundreds if not thousands of miracles. Many of them had to do with individuals being healed or saved or delivered. I think of the OT miracles like Hannah miraculously conceiving Samuel, or the prophet Elisha healing the son of the Shunammite woman. I think of the NT miracles like Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, or of the apostles healing the paralytic in the book of Acts. And those are amazing stories. But I want us to think together about those miracles that involved an entire group of people ... miracles that were done through a group of people, or for a group of people.

There are times when God so moves in and through a group of people that something extraordinary happens and He is glorified.

There are some facets of each of the miracles that we will examine that they all have in common:

- They each start with a human problem.
- They each fit into the Lord's purposes.
- They each involve human preparation.
- They each require God's provision (or power).
- They each result in God's praise.

Today from John 6 we see "How a Child's Lunch Fed a Huge Crowd," or "How a Happy Meal made Millions Happy."

This is a miracle that appears in each of the four gospels, so God must have something really important to say to us.

So let's examine this great miracle before us here in John 6.

## **1. IT STARTS WITH A HUMAN PROBLEM.**

And here's the problem as we see it in the first five verses of John 6.

Jesus and his disciples had gone to a region on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee. We know from the other Gospel accounts that this was a remote place. Keep that in mind. But Jesus was reaching the zenith, the peak, of His popularity and crowds were following him everywhere. Why? Because they had witnessed Jesus performing miracles, or they had heard the reports. In addition to this v.4 tells us that it was the Passover season, and the Law required that every male Jew celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem if they could possibly get there. So ordinarily these great crowds of people would be in Jerusalem.

Perhaps Jesus was feeling the pressure of the moment, and did what He often did in stressful times ... He looked for an opportunity to get away with his disciples. They got into a boat and crossed the northern end of the Sea of Galilee to the eastern shore. And v.3 says that Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.

But the multitudes were unrelenting. As the boat left to cross the lake the crowds began to run along the shoreline, to get to where they saw the boat was going.

And John tells us how the problem comes to light:

**John 6: 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?"**

The problem is stated in the last words of v.5: **"Bread (food) for these people to eat..."**

And Jesus asked the question to Philip. Why? Well we know that Philip was from Bethsaida one of the nearby towns. Philip would know that it was impossible, humanly speaking, for thousands of people to get bread that late in the day anywhere in the area.

How wonderful it is that God chooses to demonstrate His great power on the platform of our needs, our problems, and our challenges. And because He does, we know that He is not just a powerful God who does great things in the universe; He is also a gracious, merciful and loving God who does great things for us.

We have a God who cares ... that there isn't enough food to go around ... that there is sickness in our family ... that Dad needs a job ... that Grandpa needs healing.

**v.5 - "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"** - Jesus was not asking the question because He didn't know. The question was for the benefit of his disciples, not for His own knowledge. He wanted the full weight of the human problem to settle in on them.

And the next thing we see about the making of a miracle ...

## **2. IT FITS INTO GOD'S PURPOSES.**

**John 6:6 - He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.**

This was to be a mid-term exam for Philip, and the rest of the disciples. They had been with Jesus for two years. They had heard his teachings. They had seen the mighty power of God demonstrated time and time again. Now Jesus decides to test their faith.

Our problems always fit into God's purposes for our lives because they give us an opportunity to exercise our faith.

Now this is very important because so often when we start asking for a miracle, it starts with our purposes, not God's. And it generally has to do with furthering our agenda rather than God's agenda.

I'm fascinated here that Jesus orchestrated this entire event to bring about His own sovereign and holy purposes.

## **3. IT INVOLVES HUMAN PREPARATION.**

Now in vv.7-9 we see how Jesus wants to engage his disciples in this situation. We saw earlier how Jesus asked the question of Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” Remember, this is a remote region and Philip knows it. But I think Philip’s answer is amusing.

**John 6:7 - Philip answered him, “Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”**

It’s like Philip is saying, “Forget the where ... how will we buy enough bread for this many people?” Philip pulls out his pocket calculator and does the math. The screen on the calculator read “IMPOSSIBLE.”

Jesus’ question is designed to help Philip see the predicament had no human solution. Has that ever happened to you? Perhaps some of you right now are in that kind of a situation. You are faced with a predicament that has IMPOSSIBLE written all over it.

Let’s think for a moment about Philip (the man with the calculator):

- He can only see the human problem, not the divine power. He didn’t factor God’s power into the equation.
- He can only see the obstacles. He sees that what it would take to feed this many people is a staggering sum. No place to buy this much food, and not enough money to pay for it.
- He plans only for the bare minimum (“enough bread for each one to have a bite”)

So Philip flunks the test. But another of the disciples starts seeing the possibilities, but his faith is weak as well.

**John 6:8-9 - 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?”**

Now Andrew comes on the scene:

- He’s getting a little closer to the solution, but still can only see the human possibilities.

Andrew’s words tell us that he’s a “little” thinker. The word for “boy” literally means “little boy.” (I’m reminded that St. Andrew was the patron saint of Scotland, so “wee lad” might be a good translation.)

The “five small barley loaves” were not loaves of bread, but these were more like wafers. Barley loaves were about like stale crackers. And notice it says there were “two small fish.” Again, the Holy Spirit wants us to see the desperation in the moment. We’re talking about sardines here.

- He’s still overwhelmed by the enormity of the task (“how far will they go among so many?”)

But little becomes much in the hands of the Lord. Never underestimate what God can do with the little that is in your hands. What is transferred to Jesus is transformed by Jesus.

**ILLUSTRATION** – There’s an old story about a hiker who was very thirsty when he came upon an abandoned farm house with a water well pump out front. He pumped feverishly on the lever, but could get no water to come out. Then out of the corner of his eye he saw a small jug with a cork in the top. There was a handwritten note attached to it that said, “Pour the water in this jug into the pump to prime it.” The thirsty hiker was tempted to drink the water and just be done with it, but he decided to follow the directions. Sure enough after a few pumps of the lever there was cool fresh water flowing ... all he wanted and more.

The hiker drank his fill of the cool water, and then refilled the jug, and then added his own words to the note: “Believe me, it really works. You have to give it all away to get anything back.”

And that’s what the little boy did.

I imagine that the little boy whose sack lunch the Lord used had no idea when he left home that day that what he had in his basket would be the spark that ignited a great miracle.

#### **4. IT REQUIRES GOD’S PROVISION.**

The disciples were in a panic, but Jesus had a plan. Jesus had the provision in mind before it ever occurred to the disciples that Jesus could save the day.

So Jesus has the people be seated. And we’re told that there were thousands present. There were 5000 men, plus women and children ... possibly a crowd of upwards of 10,000 people, maybe more.

**John 6:11 - 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.**

Somewhere in the giving of thanks and the distributing of the bread and the fish, the miracle happened. We’re not told where or how, just that it happened that everyone had as much as they wanted.

**John 6:12 - When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.”**

And the disciples collected twelve baskets of leftovers.

But get this: The provision of God was released in the situation when the resources of man are released into God’s hands.

#### **5. IT RESULTS IN GOD’S PRAISE.**

Jesus is the hero in this story. In fact, there is very little in this to credit humans for. Jesus orchestrated this from the outset to raise the faith of the disciples not in themselves, but in Jesus.

There have been many attempts to explain away this miracle.

- Some believe this was a miracle of sharing, that, as Jesus was teaching the people, he so moved them they abandoned their selfish habits and shared with their own families and with others the lunch they had brought with them so that there proved to be plenty for everybody.
- Others say that there was really no physical feeding at all, that Jesus' teaching was so marvelous people forgot about their food and they went home saying, "Oh, that was so great! He fed us so full I'm not even hungry." But they what do you do with the twelve baskets of bread and fish left over?

No v.14 says that the people knew something supernatural had occurred...

**John 6:14 - After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."**

Jesus doesn't perform miracles to show off. And He doesn't perform miracles just to make life easy for us.

Jesus performed this "miraculous sign" for one reason. It's the same reason that He performed all the wonders:

**John 20:30-31 (NIV) - Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

## **CONCLUSION**

The miracle of the feeding of the 5000 was to be a faith-builder for the disciples, because immediately they were thrust into another storm. They would need to know that they could trust Jesus.