

## Observations from the Feeding of the Five Thousand

By James W. Moore (Edited and additional material added by Ken Davies)

“And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they didn’t understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened!” (Mark 6:51-52; ESV)

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A highway patrolman pulled over a little old lady on the freeway. As she opened her glove compartment to retrieve her registration, he noticed 2 handguns in it. The officer said, “I notice you’ve got some guns in there.” “Yes,” she answered, “and I have a shotgun under my seat, too.”

“Goodness! What are you afraid of?” asked the officer.

“Not a thing, sonny, not a thing!”

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As I’ve gotten older, I’ve found myself sometimes faced with situations and circumstances that were difficult for me to deal with as a believer, as a father, a husband, and an older man. As I mull over these situations and circumstances, I find that I can quote the right Scriptures, I can give biblical answers, I can reason through these things in the language of Scripture, yet the conclusions at which I arrive don’t always result in an understanding, trust, and awareness of God’s presence and peace as the Bible says it should.

So, what do I do? How do I gain peace, perception, and understanding in the midst of these sometimes troubling and difficult, circumstances? How do I sense the presence and grace of God in such times? How do I not only acknowledge *mentally*, but also trust in my *heart*, that these situations are the working out of God’s love and purpose in my life?

I’ve been studying the Bible fairly deeply for over 40 years, and yet the greatest obstacle for me to overcome is the simple everyday trusting of its message and teachings as they’re embodied in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. My studies have enabled me to know quite a bit about Him—shouldn’t I be able to *trust* Him?

I readily accept the teaching of the Bible *intellectually*. Every fact revealed concerning Christ Jesus I embrace without reserve—but how different that is from practically living the life of trusting faith; of knowing by experience His felt, or perceived, presence; of easily recognizing His promised supply of grace to my life, resulting in the practical abilities and leading promised in Scripture!

How do I reckon Him as always present and directing the affairs of my everyday life—the small, insignificant circumstances and relationships, as well as those that are life-changing? How do I then find the promised grace and ability to conduct myself in obedience and submission to Him, no matter the situation or relationship that He brings into my life?

Well, at long last I have the answer: **I don't know!** But I can tell you what I **do** know: The disciples didn't always have the answers either (at least not until after Pentecost), yet *for three years they were constantly in His physical, literal presence, experiencing the practical reality of Omnipotence at work residing in the God-man, Jesus!*

Perhaps it's a testimony to the smallness of my own "trust" in God through the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, the lack of faith and trust the disciples displayed at times gives me encouragement—especially in light of their privilege of living their life in His physical presence for the 3 ½ years that He walked and ministered on the earth.

I'm so glad that they, just like you and me, were sinners saved by grace, and that even after seeing the Lord perform astounding miracles in their presence they still couldn't live their daily lives on a more "supernatural" plane or level!

Our text in Mark [6:51-52] tells us about the feeding of the five thousand, Peter's walking on the water, and the stilling of the storm.

"And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened."

What were they supposed to understand? I'd like to make some observations regarding the Gospels' accounts of the feeding of the five thousand.

**First**, considering the disciples' view of the multitude and the "smallness" of the provision at hand—is what a sense of helplessness they must have felt! Yet, just as the disciples discovered, what a blessing for us to know that what **we** cannot provide, **Christ has provided for us**. We can't provide anything toward our soul's salvation, but, just as in the feeding of the multitude, all we can do is offer up our need. And just as the disciples recognized their inability to supply the need at hand, when we recognize our spiritual need, it is then, and then only, that we see the glory of the Son of God in saving us and the super-abounding grace supplied to do so! What lengths the Holy Spirit of God goes to at times to convince us of this fact and reality, though we at times resist through pride and unbelief! I still need constant reminding and the conviction of the Holy Spirit to realize and employ the biblical teaching that "*when I am weak, then am I strong!*"

Our situation may lead us to say, "I can't," which is *true*. But God **can** and **will** in grace when I look to **Him** in absolute dependence! Therefore, we must strive to always maintain the completed work of Christ as the

backdrop of our lives. Jesus accomplished all that was necessary for our salvation, and we should keep the good news of the gospel ever before us! That will enable us to face the hungry multitudes and storms in our lives.

My **second** observation is that although the boy possessed the loaves and fish, they belonged to Jesus. Likewise, we possess nothing that God has not given to us. In my experience, I've found it difficult to realize and put into practice the premise that everything I have is provided for, and given to me by God through His all-wise Providence. Whatever gifts, abilities, or possessions I have are given to me by God—the very breath I take is His supreme right to withhold or keep giving.

I've found it extremely difficult, yet a true blessing, when I am able to “let go” of anything that God is pleased to take from me! Yet, how difficult it is to echo the words of Job after he had lost all of his flocks, servants, and children: “‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.’ In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (**Job 1:21-22**; ESV).

When God in His wisdom is pleased to take some possession or even a loved one from us it hurts deeply, but He is there to console and comfort us with His promise: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). This doesn't mean that all things are “good,” but that God causes them to work towards “good”; more importantly, they work to eventually demonstrate and manifest God's glory!

When God “reassigns” a possession He's **lent** to us, our earthly perspective may view that as an affliction or a trial, as we do in the case of Job. Yet, Paul informs us that these very “afflictions” enable us to minister to others in ways we were previously unable to do:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.” (**2 Cor 2:1-7**; ESV).

My **third** observation is the Lord's response when the disciples brought to His attention the problem of feeding the multitude. Our Lord said, "You give them something to eat." How would you have reacted to that? Jesus often put questions to the disciples that they couldn't answer and laid duties on them that they could neither perform nor accomplish by themselves—*He still does that!*

When Jesus said, "You give them something to eat," it's likely we would've said the same thing the disciples did: "We only have two fish and five loaves!" Yet, consider what ministerial experience the disciples had to draw upon when charged to feed the multitude. They'd just returned from their evangelistic mission, during which they accomplished some amazing things in preaching and healing in the Name of the Lord! They themselves were actively involved in accomplishing the miraculous! They didn't merely "witness" *someone else* perform these miracles—they were accomplished *by their own hands* as the Spirit worked through them.

We can imagine Jesus admonishing them, "What? Don't you remember what you just came back from doing? Didn't you experience my presence in power as you ministered in my Name? Didn't you find that every need was graciously provided? Didn't you see a power at work that was way beyond your abilities, and find every need met?" How often have we as believers, throughout the course of our lives, when faced with a crisis or affliction, forgotten God's previous gracious supplies?

In my opinion, a great deal of the Christian life is about what I call "raising Ebenezers." There is a stanza in the hymn, *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, that declares, "Here I raise my Ebenezer; hither by thy help I'm come." **Ebenezer** means "**Stone of help**". It was a memorial stone erected by Samuel to remind the Israelites that, "Thus far the LORD has helped us" (**1 Sam 7: 12**). In order to live the Christian life to the glory of God who gives that life, we need to raise more Ebenezers. We need to exhort ourselves to remember God's faithfulness and dealings with us in the past! We need to do as Jeremiah did:

"But this I call to mind [*remember*], and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him'." (**Lam 3:21-24**; ESV)

For our **fourth** observation, let's consider the Lord's response when the disciples informed Him of the "resources" on hand—He said: "Bring them here to me." Christ takes what we have and makes it sufficient to His end! He expects us to *use* what He's given us. We might feel that we haven't been blessed with an abundance of "talent," but Jesus expects us to use what we do have for His glory. We may at times lament and mourn that we can't do "much" for Jesus, yet Jesus expects us to do only what we can—"can" being a word

of ability. What we can't do, He will provide the grace to do. Remember what Jesus said of the woman who anointed Him with ointment:

**“She has done what she could;** she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”  
(**Mark 14:8-9**)

God very seldom calls any of us to greatness or the accomplishment of miracles; but He always calls us to do **what we can**. God may be pleased to put us into some very dire circumstances—He may greatly limit our gifts and abilities; He may at His good pleasure take away even what we were once able to do, and in doing so, He asks us to do only what we *now* can; even if it is only a “cup of cold water,” or providing “a couple of pennies” to the needy in His Name.

I'm finding that as I age, God is both limiting what I used to be able to do and He's in the process of giving me *new things* that I can do. But I'm also finding I need more of His grace to accomplish those things I can do! Supposedly, age brings more wisdom, but it also reduces abilities and limits effort. I must now seek to identify my “new” gifts and “abilities” and do them as best I “can,” and trust Him to do for me and mine that which I cannot! How about you? Are you seeking to be faithful in doing what you can? I believe that He intends for us to be content with that!

**Finally**, we must labor to keep our hearts well-versed in the Deity and Omnipotence of Christ! We should never be “astounded” to the extent that we are afraid of Him or wonder at what He does!

“And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they didn't understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.” (**Mark 6:51-52**; ESV)

The *Amplified New Testament* translates this passage this way:

“For they failed to consider or understand the teaching and meaning of the miracle of the loaves; in fact, their hearts had grown callous—had become dull, and had lost the power of understanding.”

This always happens when we fail to consider what He has done for us in the past. We need to be more faithful in erecting our “Ebenezers!” Did Jesus ever fail to respond to the disciples' needs? Did He ever abandon them when they were in urgent need of help? No. Yet they forgot what He had done previously, and only considered what they wanted done at the moment.

Have our hearts become hardened like those of the disciples? Faith is better than fear. It is safer to be in a storm-tossed ship with Christ than to be on solid ground without Him.