

A TABLE FOR 5,000 PLEASE**Mark 6:35-44****(Read Mark 6:35-44)**

INTRO: I always loved Bible stories when I was a kid. At bedtime my two younger brothers and I, the tail-end of a family of eight children, would listen with rapt attention as our mom would read to us from the various books we had acquired over the years. We were curious, but, face it, being just like most kids who want to delay “lights-out” in any way possible, we would ask her questions about the characters and events described in the stories. And she would carefully explain her understanding of them. Let me just say, with almost 63 years of life experience, much theological training, Bible study, and teaching experience, my mother’s theological depth was pretty amazing for someone who left school after eighth grade. She was an amazing Bible teacher. She knew the Bible and she knew her Lord and it rubbed off on us.

From that experience as a child we learned from early on that these were not merely stories and certainly not fiction, but instead they were Holy history. It doesn’t happen for everyone, but I certainly came out of that knowing that the Bible is not myth or wishful thinking, but in the words of the old song, WONDERFUL WORDS OF LIFE. If you’ve got a little kid in your life, spend time in the word with them – find some good Bible story books appropriate for their age. Use the YouVersion Kids App. Let them know the Bible is the real deal.

This account of the Feeding of the 5,000 is in all four of the Gospels. I pointed out a bit ago that I always loved Bible stories and this was one of my favorites. Why? Maybe because it showed and was proof that there wasn’t anything Jesus couldn’t do. It was one of the things that helped me to know, from an early age, that miracles in the eyes of people aren’t miracles for God to do – they are all in a day’s work for him. As we look at the life of Jesus, and as we go with him through his ministry, this is the perfect miracle to begin with. It quickly reveals the love and compassion Jesus came to humanity with. And how, he’s not deterred by a request for a table for 5,000.

Because . . .

God alone can satisfy our deep inner needs

- First, a little background: *It was late in the day.* Let me point out why those six words in the first sentence of our text are important: Context is always important in lots of things, but it’s especially important in determining what the Bible is teaching. This is why I sent out word on Friday by Facebook and email suggesting that reading all of Chapter 6 would help you to be better prepared for this talk. Now if you didn’t get the memo, that’s okay, I’ll give you a quick run-down.
 - Earlier in the chapter, verses 6-12, to be exact, Jesus sends the disciples out on a ministry trip. He sends them with specific instructions. They were to travel light and live off the land and the hospitality of the people they would meet.
 - In verses 13-29 is an account of the execution, actually, more accurately, the murder of John the Baptist at the hands of King Herod. Herod impulsively and lustily agrees to something he came to regret and John died because of it.
 - In verses 30-34 it is recorded that the disciples return to Jesus and report on their mission. Jesus suggests they get away for a bit of debrief and rest. The problem is the crowds who were increasingly swarming around Jesus got wind of where Jesus and his friends were going and meet them there. Instead of being frustrated, Jesus begins teaching them as the sun heads for the horizon.
- So it was late in the day, and the people were hungry, and the disciples were hungry and tired and needed to have some down-time. Their suggestion is reasonable. *“This is a remote place, and it’s already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”* Mark 6:35b-36. And Jesus makes an unreasonable suggestion. No, actually, it’s not a suggestion – he flat-out tells them, *“You give them something to eat.”* (v. 37).
- When the need is this great, the normal and reasonable response is to send those in need away. I know that’s what I’d say. I know that’s what you’d say. To feed 5 people requires prep time. Preparing for 50 people takes even more time. We have Dinner Church starting on Wednesday night and we usually plan for about 70 people – and not a one of our teams waits until everyone is sitting down before they say *“So, what will we have tonight?”* No! We plan and shop and cook for at least a couple days and probably more.

We have the Community Prayer Breakfast coming on the first Thursday in May as it always does and we have 700-800 people who attend every year. We don't wait until that morning to prepare – we're actually having our first meeting to plan it this Thursday. That's a mere 800 – not 5000 people.

- But Jesus sees a huge need and he takes care of the need. **YOU** give them something to eat. And 12 jaws drop in unison.
- I can just imagine the interchange between Jesus and the disciples. Actually, it was probably pretty one-sided – Jesus listened and they begin. The most verbal of them almost shout at a Jesus: “Go get food and feed them?! Go get food and feed them, is reasonable until you consider, we're empty-handed and they're 5,000 people!!!! And besides, we just got back from a ministry trip, where **YOU** sent us out with these instructions: *Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt.* Mark 6:8-9. **NO BREAD!** You told us no bread! So, **WE** don't have any food! **WE'RE** tired! **WE** came here to get away from the crowd – for a little retreat after our ministry and finding out about John the Baptist. It was **YOUR** idea to get away. And now, **WE'RE** tired and hungry! And you say, “Go get food and feed them?!!!!”
- Actually, what they said was more like, “*That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?*” Mark 6:37b. And they weren't exaggerating. 5,000 people is a lot of mouths, and that was just the men – woman and children likely raised the number by thousands.
- That was just an opportunity for Jesus to show that God alone can satisfy our deepest need. Nothing is too difficult for him. He tells them, “Go see what we've got.” How many loaves are out there? And they find 5 barley cakes and 2 fish. And Jesus tells them to sit down and get ready to eat and by it he shows . . .

God's word will not return void

- That's the King James rendition of part of Isaiah 55:11, which we heard earlier. Let's listen to it again from the NIV, *so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.* Isaiah 55:11. In Isaiah 55 the prophet's message from God is a promise to those who return home from Babylon to their homeland after 50 years of captivity. I know you've gotten comfortable in Babylon, but here is my promise – you will be provided for – even if you have nothing, with me you will have all you need.
- The disciples have nothing to offer except 5 barley cakes and 2 fish, for 5000+ people. But Jesus promises otherwise. He speaks and the meal begins – he's God, his word will not return void – it will not return empty – as a matter of fact – you're gonna get full. This story begins with nothing and ends up with surplus.
- Isn't that what Jesus does it for us too? We begin with less than nothing and he provides all we need. The song says “*He is our all in all.*” and it couldn't be more accurate. What is your need? Take it to Jesus. And the first need you must take to him is for him to have total control of your life – soon your cup will be running over.
- And finally, do as Jesus does . . .

Always look up and ask God to give his blessing

- Everybody is seated. Thousands of people, who came to hear Jesus teach and see him heal are now tired and hungry. The Gospel of John records that the bread and fish the disciples found was a boy's lunch that Andrew had found. (John 6:8-9). And Jesus does something essential. Listen, *Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.* Mark 6:41a. He looks to heaven, gives thanks, and breaks the bread. We see this another time here in Mark. It was at the Last Supper which was the first communion and it says, *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.”* Mark 14:22. Jesus never neglects to remember where all help and blessing comes from.
- The Psalmist lifted his eyes too – *I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.* Psalm 121:1-2. Where does our help come from? Not from here, and not from Washington, and not from Science – our help comes from the Lord – always look up. Our help and deliverance and provision come from God – look to him for it.

Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;

*Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

- No matter what you are offering, look to heaven and ask God's blessing and then watch him go to work. It will be what you need.

Conclusion: The disciples were horrified when a crowd of a mere 5000 showed up for dinner. Jesus was not at all concerned. He meets the most desperate need and he does it in a miraculous way.

God's word will not return void. A famous hymn by Martin Luther perfectly illustrates this. I'd love to sing it, but I want to read the words while we savor their truth and power.

A mighty Fortress is our God,
A Bulwark never failing;
Our Helper He amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,
And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth (Of Hosts) His Name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him. (God's word will not return void!)

That word above all earthly powers,
No thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through Him who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His Kingdom is forever.

God's word will not return void. What threatens to overcome us brings Christ to our side. When we simply look to heaven and ask God to come and bless and fill and restore. Come to the table. It's set for you. Amen.