

Jesus Unleashed

Session 3: Why Did Jesus Miraculously Feed 5,000—If It Really Happened?

Unedited Transcript

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Good morning men, if you would please turn in your Bibles to John chapter 6 verse 1, and we will do a shout out. The shout out today goes to a group called Wing Men, I love that name, you gotta love that. 15 men, they've been meeting for six months, they're led by Kelly Mixon. They're located in Titusville, Florida, part of Gateway Community Church. They meet on Wednesdays at 6 PM.

A quote from Kelly, "Our goal is to assist men in becoming leaders and mentors in our church, their family and in life." With that said would you join me in giving a very warm and a rousing Man in the Mirror welcome to Wing Men. One, two, three, Oorah. Glad to have you men with us, glad to have all of you men with us every week, every time,.

Today we're going to be looking ... Do we have the thing for me yet? Working on it? Okay, so the title of the topic today is, "Why did Jesus feed 5000 if it really happened?" We're going to look at the text of John chapter 6 verse 1, and we're going to begin by looking at the story itself, John chapter 6 verse 1.

Read along with me silently, I'll be out loud, "Sometime after this Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee, that is the sea of Tiberius, and a great crowd of people followed him, because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick." In other words there was a great fascination with Jesus, because of the miracles. The miracles were the thing that were creating the interest.

Just picture us for a second, I've got a car big enough I can probably take seven, we can cram seven guys into my car. It's not an old VW hippie van, but I could probably fit seven people in my car. Hey, there's this incredibly awesome speaker speaking later today over at a city over here about 50 miles from us, and you can't believe some of the things he's been saying.

You can't believe some of the things that have been happening, who would like to go with me? Let's go, let's do a road trip, road trip, who wants to go? Raise your hands if you want to go. That's what was going on, that's the situation. There's almost like a frenzy, there was words in the Bible that are used are like the word people were amazed, people were amazed by what was going on with Jesus. And so reading on in the text, "Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples."

WHY THIS PARTICULAR MIRACLE?

The next thing is coming is this miracle, and I want to talk about why this particular miracle. It says that Jesus went up on a mountainside and nobody knows what mountainside it is, you do realize that there are brilliant intellectual scholars, theologians, historians, textual critics, all kinds of people who are very, very smart.

Tens of thousands of them who study all the most minute details of what the Scriptures say. In fact, it's very likely that there's more science directed at the Bible than almost any other topic or subject in the history of the world. It's a very scientific study thing this Bible, but they don't know where this took place.

There's just no way to know, however, I thought I would give you a feeling for where it might've been ... Similar to where it might've been, and this is the Beatitudes monastery. Now this is not where the Beatitudes took place either, but it's just a traditional site where something like this could have taken place. Jesus went on up on a mountainside for this miracle of the feeding of the 5000.

He was on a mountainside when he delivered the sermon on the Mount, so who knows? This could be the location for either both of those same things, or neither, or one or the other. Anyway up at the top of this little mountain here is this little monastery, and I've been in it, it's beautiful, it's lovely.

It overlooks this kind of a scene, when you look out over the wall on the side some of you have been there going down to the sea of Galilee. You can see an area down there, and when we read about this miracle the feeding of the 5000, it's not actually 5000 people, it's 5000 men and their families. We'll see that in the text, it's 5000 men, so just multiply it by what? Three or four, so they're either maybe 15,000, maybe 20,000 people down in this field and Jesus is teaching them.

We're there, we're there, in fact this is the parking lot over here, that's where our minivan is right over there. Then this is the field, this is the field, so you get the scene, get the scene, all right. Verse 4, "The Jewish Passover feast was near when Jesus looked up and he saw a great crowd coming toward him. He said to Philip, 'Where should we buy bread for these people to eat?' He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do."

Now this whole idea of testing him, I'm going to talk about that another time, but that is so interesting, because Jesus is poking on people all the time testing them, asking them questions, changing ... Just it's fascinating, but we'll get to that another time. I want you to know that this miracle that we're about to take a look at that took place in a field something like this somewhere around that same ...

It did take place around the shore of that lake somewhere, this is the only of the miracles, the only one that's recorded in all four Gospels. There's something very unique about this particular miracle. Let's take a look, let's take a look. Philip answered him, "Eight months wages would not buy enough bread for each one of these people to have a bite."

Now, I don't know about you, but when we piled in this van and started on this trip I forgot we might be gone for a while, so I didn't pack a lunch for myself. Guess what? I don't have a cooler with a bunch of turkey sandwiches with mayonnaise, lettuce, and tomato for you guys either, so this is the problem Jesus sees that these people have come and they didn't bring food.

Another of the disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother spoke up, here is a boy with five small barley loaves, so just picture in your mind five little tiny health-food store size loaves of bread, and two small fish. Yeah, about the size that you and I have caught, like really teeny tiny fish. The kind that you hold way out in front of you to take the picture.

Two small fish, "How far," he asked, "Will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have them sit down, have the people sit down, and there was plenty of grass in that place," as you can see if it was a place like this, "Plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down about 5000." There are 5000 men, and I think it's fairly reasonable to assume there are probably lots of women and children there too.

It doesn't say that there were, it doesn't say that there were not, logical that there were. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed those to those who were seated as much as they wanted, so nobody went home hungry that day. Jesus didn't do a half miracle, he didn't make half sandwiches, he made whole sandwiches, and this is the way Jesus does things.

He doesn't do things halfway, it's not a half miracle, it's a whole miracle, everybody got as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish, and when they had all had enough to eat he said to the disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over, let nothing be wasted." God never wastes anything, and so they gathered them and filled 12 baskets with pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

Now 12 basketfuls, I mean I don't know if they were big baskets, little baskets, but I've got some baskets at the house, I don't have 12 baskets. I thought about like going over to Pier 1 and buying 12 baskets, but you guys just aren't worth it, so I didn't do that. I'm going to just ask you to picture like 12 baskets, and pretty good size baskets I would think.

Out of these five little health-food store barley loaves, okay? That is pretty astonishing, also it's pretty hard to believe. It's pretty hard to believe, and then what are some of the reasons, and this is actually the question, a question on your notes today, first question. What are some of the reasons why we shouldn't be surprised that men question whether the miracles of Jesus really happened?

What are some of the reasons, maybe they're relevant to you, maybe they're just theoretical reasons, or philosophical, but what do you think are some of the reasons why this is hard to believe? This is going to be more than rhetorical, I'm actually asking you a question, which I don't usually do. Well, I ask you questions then, but I don't really want you to give me the answers. In this case I really do, what are some of the reasons do you think?

A lot of big fish stories out there, there are lies, okay? It would be because this is not something in our ordinary experience, and because people do lie, and because there is fake news, that maybe this is fake news, okay? There's number one. Okay, come on, look I'm the comedian here, not you, actually you're the comedian here. All right, so other real reasons.

Okay, so they, say it again. Okay, and so assuming that it were true, they're not at a place where they yet can believe that it's true. Now what might be some of the reasons why that would be the case?

Okay, they lack faith, right? It's not logical, so it's interesting to me that the belief in miracles will not be decided on scientific grounds, on mathematical grounds, or on historical grounds. Belief in the miracles is basically going to be decided on philosophical grounds. In other words, if you come to the miracles, and you do not believe in the possibility of miracles, then there's no way you can believe this story is true.

Before you decide whether or not this really happened, you have to decide is it possible that this could actually happen? Here we come to basically the distinction Lewis does the best job perhaps, a lot of people think he does, I think he does too. Lewis does perhaps the best job of drawing the distinction between the worldview of the naturalist, and the super-naturalist.

I've talked to you about this over the years, I even put up one of my seminary notes, you remember the little hand drawn ... Some of you were here, I put up a little hand drawn thing of the different boxes and so forth. The naturalist, or the materialist believes that what you see is all there is. This is it, this is it, and that there is nothing that exists outside of nature.

The super-naturalist says, "Well we have nature, but I need to at least allow for the possibility that there could be something that exists outside of nature." Then the next step of that would be, that if there is in fact something that exists outside of nature, might it have the possibility of intervening or interacting or overriding what happens in nature?

We call this, this entity this a being, not just a force. Aristotle called it the uncaused cause, or the unmoved mover, an impersonal force. We understand this force that exists, Christians understand that there is outside of nature a force that exists that, that force is a personal being, we call that personal being God. Before you can believe that there a miracle has taken place, you must first believe that it's possible for a miracle to take place.

Lewis points out that this is the very first thing ... Hey I saw this play, some of you might've seen it too, the Max McLean play, "CS Lewis, the most reluctant convert." Have you seen that anybody? You saw it? Yeah, so I saw it this last week with my wife, and it was so interesting. I was reminded, he took most of his ... He said afterwards that 98% of what he said were the actual words of Lewis, and that he'd taken most of what he said out of CS Lewis's autobiography, "Surprised by Joy," which I hadn't read in a long time.

It looks like I really, really read it when I read it, because it's got all kinds of underlines and notes in it. During his play, his one-man play, which got a standing ovation. Can you imagine one man talking for 80 minutes and then getting a standing ovation it's crazy. How come I never get a standing ovation? In the play and in the book Lewis said something that is very fascinating, because his story is, Lewis's story is that he was an atheist, and not only an atheist, a very smart atheist, and so he had good reasons for his atheism, and good explanations of why it was a good thing to be an atheist.

Then he began to read some books, and books ... I love Christian literature, I write books, I've written 20 books. I'm working on my 21st, I hope you buy the 21st too, and the reason that I write books, is because I see the power, the power of literature, especially the power of Christian literature. I've seen how interesting it is over the years how a man will get hold of a book, and then God will use the book to get hold of the man.

That's what was going on with CS Lewis, and so he read Chesterton, GK Chesterton, "The Everlasting Man," and then he writes, "Early in 1926 the hardest boiled of all the atheists I knew sat in my room on the other side of the fire. Now he was an atheist, Lewis was also an atheist, but he said, "I sat across the room from the most hard boiled atheist I'd ever known."

He remarked that the evidence of the historicity of the Gospels was really surprisingly good. "Rum thing," he said, "All that stuff of Frazier's about the dying God, rum thing. It almost looks as if it really happened once." I'm reading through the Gospels once a month this year, if you've been here you know that. I told my wife this week something is happening.

You know how your story, you can talk about any part of your story at any time. If somebody asks you about something that happened three years ago, you can tap into that and talk about that, right? When someone asks you something about what happened in the life of Jesus three years ago, or three years before his crucifixion, you find that a little bit more difficult to tap into that, right?

I told Patsy I said, "It's so interesting, I'm reading this story now with enough repetition that I have this feeling that in two years time I will be so immersed in this story that I'll be able to tap into it as though it were my own story." Reading this miracle here, reading this miracle here, I feel like I was there. I'm starting to feel like I was there. I've already crossed the Rubicon I believe in God, I believe in that power, that force that exists outside of nature.

I wrote this, "The possibility of such power," that's my subject line, "Does it not make sense that a being powerful enough to create the natural world, would reserve the power to from time to time intervene and overwrite it?" Well of course, I mean it's just a philosophical idea, all right? You can either believe it, it's either true or it's not, and you can either believe it or not believe it.

I've chosen to believe it, so I believe in the possibility of miracles, so when I read this miracle I believe it, and not only that, I mean I really feel like I'm there. I feel like I'm in my VW hippie bus with six or seven of you strange cats, and we've parked over here, and we've been sitting over here, and I'm full, I'm full. I think it's important for us to understand that this is why these stories have been given to us.

These stories have been given to us, so that we might believe. Thomas wasn't there when Jesus appeared. He said to them, the other disciples, later he said, "Unless I can't put my finger in the wounds, and put my hand in his side, I'm not going to believe." Later he was able to put his fingers into the wounds in his hand, into the side where the spear had been thrust and he said, "I believe."

Jesus said, "You see because you believe, blessed are those who do not see and yet believe." Then the Scripture goes on, then John writes, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs, but these have been written down, so that, why?" "So that you may believe," and so this miracle, why this particular miracle? It's so that we would believe, the Big Idea, **oh my goodness, he really is who they say he is.**

Guys, let's get back in the minibus, hey, I'm going back to Orlando, I can't wait to tell everybody what just happened. Now just picture if we'd gone out there, and we heard this really cool speaker and nothing had happened. Would we have gone back to Orlando and told our friends if we liked his speech? Sure, the rule is you tell 10 people if you don't like it, and two people if you do, or whatever the rule is, there's a rule like that you know.

Yeah, we'd all go back, and now let's say we can figure out how to get 10 of us into my little VW minibus, there are 10 of us. We're trying to set the Guinness World Book of Records for how many people you can fit in a VW bus. Let's say we have 15 of us, we get back to Orlando, we start telling everybody about this cool guy, but we're only telling two a piece.

We tell 30 people, but what do you think happens when you experience the miracle? Whether you were there or not there like Thomas, verse 14, "After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say," oh my goodness, this really is who they say he is. They began to say, "Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus knowing what that they intended to come and make him king by force withdrew again to a mountain to himself. "This whole solitude thing, that's another theme I want to get to at some point, all right?"

WHAT'S THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE MIRACLES?

What's the driving force behind the miracles? Well I've told you that in the large part it's so that we would believe. If you have made the philosophical decision that you believe in the possibility of miracles, it might be because you believe in God, or so that you could believe in God.

You believe in the possibility of miracles, the next issue is do you believe in the probability, or what is the probability of a miracle? Even though miracles are possible, that still isn't enough of a motivational reason for God to actually do one. Why does he actually do one? Well the big picture is, is so that we would believe, because he's a Savior.

In this particular miracle which we're looking at, as I said there are four accounts, and in the Matthew passage Matthew chapter 14 verse 14 it says, "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them." Later in Matthew chapter 15, John doesn't record the feeding of the 4000, but there's another similar miracle, the feeding of 4000.

In that particular miracle the same thing this is said, that it is because of his compassion that Jesus fed them. It is the existence of a supernatural being who we call God, who has the ability to intervene and override nature with super nature, that leads us to believe in the possibility of miracles. The probability of miracles, the motivational force behind this is that God loves us.

He had compassion on them, Matthew 9:36, "Jesus got out of the boat, and he looked on the crowds and saw that they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd, and he had compassion on them." The driving force behind these miracles, what did I do with ... Oh, there it is, the driving force behind these miracles is this immense love that Jesus Christ has for us.

We see it play out, and it's important to understand that half of you in that minibus with me that day, you didn't know the Lord. You may still not know the Lord, but Matthew chapter 5, I think it's maybe around verse 45, but anyway in the sermon on the Mount Jesus said that the father makes his sun to rise on both those who believe and those who don't believe.

It's the doctrine of common grace, common grace. God loves everybody, God makes his sun and everything to shine and to fall the rain on everybody, because God does love everyone. He wasn't making a distinction, there was no precondition to be able to ... Okay, do you want a sandwich? Do you believe in me? Do you want a sandwich? Do you believe in me?

You only half believe, okay? You only get a half sandwich. There's no conditionality to this love, and that in itself, understanding not only the possibility of miracles, but that because God does love us, there is a real probability that he wants to intervene in our lives and override nature with super nature in order to

provide us with something that we need, and because of that we can say, "Oh my goodness, he really is who he says he is."

THE MIRACLES ARE WHAT GIVE US HOPE THAT THE GOSPEL IS TRUE

Miracles give us the evidence, the proofs to be able to release us to the possibility and the probability that the miracles are true. Then just finally, so the miracles are what give us hope that the gospel is true. What is the gospel? Not everybody knows, most of you know, but not everybody in this room knows what the gospel is. The gospel is that Jesus Christ loves you, and he came to give his life for you, and to provide all kinds of proofs for you, so that you could say, "Oh my goodness, oh my goodness, he really is who he says he is."

Would you pray with me, our father in heaven, our dearest father, we come to you today wanting a little bit more of this oh my goodness. Lord I pray that you would help us to be part of this story. Lord put us there in this story, help us to see what the people who came from all over saw. Hear what they heard, feel what they felt, think what they thought, and eat the bread of life.

Help us to walk out of here today with a greater sense that oh my goodness, it's really true. We ask this in Jesus name, your name Lord, the one we're talking about today, Amen.