

# Who Fed The 5000?

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Date: 25 June 2023

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, for a wee while tonight, I'd like us to turn back to Matthew chapter 14, and I want us to look at one of the most famous events recorded in the Bible, the feeding of the 5,000. And I want to just, I'll read again verses 14 to 16, but we'll look at that section of the chapter together. When Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. Now, when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, this is a desolate place, and the day is now over. Send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves. But Jesus said, they need not go away, you give them something to eat. And as we look at this passage, I want to ask this question that is our title for this evening. Who fed the 5,000? Now, you might say, well, that's obvious. It was Jesus. And that's, it's one, this is one of the stories that, that it's one of, you know, the first things we learn about Jesus, if we went to

Sunday school or anything like that, this is, as I said, is one of his most famous miracles. Jesus fed 5,000. Of course, it was actually probably a lot more than 5,000. It was just 5,000 men. And on top of that, there were women and children. And so it's two, who fed the 5,000? Jesus did. And this is one of his greatest miracles. But what I want us to think about tonight is the fact that if we ask this question, who's fed the 5,000?

If in our answer, we just say Jesus, then we are at risk of missing something very, very important in this passage. Because as you read through it, Matthew makes it very clear that even though it was Jesus who was ultimately responsible for the miracle, the crowd was actually fed through the disciples. So who fed the 5,000? In a very important sense, the answer to that question is that it was the disciples. Now, maybe you don't believe me. Well, let's look at the passage. Verses 14 to 18 were told that there's, 14 to 15 were told that there's a huge crowd. Jesus had compassion on them. But when evening came, the disciples are concerned. So it's evening here, the disciples are concerned, that it's a desolate place. You need to send, the day is over. They need to be sent away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves. In verse 16, though, Jesus replied to the disciples and he said, they don't need to go away. And then he says something extremely important. He says, you give them something to eat. Jesus says, you feed them. And they immediately reply in verses 17 to 18 saying, we can't. We've only got five loaves and two fish. We don't have anywhere near the resources needed in order to feed the crowd. But Jesus responds and says, bring that bread and fish to me. And then we come to verse 19 and 20.

Jesus performs a miracle, orders the crowds to sit down on grass, takes the five loaves and the two fish, looks up to heaven, said a blessing, breaks the loaves, gives it to them and to the disciples. And then the disciples gave them to the crowds. And afterwards, they pick up 12 broken baskets. I want you to see the connection between verse 16. Jesus says, you give them something to eat. And verse 19, the disciples gave them something to eat.

Jesus tells his disciples to feed them. And then the disciples go on and do it in a very, very important sense. You ask the question, who fed the 5000? It was those guys. It was the disciples. Now, it's true that they could never have done that without Jesus' help. They couldn't have done it on their own. They're completely dependent on him. But the key point is that with his help, they did it. And this is raising for us one of the most important lessons that we can ever learn as a church. And that's what I want us to think about together tonight, because I think there's stuff being said here in God's Word that is so important and so helpful for us to recognize. And I want us to explore three things. I want us to think about the disciples who can see a massive need in front of them. I want us to look at the disciples who feel as though they have got next to nothing. And I want us to look at Jesus who can organize miracles. So first of all, we've got disciples who see a massive need. One of the interesting things to notice is that this day, the day when this happened, was actually an amazing day even before the 5000 were fed. As murder read to us after Jesus heard

about the death of John the Baptist, he withdrew in order to have time on his own, no doubt, to grieve the passing of his cousin. But the crowd hear about it and they make their way around the lake on foot and by the time Jesus arrives, the people are there to meet him. And Jesus, even though he is grieving, he has compassion in the crowd and he heals. They're sick. So it's already an amazing day. But these great events, this huge crowd coming to hear Jesus, to be healed by him, it creates a need that the disciples recognize. And that need can be broken down into three parts. First of all, there's a problem with the place where they're located. And so the disciples say, this is a desolate place. In other words, they're miles away from the towns and the villages. There's nothing there and the surroundings that they're placed in creates a problem. Secondly, there's a problem with the time. The day's over. And so time is short and there's pressure. If a solution is going to be found, they need to act quickly. And then thirdly, there's a problem with the scale of the task. It's a great crowd and it's going to be a huge job to get them fed and refreshed in order for them to walk home. So there's a problem with the place where they are. There's a problem with the time available. There's a problem with the scale of the task. The disciples can see a massive need right in front of their eyes. Now life is different today and I absolutely know that that is highly unlikely that today we're going to have a preacher in the middle of nowhere with a crowd of upwards of 10,000 people gathered there to listen to. We're not going to see that. We're highly unlikely to see that in Scotland this week. But what I want us to see is that there are so many clear and obvious parallels that we can draw from what we're seeing in this passage. We are surrounded by a crowd, by a community. We're surrounded by colleagues in our workplaces.

[ 8 : 01 ] We're surrounded by other children in school. We're surrounded by a crowd in our nation. We're surrounded by a crowd in our world. And that crowd is in desperate need. That crowd is in desperate need. And the same problems apply. There's a problem with the place. If we think of our own nation, there are lots and lots of ways in which I think I don't think I need to persuade you that there's lots of ways that Scotland is a kind of spiritual wilderness, a desolate place spiritually. And I think that's true because Scotland is like a desert because spiritually what you tend to have today is just mirages that people see. And I can give you examples. There's the illusion that wealth and success is going to make you feel like you're worth something. We see that so much in our nation. We see that so much in our island where you think if you have a certain level of income, if you have a certain size or style of house, if you have certain clothes, if you come across as successful, it will make you worth something that people will think you're special. So many people are chasing that mirage. There's the illusion in our society today that everyone can do what is right in their own eyes and everything will be peaceful. And you see that, that is a mindset that is running right through the secular West at the moment, that everybody can do what is right in their own eyes and everything will be fine. That is an illusion because those two statements don't sit beside each other. They cannot sit beside each other because in a world where we need moral and ethical boundaries, it cannot be the case that everybody does whatever is right in their own eyes. And there's the illusion, the mirage today that the best way to be happy is just be distracted. And so if we can pick up our phone or if we can get on social media or if we can just scroll through this, that and the next thing and just take our minds of everything, then that's the key to happiness.

So spiritually speaking, there's a problem with the place where the crowd around us is living. There's also a problem with the time available. Time is limited. And this is one of the things that is so obvious and yet so often ignored, so obvious, but so ignored. Every day that you add to your age is one more day that has been taken away from the rest of your life. Every day you add is one more that's taken away. And time is limited. In fact, time is short. Time is frighteningly short. It's short because it goes by so quickly. And I don't need to persuade any of that. It's something that people say to me so often. It just can't believe that time has gone by so quickly. Even think of this year. Can't believe it's June. Can't believe that the shortest night has passed. And it just goes by like that. And it's two of the years of our lives. We look back and I know that there are people here who've gone from 20 to 70 in the blink of an eye. Time goes by so quickly.

[ 11 : 58 ] And time is also short because we actually don't know when our lives will reach their last day. And for many of us, our time might be even shorter than we realize. Time is so precious. It's so short. There's an urgent need for everyone, for everyone to prepare for eternity. So there's a problem with the place, problem with the time available. There's a problem with the scale of the task. The crowd around us is massive. It's massive.

The mission field around us is massive. And it's not just huge. It's also very hard to move. So there's about 400 odd people in Carloway. There's about 40 odd people here tonight. And so we're sitting at about 10% of the population, which means 90% of the population aren't here. And even getting one new person here this time next week is hard. Even to get 1% for us to go from 10% of the population to 11% that is hard. And that's just one village. You think about the whole island. You think about the whole nation. The task is massive. So we can parallel with this passage, even though our circumstances are different.

There's the challenge of the place where we find ourselves. There's the challenge of time being incredibly short. There's the recognition that the task is huge. But there's another parallel that is so, so important between the physical circumstances of this crowd and the spiritual circumstances of the crowd around us. And that's the fact that there is hunger.

That crowd was hungry. And honestly, one thing that is becoming so, so clear is that there are many people around us who don't come to church and many people who don't seem interested in church and many people who we think would probably never come to church, but they are hungry. And yes, we might be living in a spiritual wilderness as a nation. And we might be surrounded by people who seem oblivious to the fact that time is short and eternity is huge and that all of us must give account to God. But at the same time, there is still a hunger. There's a hunger for truth. People want answers. People want to know the truth. There's a hunger for peace and especially a personal peace. So many people live and they are hiding despair.

[15:09] And their hearts are broken, whether that's because of things that have happened to them or things that haven't happened that they longed for, things that they've done that they wish they hadn't, things that they regret, things that they struggle with, things that they had wished for, whatever it is, there is a hunger for peace. People long to just to have that whole in their heart filled. And there is a hunger for hope. We live in a world where people's lives are constantly being confronted with the brutal, merciless reality of death. And in the face of that, we all need hope. There's a hunger for hope. The disciples could see the massive need around them. We have to ask ourselves the question, do we see the need around us?

Do we see that need? What do you see when you look at your village? When you look at your neighbors, when you look at your colleagues, do you see people who just need Jesus so much because that's what they are? They need Jesus more than anything else. And for anyone who's maybe not yet a Christian or not sure who you stand in terms of your faith, do you see the need in your own heart? Do you feel it? Maybe you don't. Maybe I've met people who have no interest in the gospel and they're like, I'm not bothered. And that's the way they are at the moment. But I think it's much more likely that anyone in here or anyone watching at home who's not yet a Christian is like, yes, I can see this need. I can see it. I can see that there's something missing. And I long for it to be filled. That is the hunger. That's the thirst that only Jesus can satisfy. So the disciples saw a great need. But when they saw that need, did they think to themselves, right, there's a massive need, we can do this, let's get together, come on, we're going to sort it. No, not at all. They did not have a sense of energy or courage or confidence at all. Instead, in this passage, we've got disciples who feel as though they've got next to nothing to offer. And you see that in verses 15 to 17. This is the conclusion of the disciples. They're like, there's a huge need here when a desolate place, the day's over. So you've got to send these threads away. Send them off because we cannot do it. And Jesus says to them, they don't need to go away. You can fix this. You give them something to eat. And they say to him, we've got nothing. We've just got five loaves and two fish. And the key point here is that that's a completely inadequate level of resources for the need that is in front of these disciples. So the disciples are in a situation where they can see the greatness of their need. And yet at the same time, they see how puny and inadequate their own resources are. And their conclusion is understandable.

They're like, Jesus, get this thread away from us because we can't do this. We've got nothing to offer. And right there, right there, we see one of the easiest and most common conclusions that we can come to as a church. We look around us, even in Carlyway, we look around us and we see a huge need.

And then we look at ourselves and we see a hopelessly inadequate level of resources. And the conclusion is easy and clear. We can't do this. We've got nothing. It's so easy to feel like that as a church. And you see the reality of that. Gone are the days when we just have to open the door and this gallery was full. Those days are gone. All our churches on the island are smaller. And even as

we function as a church, within that, so much responsibility is carried by a tiny number of people. We look at our finances. They're fragile. They're not as strong as we would like them to be. We don't have masses of resources. Everything is stretched. And we look at our prospects. I've seen statistical analysis of analyses of our churches on the island. You look at the numbers who are growing, going, you look at the age profile, you look at all of those factors and the trajectory is only in one direction. Downward. And so you think we've got nothing. We feel like that as a church. We can also feel like it as individuals. We don't feel capable or confident in serving. We feel hesitant about inviting others or about welcoming people into our homes. We're scared of questions, whether it's us asking people questions or other people asking us questions and we don't know the answers. We want to see things happen in our community. We want to see more Bible studies, more outreach, more discipleship. We want to see addiction support. We want to see invitations going to every member of our community. We want to see counseling developing. We want to see discussions. We want to see book groups. These are all things that we would love to see happen in our community. But for them to happen, we need people who can do it. And we go and look in the mirror and we're like, well, I can't. I've got nothing. And we are crushed by the same word that crushed the disciples. That word there. Only. We only have five rows and two fish. And we look at ourselves and we're like, we only have a few of us. I've only read a couple of books in my life. [ 21 : 52 ] I don't really know anything. I've only invited somebody once and they said, no, I'm only a weaver. I'm only a crofter. I'm only a teacher. I'm only a joiner. I only know a little bit about the Bible. And when it comes to my spiritual credentials, credentials, I've only got a list of failures. And all of that comes together. And it feeds a culture of pessimism, where we tend to think that what we try is not going to work. And we tend to think that that that if anything's going to happen, God alone has to do it because we can't. And there's that mindset and culture of pessimism, which is understandable, but it's not biblical. And we have to acknowledge that and we have to repent of it. In Scotland today, as disciples, as churches, we're all generally pessimistic. We say that it's dark days. It's a day of small things. It's not the way things once were.

We're surrounded by a nation that is in deep spiritual poverty. Things are looking bleak. And we stand as a church in the middle of that spiritual wilderness. And Jesus comes to us. And he says, you give them something to eat. You give them something to eat. And in this passage, that's exactly what happens. The narrative is very clear. The people in this crowd get their food from the disciples. They are the ones who fed the 5,000. And the reason why that can happen is because of Jesus, who can organize miracles. There's two crucial things that we need to notice as we bring things towards a conclusion. First thing to notice about this event is that it would have been impossible. It is impossible without Jesus. So this miracle is doing what every other miracle in the Gospels is doing. It's attesting to the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. In other words, the miracles are proving that Jesus is supernatural.

He is above the ordinary functioning of nature. He has unique power. He's able to do what nobody else is able to do. And so the miracles, this one and all the other ones, are telling us that Jesus is unique. He has a unique power. But not only that, the miracles tell us that Jesus uses that power for good. So he uses his power to heal people, to help people. And in this passage, he uses that power to feed people. And all of it is teaching us crucial truths about Jesus.

[ 24 : 57 ] It's teaching us that he has come as God the Son. That means that he has authority over the created order. You look at Jesus' miracles in all of them. He is exercising authority over the created order. Whether it's here in relation to food, whether it's later on in this chapter in relation to a storm at sea, whether it's in relation to illness and disease as he heals people, he is God the Son and he has authority over the created order. And he comes with a power that is unprecedented. He can do what only God can do. And that's why some people struggle to believe that Jesus performed miracles. Well, it all depends who you believe Jesus is. If you just believe that Jesus, if you believe that Jesus is just a person, then reading that he performed miracles makes you think, well, I'm not sure that's true. But if we recognize that Jesus is God the Son, then of course he can do miracles. Because that's what God can do. And Jesus has come to use that power to restore a broken and needy world. And that's the wonderful thing you see in all these miracles is a glimpse of the fact that Jesus has come to restore stuff. Jesus has come to restore our world so that disease no longer wrecks people's lives. So that storms and natural disasters no longer cause fear and pain and suffering. And so that we are no longer starved and hungry. Jesus has come to restore all of these things. The miracle is impossible without Jesus.

That's the first thing we've got to recognize. But the second thing that we must always see is that this miracle would not have happened without the disciples.

It would not have happened without the disciples. This miracle is not describing a one man show from Jesus. And that's so crucial. When you come to verse 16 to 18, Jesus, when the disciples come to Jesus and they say, this crowd needs to go because they've got nothing to eat, he doesn't say, I'll feed them. He says, you feed them and I will help you. And that is such an important thing for us to recognize. Jesus uses the disciples. He works through the disciples. They're the key channel through which Jesus performs this miracle. And that's because Jesus is able to organize miracles. And I've chosen those words really carefully. And I really hope that you'll see what I'm trying to say. Jesus is able to organize miracles. You see these two things in the passage.

You see a miracle, an astonishing multiplication of bread accomplished by the creator of the universe. And so the God who is able to design seeds to be put into the ground to grow and multiply into a whole pile of grain that can then be turned into bread and all sorts of other foods is the same God who is able to do the same process in a faster, miraculous way in that moment and as he fed the 5,000, an astonishing miracle takes place, bread and fish multiplied by Jesus.

But alongside the miracle, you also see organization. So Jesus gets the crowds to sit down. And we know from Mark's Gospel that they were actually put in groups of 50s and hundreds.

[ 28 : 35 ] And that Jesus then uses the disciples as a team to distribute the food to the crowd. And this is just such a brilliant combination between organization and miracles. You've got simple, clear, strategic organization from Jesus and through it, he works a miracle.

And what we've got to see is that right there is the pattern for how Jesus has built his church ever since. He's organized his people into a church community. He's given us a task to do.

He's given the different people in that church different gifts and different roles. He's given us a weekly pattern of worship and other activities, a list of duties to fulfill.

He's given us resources that are available. And he takes all of that organized stuff. And he works miracles through it. And this means that if we look at the needs around us, the spiritual needs around us today, whether it's in our village, in our workplaces, in our families, wherever it might be, if we see this massive need around us and we find ourselves thinking the task is huge. And if we look at ourselves and think we've got next to nothing, then Jesus is crying out to us through this passage tonight. And he's saying, get ready for a miracle. And it all rests on the key phrase that we have here in verse 18. Jesus says, bring them here to me.

We do not have many resources just like these disciples, but Jesus says, bring them to me. And when we come to Jesus with our small resources, he is the one who brings about amazing results. So the disciples took their tiny plate of bread and fish to Jesus.

[ 30 : 39 ] He turned those 12 men into the feeders of 5,000 people. And we need to do exactly the same. We need to bring our small feeling resources to Jesus. And we need to let him organize a miracle through us. And it can happen. And I'll give you some examples of how it can happen. Take that thing out your pocket. Get your phone and bring it to Jesus because he can organize a miracle through your phone. You can text someone and invite them to church. You can tell someone that you're praying for them. You can send someone a link for a sermon. You can share a Bible verse through your phone.

You can pick that up before you go to bed tonight and do something that will take 30 seconds and Jesus can do a miracle through it. Or think of your cooker. Anybody who knows me will think, well, Thomas, you and a cooker, well, it's going to be a miracle for anything good to happen there. But for those of you who can use a cooker, think of your home. Think of your dining room table. Think of inviting somebody around, showing them that you care about them, and telling them that you've had a good week because Jesus has helped you, showing them that Jesus cares. And through making a simple meal and inviting somebody around to your home, Jesus can make a miracle happen. Think of someone you know who's struggling. You only need to say three words to them for Jesus to potentially work a miracle. You only need three words. You can simply say to the person who's struggling, are you okay? And from that starting point, you can show that you care. You can encourage them, listen to them, love them, stick with them, and Jesus can make a miracle happen. And you might be thinking, Thomas, you're crazy. But if you think that it's crazy to talk about a piece of technology or to talk about hospitality or to talk about reaching out to those who are in need, and think that's not how mission works, if you think that

I'm crazy, then you know nothing about church history. Because for the last 2000 years, Jesus has taken technology, whether it was the papyrus that the New Testament was written on 2000 years ago, whether it's the printing press that shaped the Reformation 500 years ago, whether it's the phone and internet that spreads God's word all across the nations today. He takes technology and he works miracles. Same with hospitality. For 2000 years, Jesus has been using dinners to further his kingdom. And the same with showing compassion and the same in a million other ordinary everyday ways, Jesus makes them the channel through which he builds his church.

The key point is this, Jesus is not going to do his work without us. He's going to do his work through us. He's going to do his work through you. And he has done already. And I think because so many examples in which the people I'm looking at right now have been used by God to further his kingdom and he's going to keep on doing it. Because Jesus doesn't feed the 5000 on his own.

[ 34 : 30 ] He does it through his disciples. And Jesus doesn't convert Carl away or revive Carl away on his own. He does it through his disciples. And that is just so good. It's so exciting. It's so brilliant.

Jesus organizes ordinary people like us who've got not very much to offer. And he brings us into a church community of love and worship and discipleship and evangelism. And every single person in that church has not got very much in terms of skills or talent or resources. Our five loaves and two fish look pretty pathetic and they feel pathetic. But that's exactly the kind of people that Jesus works through. It's through that church. It's through people like you that Jesus is doing a miraculous work of bringing people to faith in him. And it's all teaching us a really important lesson about our theology. Our theology is poor if we are not prepared to be stunned. Our theology is poor if we are not prepared to be stunned by what Jesus is doing. Stunned by who Jesus reaches.

Think of all the people who you think, well, they're never ever going to be in this one in the gospel. Don't be so sure. Think of all the people who think, oh, they've been coming for years, but they don't seem to have taken the step. Well, that step might just come tonight because there are so many people for whom that's been their story. And we need to be ready to be stunned by who Jesus reaches.

Because that's what he's always done in this church. He's just brought in people, wealthy, poor, successful, failures, famous, nobody's, everyone. The gospel is for us all. And we need to be ready to be stunned who Jesus reaches. But we also need to be ready to be stunned by who Jesus uses. And boy, that is a truth that we've got to press into our hearts. Because it's so easy to think that the work of the gospel is only done by people who are better or smarter or cleverer or whatever.

[ 37 : 09 ] But we're actually all just stumbling along. And Jesus can stun us by who he uses. He's done that so many times. And I think the biggest surprise of all is when you realize that he can use you.

And he will use you. The feeding of the 5000 is one of the most famous, amazing, astonishing events in history. Who did it? It was the disciples.

The disciples did it because Jesus enabled them to do it. And that's the pattern that Jesus sets as a church. There's a lot of hunger around us. There's a lot of need around us. Jesus is saying to us as a church, you give them something to eat. And with his help, we will. So let's think about how we can do it. Let's pray about how we can do it. Let's talk about how we can do it. I want a flood of ideas about how we can reach our community. I want us to think about how we can use this building. I want us to think about how we can go out into that community. I want you to think about how you can use your house and your hobbies and the things that you like and everything else. And I want us just to pour these ideas onto the table and for us to go for it together and may Jesus leave us stunned at what he does through us. Amen.