# Feeding the Five Thousand

**Bible Stories Anthology — John 6; Mark 6:30-44**

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> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

## Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

## Five Loaves, Two Fish, and a Hillside of Hungry People

The disciples wanted a rest. They had just come back from preaching village to village, and they had heard terrible news: John the Baptist had been beheaded in Herod's prison. Jesus took them across the lake to a quiet place.

The crowd got there first.

Thousands of people had run around the shore on foot. By the time the boat landed, the hillside was covered with men, women and children who wanted to see him. Jesus could have sent them away. Instead, he looked at them and saw sheep without a shepherd, and he spent the whole day teaching them and healing their sick.

Now the sun was going down. There was no town nearby, no market, no food. The disciples said, *Send them away*. Jesus said, *Give ye them to eat*.

All they could find was one boy's lunch: five small barley loaves and two little fish.

That evening, on a grassy hillside by the Sea of Galilee, more than five thousand men, besides women and children, ate until they were full — and twelve baskets of leftovers were gathered up afterwards. The next day Jesus told the crowd what it meant: **"I am the bread of life."**

This is the story of the feeding of the five thousand — the only miracle of Jesus' ministry recorded in all four Gospels.

## The Setting

**When.** In the spring, about A.D. 29 by the reckoning this series uses. John says, **"And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh"** (John 6:4). It was the second Passover of Jesus' ministry John mentions, a year after his talk with Nicodemus (story 42). The grass on the hills was green after the winter rains (Mark 6:39). The disciples had just returned from the mission on which Jesus had sent them out two by two (Mark 6:7-13, 30), and word had just come that **Herod Antipas** had beheaded **John the Baptist** (Matthew 14:1-13).

**Where. "A desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida"** (Luke 9:10), on the north-eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, near where the Jordan flows into the lake. "Desert" here means *deserted*, *uninhabited*, not sandy waste: open grassy hillside, away from the towns. Bethsaida was the home town of Philip, Andrew and Peter (John 1:44). It lay just outside Herod Antipas's territory, in the land of his brother Philip — perhaps one reason Jesus went there after John's death.

**The accounts.** All four Gospels tell this story: **Matthew 14:13-21**, **Mark 6:30-44**, **Luke 9:10-17** and **John 6:1-15**. John alone tells of the boy, the barley loaves, and the conversation with Philip and Andrew; John alone records the long teaching that followed the next day in the synagogue at Capernaum (John 6:22-71).

**Who.**

- **Jesus**, about thirty-one or thirty-two years old.
- **The twelve apostles**, especially **Philip** and **Andrew**.
- **A lad** with five barley loaves and two small fish.
- **The multitude** — five thousand men, besides women and children.

**The administration.** The **Christ administration**, under the Law of Moses.

## The Story, Told Faithfully

## Come Apart and Rest

> **Mark 6:30** *And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught.*
>
> **Mark 6:31** *And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.*

**"The apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus."** *Apostle* means *one sent out*. Jesus had sent the twelve out two by two to preach repentance, cast out devils and heal the sick (Mark 6:7-13). Now they came back full of reports.

At about the same time, John the Baptist's disciples came to tell Jesus that John was dead. Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, had imprisoned John for condemning his marriage to his brother's wife, and at a birthday feast had him beheaded to keep a rash oath (Mark 6:17-29). **"And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus. When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart"** (Matthew 14:12-13). John had been Jesus' cousin and his forerunner. Jesus was grieving.

**“Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while.”** The apostles were exhausted. So many people were coming and going that they had not even had time to eat. Jesus cared for them. Rest is not a lack of faith; it is part of God’s provision. God gave Israel the sabbath; Jesus gave his weary friends a day apart.

> **Mark 6:32** *And they departed into a desert place by ship privately.*
> **Mark 6:33** *And the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him.*

**“And ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them.”** The crowd saw which way the boat was heading and ran around the north end of the lake on foot — a distance of several miles — and arrived before the boat did. Word spread from village to village, and people came out of every town. So much for a quiet day.

## Sheep Not Having a Shepherd

> **Mark 6:34** *And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.*

**“And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people.”** He stepped out of the boat, ready to rest, and found a crowd waiting.

**“And was moved with compassion toward them.”** The Greek word *splanchnizomai* comes from *splanchna*, the inward parts — the heart, the bowels. It means to be moved in your innermost being, to feel pity so deep it is felt in the stomach. Jesus did not feel irritation that his rest was spoiled. He felt compassion.

**“Because they were as sheep not having a shepherd.”** These were God’s people, Israel, and they had no one to care for them. Moses had prayed, long before, that God would appoint a leader **“that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd”** (Numbers 27:17). God had condemned Israel’s leaders through Ezekiel: **“Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? … And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd”** (Ezekiel 34:2, 5). And God had promised: **“And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd”** (Ezekiel 34:23). The son of David had come, and he was about to feed them.

**“And he began to teach them many things.”** He fed them first with the Word. Luke adds that he **“healed them that had need of healing”** (Luke 9:11). He gave them what they needed most before he gave them bread.

## “Give Ye Them to Eat”

> **Mark 6:35** *And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed:*
> **Mark 6:36** *Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat.*
> **Mark 6:37** *He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat.*

**“When the day was now far spent.”** Late afternoon. The sun was going down over the hills on the western shore.

**“Send them away.”** It was a sensible suggestion. There was no food. If the crowd did not leave soon, they would be walking home in the dark, hungry. The disciples were thinking practically, and perhaps they were also thinking of their own rest.

**“Give ye them to eat.”** *You* give them something to eat. The word *ye* is emphatic in Greek. Jesus put the problem back in their hands. He knew it was impossible for them. He wanted them to know it too.

John tells us how Jesus put it to Philip:

> **John 6:5** *When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?*
>
> **John 6:6** *And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.*
>
> **John 6:7** *Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.*

**“He saith unto Philip.”** Why Philip? He was from Bethsaida, the nearby town (John 1:44). If anyone knew where to buy bread around here, Philip did.

**“And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.”** *Prove* means *test*. Jesus was not asking for advice. He already knew what he would do. He wanted to see what Philip would say — whether Philip would look at the problem, or at him.

**“Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient.”** A “penny” was a *denarius*, a day’s wage for a labourer (Matthew 20:2). Two hundred denarii was the wages of two hundred days’ work — more than half a year’s income — and Philip calculated that even that much would not buy each person even a little. Philip had done the arithmetic, and the arithmetic said: impossible.

## A Lad with Five Barley Loaves

> **John 6:8** *One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith unto him,*
>
> **John 6:9** *There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?*

**“Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.”** Andrew is always being introduced as Peter’s brother, and he is always bringing someone to Jesus: he brought Peter (John 1:41-42), here he brings a boy with his lunch, and later he brings some Greeks who wanted to see Jesus (John 12:22).

**“There is a lad here.”** A *lad*, a young boy, perhaps sent with food for the day by his mother. Only John tells us about him. Of all the thousands on that hillside, he was the one whose food was found and given.

**“Five barley loaves.”** Barley bread was the bread of the poor. Wheat bread was better and cost more; barley was cheaper, coarser, and was even fed to animals. These “loaves” were small, flat, round cakes, about the size of a hand, enough for one meal for one person. The boy was poor, or his family was.

**“And two small fishes.”** The word is *opsaria*, *little fish*, the kind eaten with bread as a relish — probably small fish dried or salted to keep them. The town of Magdala on the western shore was known in Greek

as Taricheae, from the word for *salting fish*, and salted fish from the Sea of Galilee was sold far and wide.

**"But what are they among so many?"** Andrew found the boy's lunch and brought it, which was more than anyone else did. But he could not see how it would help. *What good is this among so many people?*

That question had been asked before. In the days of Elisha, during a famine, a man brought the prophet a gift:

> **2 Kings 4:42** *And there came a man from Baalshalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat.*
>
> **2 Kings 4:43** *And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof.*
>
> **2 Kings 4:44** *So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the LORD.*

Twenty barley loaves for a hundred men — and there was some left over. Now there were five barley loaves for five thousand men, besides women and children. A greater than Elisha was here.

## By Hundreds and by Fifties

> **Mark 6:38** *He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes.*
>
> **Mark 6:39** *And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass.*
>
> **Mark 6:40** *And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.*

**"How many loaves have ye? go and see."** Jesus started with what they had. Not what they lacked, but what they had.

**"He commanded them to make all sit down."** Before there was any food in sight, Jesus told the disciples to seat thousands of people as if for a meal. It took faith for the disciples to obey, and faith for the people to sit and wait.

**"By companies upon the green grass."** John notes, **"Now there was much grass in the place"** (John 6:10). It was spring, just before Passover, when the hills of Galilee are green. Mark, who probably got his account from Peter, remembered the colour.

**"And they sat down in ranks."** The Greek word is *prasiai*, repeated: *prasiai prasiai*, literally *garden beds*, *garden beds*. Seen from the hillside, the groups sitting on the green grass in their coloured clothing looked like rows of flower beds in a garden. It is an eyewitness memory.

**"By hundreds, and by fifties."** Orderly groups, so that the food could be handed out and everyone counted. When Moses organised Israel in the wilderness, he appointed **"rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens"** (Exodus 18:21). Here was a new Moses, organising God's people in the wilderness, about to give them bread.

## He Blessed and Brake

> **Mark 6:41** *And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all.*

Five verbs describe what Jesus did: he **took**, he **looked up**, he **blessed**, he **brake**, and he **gave**.

**"He looked up to heaven."** He looked to God, the source of every gift. Jesus did nothing of himself (John 5:19). When he raised Lazarus, he likewise **"lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me"** (John 11:41).

**"And blessed."** John says **"when he had given thanks"** (John 6:11). To *bless* food, in Jewish custom, was to bless God for it — to thank Him. The blessing Jews say over bread, recorded in the Mishnah a little later, is: *"Blessed art thou, O LORD our God, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth."* Jesus thanked God for five loaves as if they were enough. He gave thanks *before* the miracle, not after.

**"And brake the loaves."** He broke the flat cakes into pieces, as the head of a household did at every meal.

**"And gave them to his disciples to set before them."** The miracle happened in the giving. Somewhere between Jesus' hands and the disciples' baskets and the people's hands, the bread multiplied. No one saw a pile of bread appear. The disciples kept going back for more, and there was always more. The disciples themselves carried it out. Jesus used them to feed the crowd: *Give ye them to eat* — and they did, with what he gave them.

## They Were All Filled

> **Mark 6:42** *And they did all eat, and were filled.*
> **Mark 6:43** *And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes.*
> **Mark 6:44** *And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men.*

**"And they did all eat, and were filled."** Not a little taste each, as Philip feared, but **"as much as they would"** (John 6:11). *Filled* is the word used of animals fed until they are satisfied. Everyone ate until they could eat no more.

**"About five thousand men."** Matthew adds, **"beside women and children"** (Matthew 14:21). In that culture, crowds were counted by the men. With women and children, the whole crowd may have been ten or fifteen thousand people or more.

John adds Jesus' instruction afterwards:

> **John 6:12** *When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.*
> **John 6:13** *Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.*

**"Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost."** The one who could feed thousands from five loaves did not waste what was left. God's abundance is never an excuse for carelessness.

**“And filled twelve baskets.”** The word is *kophinos*, a wicker basket for carrying food — the kind Jewish travellers carried, so that they could take their own food and not have to eat what Gentiles served. (The Roman poet Juvenal even mocked the Jews of Rome for their basket.) There were twelve baskets, one for each apostle. Each man who had wondered how to feed the crowd came back carrying more than the boy’s whole lunch. Some readers also see in the twelve a picture of the twelve tribes of Israel, all fed by their shepherd; the text does not say so, but the number is not likely to be accidental.

There was more left over at the end than there had been at the beginning.

## “This Is of a Truth That Prophet”

> **John 6:14** *Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.*
>
> **John 6:15** *When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.*

**“This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.”** The people remembered Moses’ promise: **“The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken”** (Deuteronomy 18:15). Moses had fed Israel with bread from heaven in the wilderness (story 15). Here was one who fed them with bread in the wilderness too. They were right that he was the Prophet. Peter later preached the same: **“For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me”** (Acts 3:22).

**“They would come and take him by force, to make him a king.”** But they wanted the wrong kind of king. A king who would feed them every day, throw off Rome, and give them the kingdom now, without repentance and without a cross. It was the very temptation Satan had offered in the wilderness: bread, and the kingdoms of the world, without God’s way (story 40).

**“He departed again into a mountain himself alone.”** Jesus would not be made king that way. He sent the disciples away by boat and the crowd away to their homes, and went up the mountain alone to pray. That night he came to his disciples walking on the sea (story 45).

## The Bread of Life

The next day the crowd found him on the other side of the lake, in the synagogue at Capernaum. There Jesus explained what the bread had meant. His words are among the most important he ever spoke.

> **John 6:26** *Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.*
>
> **John 6:27** *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*

**“Ye seek me … because ye did eat of the loaves.”** Jesus saw through them. They had not understood the sign; they just wanted more free bread.

**“Labour not for the meat which perisheth.”** The bread they ate yesterday was gone; they were hungry again today. **“But for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.”** There is food that lasts for ever.

**“Which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.”** God had put His seal on Jesus, as a king seals a document to show that it is genuine and carries his authority. Jesus gives everlasting life because God sent him and authorised him.

> **John 6:28** *Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?*
> **John 6:29** *Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*

**“What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?”** They wanted a list of things to do. **“This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.”** Here is the heart of it. The only “work” God asks is to believe. And notice whom they were to believe on: **“him whom he hath sent.”** God is the sender; Jesus is the one sent.

They asked for a sign — though they had seen one the day before — and pointed to the manna: **“Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat”** (John 6:31, quoting Psalm 78:24).

> **John 6:32** *Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.*
> **John 6:33** *For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.*
> **John 6:34** *Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.*
> **John 6:35** *And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*

**“Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you.”** It was not Moses who fed Israel, but God. And God was now giving the *true* bread — the real thing, of which the manna was only a picture.

**“He which cometh down from heaven.”** As in his words to Nicodemus (story 42), “from heaven” means *from God* — sent by God, given by God, having his life from God. The manna came down from God; so did His Son. This series understands “came down from heaven” this way throughout John’s Gospel, as it did in the story of the manna (story 15).

**“I am the bread of life.”** This is the first of the great “I am” sayings in John: *I am the bread of life* (6:35), *the light of the world* (8:12), *the door* (10:9), *the good shepherd* (10:11), *the resurrection, and the life* (11:25), *the way, the truth, and the life* (14:6), *the true vine* (15:1). Each one is a picture, a metaphor, of what Jesus is to those who believe.

**“He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”** Coming to him and believing on him are the same thing. Bread satisfies hunger for a day; he satisfies for ever. The woman at the well heard the same promise about living water (story 43).

> **John 6:37** *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*
> **John 6:38** *For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.*
> **John 6:40** *And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

**“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”** *In no wise* is a double negative in Greek, the strongest possible: *I will never, ever throw him out.* No one who comes to him is turned away.

**“Not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”** Jesus had a will of his own, and he set it aside to do his Father’s will, as he would in Gethsemane: **“nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done”** (Luke 22:42). He and his Father are two, and the Son submits to the Father.

**“And I will raise him up at the last day.”** Four times in this teaching Jesus promises to raise up the believer **“at the last day”** (6:39, 40, 44, 54). Everlasting life is not only a present gift but a future resurrection. The hope is not that the dead go somewhere else at death, but that they will be raised.

The crowd murmured, as Israel murmured over the manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16:2). Then Jesus said something harder still:

> **John 6:51** *I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

**“The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”** Here Jesus points to the cross. He would give his own body, his own life, so that the world might live. He went on, **“Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you”** (6:53).

The crowd was shocked: **“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”** (6:52). They took it literally, as Nicodemus took the new birth literally, and the woman the living water. But Jesus explained:

> **John 6:63** *It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*

He was not speaking of eating meat. **“The flesh profiteth nothing.”** To “eat his flesh and drink his blood” is to receive by faith what he gave in his death — to take his life into yourself by believing, as a man takes food into his body by eating. The words are a figure of speech — the figure called **hypocatastasis**, where one thing is put for another without saying “like” or “is”: eating stands for believing. Verse 35 has already told us so: *he that cometh to me … he that believeth on me.* Later Paul taught believers to remember Christ’s death with bread and a cup, **“in remembrance of me”** (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

## “To Whom Shall We Go?”

> **John 6:66** *From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*
>
> **John 6:67** *Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?*
>
> **John 6:68** *Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*
>
> **John 6:69** *And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

**“Many of his disciples went back.”** Yesterday thousands wanted to make him king. Today, when he told them that he had come to give his life and that they must believe on him rather than seek free bread, many walked away. The crowds followed for the loaves; not all would follow for the truth.

**“Will ye also go away?”** Jesus did not chase them or soften his words. He turned to the twelve and gave them the choice.

**“Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.”** Peter did not understand everything Jesus had said. But he knew where life was to be found. There was no one else to go to.

**“Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”** This is the King James reading, from the later manuscripts. The oldest copies read, **“thou art the Holy One of God.”** Either way, Peter confessed Jesus as the one God had set apart and sent — not God himself, but God’s Holy One, His Christ, His Son.

## Where the Story Leads

## To the Messiah

**The greater Moses.** Moses fed Israel in the wilderness with bread from God; Jesus fed the multitude in the wilderness with bread multiplied by God, organised them by hundreds and fifties as Moses had, and was recognised as **“that prophet”** Moses promised (Deuteronomy 18:15). But he was greater: Moses could not give the manna; God gave it. And the manna could not give life: **“Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead”** (John 6:49).

**The greater Elisha.** Elisha fed a hundred men with twenty barley loaves, and some was left. Jesus fed thousands with five barley loaves, and twelve baskets were left.

**The good shepherd.** The crowd were sheep without a shepherd. God had promised to set His servant David over them as shepherd (Ezekiel 34:23). The son of David made them lie down in green pastures and fed them: **“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures”** (Psalm 23:2). He said, **“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep”** (John 10:11).

**The bread given for the world. “The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”** (John 6:51). On the night before he died, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples — the same actions as on the hillside — and said, **“This is my body which is given for you”** (Luke 22:19). He gave his life on the cross, God raised him from the dead, and he ascended to God’s right hand, from where he gives life to all who believe.

**The resurrection at the last day.** Four times Jesus promised, **“I will raise him up at the last day.”** He was raised first: **“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept”** (1 Corinthians 15:20).

**No more hunger.** In the age to come, God’s people **“shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more … For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them”** (Revelation 7:16-17).

## To the Grace Administration

**The work of God is to believe.** *What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?* **“This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent”** (John 6:29). Under grace Paul says the same: **“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”** (Ephesians 2:8-9). **“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness”** (Romans 4:5).

**God supplies. “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:19). **“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work”** (2 Corinthians 9:8).

**Give what you have.** The boy gave five loaves and two fish, and God multiplied them. **"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not"** (2 Corinthians 8:12). **"Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown"** (2 Corinthians 9:10).

**Give thanks first.** Jesus gave thanks for five loaves before they were multiplied. **"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you"** (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

**You give them to eat.** Jesus handed the bread to his disciples to give to the people. Believers today carry God's provision to others: **"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith"** (Galatians 6:10). And they carry the bread of life, the Word of God, to the hungry: **"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ"** (2 Corinthians 5:20).

**Remember him.** Paul received from the Lord the practice of breaking bread in remembrance of Christ's death: **"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come"** (1 Corinthians 11:26). **"For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread"** (1 Corinthians 10:17).

## To the Topic of Provision

- **Jesus has compassion** before he provides.
- **He feeds the soul first,** then the body.
- **He starts with what we have,** not with what we lack.
- **Human arithmetic says "impossible";** God's provision says "more than enough."
- **Small gifts in his hands become great.**
- **He gives thanks before the answer.**
- **He uses his people to distribute.**
- **There is more left over than we started with.**
- **Nothing is to be wasted.**
- **The greater bread is himself** — believed on, he satisfies for ever.

## The Main Takeaway

**In the spring, near Passover, Jesus took his weary apostles across the Sea of Galilee to rest, but the crowds ran ahead around the shore; moved with compassion because they were as sheep without a shepherd, he taught them and healed their sick all day; when evening came and the disciples said, "Send them away," he said, "Give ye them to eat"; Philip counted that two hundred days' wages would not buy enough, and Andrew found a lad with five barley loaves and two small fish — "but what are they among so many?"; Jesus had the people sit down on the green grass in companies of hundreds and fifties, took the loaves, looked up to heaven, gave thanks, broke them and gave them to the disciples to hand out, and five thousand men, besides women and children, ate until they were filled, and twelve baskets of fragments were gathered up. The people said, "This is of a truth that prophet," and would have made him king by force, but he withdrew; the next day he told them, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger," and "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" — the bread he would give was his own life, given for the life of the world, and he would raise up every believer at the last day.**

- **Bring what you have** — God can multiply it.
- **Give thanks before you see the answer.**
- **Let God use you** to feed others.
- **Seek the bread that lasts,** not only the bread that perishes.
- **Believe on him whom God has sent** — that is the work of God.
- **He will never cast you out.**

## For Our Learning — The People

- **Jesus.** The Son of God, the Prophet like Moses, the good shepherd, the bread of life.
- **The apostles.** Just back from their mission; tired, practical, and used to hand out the bread.
- **Philip.** From Bethsaida; tested with "Whence shall we buy bread?"; counted the cost.
- **Andrew.** Peter's brother; found the boy and brought him to Jesus.
- **The lad.** A boy with five barley loaves and two small fish — the only food found.
- **The multitude.** Five thousand men, besides women and children; fed, then wanting to make Jesus king.
- **John the Baptist.** Just beheaded by Herod Antipas (Matthew 14:1-13).
- **Simon Peter.** "Lord, to whom shall we go?"

## For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **Barley loaves** — small, flat, round cakes; the bread of the poor.
- **Small fishes (opsaria)** — dried or salted fish eaten with bread; Magdala's Greek name Taricheae came from fish-salting.
- **The denarius ("penny")** — a day's wage; two hundred denarii was over half a year's wages.
- **Desert place** — uninhabited country, here grassy hillside.
- **Green grass in spring** — the hills of Galilee after the winter rains, near Passover.
- **Sitting in companies** — groups of hundreds and fifties, like Moses' divisions of Israel.
- **Blessing God for bread** — "Blessed art thou, O LORD our God … who bringest forth bread from the earth."
- **Breaking bread** — the head of the house broke the loaves at every meal.
- **Wicker baskets (kophinoi)** — the food baskets Jewish travellers carried.
- **Counting the men** — crowds were numbered by the men; women and children besides.
- **The synagogue at Capernaum** — where the bread of life teaching was given.

## For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Simile** — "as sheep not having a shepherd" (Mark 6:34).

- **Repetition (epizeuxis)** — *prasiai prasiai*, "in ranks" (literally "garden beds, garden beds," Mark 6:40).
- **Erotesis (questions for effect)** — "what are they among so many?" (John 6:9); "Will ye also go away?" (6:67); "Lord, to whom shall we go?" (6:68).
- **Metaphor** — "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35): Jesus said to *be* bread.
- **Hypocatastasis (implied comparison)** — "eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood" (6:53): eating and drinking put for believing and receiving, as 6:35 and 6:63 show.
- **Antithesis (setting opposites against each other)** — "the meat which perisheth … that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (6:27); "the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (6:63).
- **Epizeuxis (doubling)** — "Verily, verily" (6:26, 32).
- **Synecdoche (a part for the whole)** — "bread" for all food and provision; "the world" (6:33, 51) for mankind.

## What the Bible Actually Says

- **This is the only miracle of Jesus' ministry recorded in all four Gospels.**
- **It happened near Passover, on green grass, near Bethsaida.**
- **Jesus was moved with compassion; they were as sheep without a shepherd.**
- **He taught them and healed them before feeding them.**
- **He told the disciples, "Give ye them to eat."**
- **He asked Philip to test him, knowing what he would do.**
- **A lad had five barley loaves and two small fishes.**
- **Jesus looked up to heaven, gave thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to the disciples.**
- **About five thousand men ate, besides women and children, and all were filled.**
- **Twelve baskets of fragments were gathered.**
- **The people wanted to make him king by force; he withdrew.**
- **Jesus said, "I am the bread of life."**
- **He said the work of God is to believe on him whom God has sent.**
- **He said he came to do the will of him that sent him.**
- **He promised to raise up believers at the last day.**
- **He said his words were spirit and life; the flesh profits nothing.**
- **Many disciples turned back; the twelve stayed.**

## God's Will and Intent

- **God has compassion on His people** and sent a shepherd to feed them.
- **God provides abundantly** — more than enough, with some left over.
- **God multiplies what is given to Him.**
- **God's work for us is to believe on the one He sent.**
- **God gave His Son as the true bread from heaven,** for the life of the world.

- **God will raise up at the last day all who believe.**
- **God gave His Son for us, raised him from the dead, and exalted him** — and through him gives everlasting life.