

The Five Thousand: Eating Fresh Manna Every Day
People Jesus Met, Part 15
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McLean Bible Church
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Well, we want to say a big good morning to all of our friends on the Internet campus around the world and to our friends out at our Loudoun campus, so are you ready? When I say three, one, two, three—GOOD MORNING! We're glad that you guys are with us today.

Hey you know, one of the great things about going to the Holy Land is that you get to see the places where all of the events of the Bible took place. For example, there's a place on the shore of the Sea of Galilee called Tabgha (spelling?). When the excavators dug at this city, they found the remains of a church from the 4th century A.D. When they cleared the rubble, they found under it the original mosaic floor from this church. I'm going to show you the centerpiece of that mosaic floor; as you see, it's a mosaic that has two fish and a basket of bread in it. The reason for this, of course, is because Tabgha is the site where Jesus fed the five thousand. This mosaic was built to commemorate the great miracle that was done there.

Every time I'm there at Tabgha, I remind myself that God did not do this great miracle so that we could turn it into art work. God did this miracle like He did every other one Jesus did, in order to teach you and me spiritual lessons that are life changing, spiritual truth that is life altering. This is what we want to talk about today as we continue in our series entitled "People Jesus Met." We want to look today at the encounter that Jesus had with the 5000 where He fed them with the fish and the bread, then we want to bring all of that forward and talk about what life-changing truth is embedded in this event that Jesus wants us to understand today.

I might add, just before we start, that whatever the truth is that Jesus wants to teach us from the feeding of the 5000, that truth must be really important, because the feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle Jesus ever performed that is actually recorded in all four gospel accounts. Obviously this is an important lesson we need to get.

So let's begin in John 6:1. "Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far side of the Sea of Galilee and went up on a mountain side and sat down with His disciples. But a great crowd of people followed Him because of the miracles that He had performed on the sick." Every time I read about the crowds following Jesus like this, I think of the movie "What About Bob?" I think about that poor psychiatrist who had finally gotten a few days set aside for him and his family, and then Bob—Bill Murray—follows him everywhere he goes. You know the movie.

Of course, the psychiatrist saw Bob as a bother, as a nuisance, as an annoyance, but that is not at all how the Lord Jesus Christ saw the crowds that followed Him. Look at verse 5. "When Jesus looked up and saw the great crowd coming toward Him, He said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?'" Mark chapter 6 adds that Jesus had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. You see, Jesus did not see the crowds following Him as a nuisance or as a bother; instead, the Bible says He saw them as sheep without a shepherd, and He was happy to be that shepherd they needed. Just like that, He is happy today to be our shepherd, no matter how many times we go to Him or call upon Him. Friends, we are never bothering Jesus, because He wants to take care of our needs, just like He wanted to take care of the needs of these people. Wow, that's great news, huh?!

Verse 6, "And Jesus asked Philip this to test him, for Jesus already knew what He was going to do. And Philip said, 'Lord, eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of these people just to have a little bite.' Another one of His disciples, Andrew, said, 'Lord, here's a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far is that going to go among so many people?'"

Verse 10, "Then Jesus said, 'Well, just have the people sit down.' Now there was plenty of grass in that place, so everyone sat down, about 5000 of them. Then Jesus took the loaves and gave thanks and distributed to those who were seated, as much as they wanted." This was an all-you-can-eat buffet. He did the same with the fish. When everyone had had enough to eat--literally the Greek word means that everybody had gorged themselves—Jesus said to the disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over," so they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the leftovers. The Bible

says that Jesus took the bread and the fish, lifted His eyes toward heaven and said (speaks Hebrew, then English), "Blessed are You, oh God, the Lord of the universe who brings forth bread from the earth," and then He began to give out pieces of bread and pieces of fish. He gave out so much food that the people were completely stuffed. In fact, friends, the only reason Jesus stopped making food is because the people just couldn't eat any more food.

Now you say, "Well, Lon, how do you explain that?" Well, you don't explain that. It's a miracle, pure and simple. It's a suspension of the natural laws of the universe, pure and simple. But listen, if you believe as I do that Jesus is Jehovah God Himself in human flesh, who made all the natural laws of the universe, for Him to suspend them whenever He feels like it, hey, no problem, friends.

Let's go on with our story. Verse 24 says, "In the morning, when the crowd realized that Jesus was not there, they went to Capernaum in search of Him. Then Jesus said to them, 'You are looking for Me because you ate the loaves and had your fill. You want more to eat. Do not work for the food that spoils but for the food that endures to eternal life, which I the Son of Man will give you.' So they asked Jesus, 'Well, what must we do to do the works that God requires?'"

The people are confused. They say, "Well, Lord, how do we do this? How do we get this eternal life food that You're offering to give us?" Jesus answered and said, "The work of God is this, to believe in the one He has sent." "What do you have to do to get eternal life," Jesus said, "It's very simple, friends. You have to believe in Me."

Now, this was the constant theme, the unbroken message of the Lord Jesus Christ when He was here on earth. Listen to what He says in John 6:40. "Everyone who believes in Me has eternal life." John 6:47 says, "The person who believes in Me has eternal life." John 11:25 says, "He who believes in Me will live, even though He dies here on earth." I could give you more, but every time Jesus talked about eternal life, this is what He said you have to do.

But you know, there's a problem here. The problem is that the word "believe" is one of those easy-to-misunderstand-what-it-really-means words. I mean, there's head believing. There's heart believing. There's a scientific believing. There's an in-your-gut

believing. Jesus wants to make sure that these 5000 people and you and I all know exactly what kind of believing it takes to unlock His promise of eternal life. So, He uses the miracle of the fish and the bread, which He had just done the day before, to explain to these people exactly what kind of believing He is talking about. Watch now. He says in verse 48, "I am the bread of life. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. This bread is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." "Then the Jews began to sharply argue among themselves and say, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' Jesus said, 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no eternal life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.'"

Now you say, "Lon, whoa. Stop, enough! What in the world is He talking about here? I mean, these are like gruesome words. Eat His flesh and drink His blood? What is He talking about?" Well you know, a lot of commentators have said that what Jesus is talking about here is communion, the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, where the bread symbolizes the body of Jesus and where the cup symbolizes the blood of Jesus, but friends, that won't work, and let me tell you why.

It won't work, because when Jesus spoke these words here in John chapter 6, the Eucharist, communion didn't exist yet. It's obvious whatever He's talking about to these people, they were able to do right then and there. Communion didn't exist. The Last Supper, where communion was instituted, is still several years away; He's not talking about communion.

You say, "Then what in the world is He talking about?" Well, put on your thinking caps now, and here we go. Watch and look at the connection Jesus makes. Here we are in John 6:29, 40, 47. Jesus says, "Believe in Me, and you will have eternal life." Then here in verse 54, Jesus said, "Eat My flesh and drink My blood, and you will have eternal life."

Stick with me. The point is that whatever eating Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood means, it's clear that in Jesus' mind, that was synonymous with believing in Him properly for eternal life. Does everybody see that? Those terms are the same in Jesus'

thinking. In other words, Jesus uses this phrase, "eat My flesh," to explain to us, to clarify for us exactly what kind of believing you and I have to do in order to activate God's promise of eternal life. Does everybody see that? Do you see that? That's the fulcrum of this passage. If you get this, we can make this passage make sense.

Of course, if you get that, then it means you've got a very important question on your mind right now. You know what our very important question is, don't you? Are you sure? All right, here we go now, nice and loud. I want to hear this all around the world on the Internet campus and out at Loudoun. Ready? One, two, three—SO WHAT? Yeah!

You say, "All right, Lon, look. I'm with you so far, but I need some handles on this thing. You've got to make this practical for me. I still don't quite have this locked down." Okay, let's do that. Remember what we said earlier? We said that the word "believe" is one of those easy-to-misunderstand-what-it-really-means words. The most common mistake that people make when it comes to the biblical word "believe" is that they limit that word to intellectual, in-my-head believing. Yes, I believe Jesus was the Son of God. Yes, I believe Jesus died on the cross. Yes, I believe Jesus rose from the dead. Yes, I believe Jesus is the Savior of the world . . . in my head, that is.

It reminds me of the true story of the famous French philosopher Voltaire. One day Voltaire was out walking in Paris with a friend, and they passed a Christian procession. Voltaire immediately stopped, stood at attention, and tipped his hat to the procession. His friend was shocked by this, and when his friend asked Voltaire why he did this, here's what Voltaire said. He said, "When God and I pass, we salute each other, but we never speak."

The point is that Voltaire had this kind of "I believe that God exists in my head believing," but friends, Jesus said here in John chapter 6 that is not the kind of believing that God grants eternal life to. This is not saving faith. This is not redeeming faith. Instead, Jesus said that saving faith, redeeming faith is like eating. You say, "Well, yeah. What does that mean?" Think about it. Think now. When we eat food, what do we do? Well, we take it in. We don't just take it into our head; we take it into every part of our being. We assimilate it. We digest it. We absorb it. We break it

down and distribute it to every cell in our body, and it becomes an inseparable part of us, an indivisible part of us. The point is that our relationship with food, my friends, is not an intellectual relationship. It is an intensely personal relationship. It is an experiential relationship.

I need to tell you that I love food. I do. I mean, the minute I get up from breakfast, I'm already thinking about what I'm going to have for lunch. And when I get up from lunch, I'm already planning dinner. As soon as dinner's over, I spend the evening thinking about what I'm going to have for breakfast the next morning. This is why I've had a weight problem all of my life. In my high school, I was 5'7" tall and weighed almost 300 pounds. That's true. 45 years ago, I had to lose a hundred pounds. Ten years ago, I had to lose 35 pounds. Two years ago, I had to lose another 20 pounds. I've been on a diet for the last 40-some years of my life.

Now why do I eat like this? Why do I keep putting myself through this agony? Well, it's because I do not have an intellectual relationship with food. (laughter) No, no. Besides, who wants an intellectual relationship with food anyway? I mean, we can purchase food, prepare food, smell food, see food, touch food, sit at the table with food all around us, but food is no good if we don't what? You've got to eat it, exactly!

Now you've got it. So now in John chapter 6, what does Jesus tell us? He tells these 5000 people and us that this is exactly the way it has to be with believing in Him. Jesus says to these folks, "Look, I am not some theological theory to be intellectually debated in some classroom. I am a personal Savior that is meant to be ingested and absorbed into every part of your life and made an indivisible, inseparable part of your being. This is the kind of believing I'm talking about."

You see, friends, it's not good enough to believe Jesus is the Savior. In order to activate eternal life, we've got to believe that Jesus is My Savior. It's not good enough to believe Jesus died on the cross for the world's sins; I've got to believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins. It's not good enough to believe that Jesus came to redeem the world; I've got to believe that Jesus came to redeem me, because I've reached out and ingested Him personally and experientially into my heart. This is saving faith. This is the kind of believing that activates Jesus' promise of eternal life.

And you know, the really tragic thing is that there are tens of thousands of people today sitting in churches all over the world or watching Christian television programming all over the world who are convinced that they have believed in Jesus properly, who are convinced that they are on their way to heaven when they die because they have given intellectual consent to the facts about Jesus in the Bible. But friends, they are tragically, eternally mistaken.

I had a man in my office a number of years ago. After talking to him a little bit about his faith, I turned to him and said, "Sir, I don't mean to offend you, but I need to tell you that you are 18" away from eternal life." He said, "What?" I said, "You are eighteen inches away from eternal life, because everything you've got is right up here in your head. You need to move it eighteen inches down into your heart if you want eternal life. It's not going to get you eternal life in your head. You've got to embrace Christ. You've got to absorb Christ. You've got to receive Christ like you do food."

And you know what? If you're here today and are like that man, if you're eighteen inches away from eternal life, in just a few moments we're going to give you the chance to change that, so you hold on just a second.

But you say, "But Lon, I'm here and am a believer in Jesus. I've already done this. I've already believed in Him right, so how does what Jesus say in John chapter 6, what life-changing truth is there for me in this passage?" Oh, there is much in every way, folks! Listen, here in John chapter 6, look what Jesus says in verse 48. He says, "I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate manna in the desert, yet they died, but I am the bread that comes down from heaven, which if a person eats of, they will not die. I am the living bread"—verse 51—"that came down from heaven." Verse 58, "Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever."

Would you notice here that Jesus compares Himself to the manna that God gave the Israelites to eat out in the desert? There's an enormous spiritual lesson there for you and me as followers of Christ. Listen to what we know about this manna. Exodus 16:4 says, "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out every day and gather enough for that day, and the people

called this bread manna. However, some of the people tried to store up jars of manna for the future, but when they opened it, it was full of maggots and it smelled.”

The important thing for us to see here is that God would not allow Israelites to store up manna. They had to go out and get it fresh—except for the Sabbath—every single day. The Lord was trying to communicate something to those Israelites, which is that you can’t live on yesterday’s manna. You can’t store it up. You’ve got to have fresh manna every day.

Friends, as followers of Jesus Christ, when it comes to our feeding on the living manna, the living bread of life, the living Lord Jesus Christ, the exact same thing is true. God wants us to understand that we can’t live on yesterday’s manna either. As followers of Christ, if we want the spiritual power that we need every day to live biblically and to act righteously and to hate sin, to love God, to love righteousness, and to pursue spiritual holiness; if we want the spiritual power that we need every day to love our spouse right, to love our children right, to love our neighbor right, then we need a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit every day. We need a fresh experience with the living Christ every day. We need to eat fresh manna from the Word of God every day.

Remember what Jesus said in the Lord’s Prayer? He said, “Give us this day our”—what?—“daily bread.” He didn’t say, “Give us our weekly bread” or “our monthly bread” or “our quarterly bread.” No, no, He said “daily.”

I’ve been a pastor now for almost 30 years. It’s my observation that the evangelical church in America today is plagued with an abundance of people who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, but who go out and live powerless, insipid, wimpy Christian lives every single day. This is a disgrace to the Lord Jesus Christ. Folks, it cheapens His power in the world’s eyes. People look at us and go, “Well, why can’t you deal with this? What’s wrong? I thought you walked with Christ.” It weakens our witness for His glory, and it undermines our efforts to bring people to Him.

Listen, do you know in NASCAR how they try to skip the last pit stop and just get across the finish line running on fumes? Well friends, we’ve got to be careful that we’re not NASCAR Christians. Do you understand what I’m saying to you? We’ve got to be careful that we’re not trying to run our life on fumes. If you’re here today and are a

follower of Jesus, I'm here to implore you to learn the lesson that Jesus wants us to get out of John chapter 6, that we cannot live on yesterday's manna. We cannot be NASCAR Christians, run on fumes and live the kind of powerful, effective Christian experience that God has ordained for us to live in the world. Friends, God serves up fresh spiritual manna every day in the Word of God, and we need to fill our lives with it if we want to have the spiritual vitality, the spiritual authenticity, and the spiritual power of the Holy Spirit operating in our lives every day. We need to be eating fresh manna every day.

So as we close, let me ask you a question. If you're a follower of Jesus here today, how is your daily time with the Lord? The key word there is the word "daily." How is your daily Bible reading? How is your daily Bible study? How is your daily Bible memorization? How is your daily prayer time? Folks, are you running on new manna every day, or are you trying to run on yesterday's manna, yesterday's victories, and yesterday's power? Folks, listen to me. God designed abiding in Christ to be a daily experience that demands daily refueling, and no one can do it effectively and powerfully any other way, not you, not me. None of us can do it differently.

So if you're a follower of Jesus here today, hey friends, I want to challenge you. Make sure you're eating fresh manna every day. Make sure you're refueling every day with the living Lord Christ if you want to go out and live the kind of life that brings honor to Him and that brings blessing to you. Let's bow our heads together.

Now with our heads bowed and our eyes closed, you remember I said a moment ago that if you're here today and are eighteen inches away from eternal life, then we were going to give you an opportunity to remedy that. We're going to do that right now. Maybe you've been going to church all your life. Maybe you've read the Bible. Maybe you know all kinds of information about Jesus, but unless you have ingested Him into your life like you do food, unless you have made Him an inseparable and indivisible part of what and who you are by surrendering all that you are to Him, unless He permeates every part of your being, then folks, it's just head knowledge that's not going to bring you eternal life.

So if you want to fix that today, we're going to move Him eighteen inches right now with a little prayer. I'm going to pray out loud; you pray silently, one phrase at a time. Here we go. Lord Jesus, I come to You today because I want eternal life. I want to know that my sins are forgiven and that when I die here on earth, I am guaranteed heaven. So today, I move You eighteen inches from my head into my heart. I ingest You today as my living Savior. I invite You into my life as the Lord of my life. I surrender myself to You. I open myself to You, Lord, and ask You to permeate every part of my being, just like food does. So today, come into my heart. Forgive my sins. Grant me eternal life and a secure place in heaven. I give my life to You, in Jesus' name.

Father, I want to pray for the folks who prayed that prayer, that You would confirm in their hearts right here and now that a great transaction has taken place, that as John 5:24 says, they have moved from death into eternal life because they have made their relationship with You personal like it is with food.

Lord, thanks for teaching us so clearly today what kind of believing it takes to activate Your promise of eternal life. May there not be a single person here who leaves eighteen inches shy of heaven. Thanks for the power of Your Word, Lord. Use it to change our lives because we were here today, and we pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.