

Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

One of the most popular things to do on Independence Day is to get together with family and friends and have a big meal together. I drove up to Maine yesterday so I could spend the holiday with my family and for dinner we did the quintessential July 4th thing that all Americans do – went to our favorite Chinese restaurant!

The gospel story today is about a meal with a lot of people also, probably a few more than you had over. As we continue our series Every Miracle Begins with A Problem, today we have the problem is too many people and not enough food.

“After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. 2 **A large crowd** kept following him, **because they saw the signs** that he was doing for the sick. 3 Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. 4 Now **the Passover**, the festival of the Jews, was near. 5 When he looked up and saw **a large crowd** coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “*Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?*” 6 He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, “*Six months’ wages^b would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.*” 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, 9 “**There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?**” 10 Jesus said, “*Make the people sit down.*” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. 11 Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “*Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.*” 13 So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 14 When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “*This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.*”

There is so much we could talk about in this story, the only miracle of Jesus that appears in all four gospels; there are so many places we could focus our attention, but we can’t look at everything so today I would like to consider it from the perspective of the boy who gave his lunch away. I was missing our younger son Greg this week while he was away at Boy Scout camp and while I was out and about this week, I ended up having a conversation with a 9-year-old boy with bright, intelligent eyes who was very fun to talk to and his dad is a fisherman. It made me think about this story of Jesus and how it would have been remembered by the boy who shared his barley loaves and fish. What kind of story would he have told about this experience as the years went by, what would he have said to a group of people gathered as we are today? Maybe he would have said something like this:

^b Gk *Two hundred denarii*; the denarius was the usual day’s wage for a laborer

My name is Daniel. I grew up in a small town not far from the city of Tiberias on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Actually, it is more like a lake. My father was a fisherman who worked his trade in the fresh water of the sea which is home to more than 40 different kinds of fish. Fishing is a difficult and sometimes dangerous way to make a living. Between the long hours, the habits of the fish, and the unpredictability of the weather – one truly learns the necessity of trusting God to provide for one's needs. My mother kept our humble home supplied with fresh barley bread and water while struggling to keep out the sand that the wind always brought in like an unwelcome guest. Some people consider barley bread to be the bread of the poor, but we never thought of ourselves as poor. I almost always had enough to eat each day and the lake was my front yard. There were lots of other children to play with and we often swam and played in the cool water while our fathers worked in the boats.

All the boys looked forward to when our parents finally allowed us to go on the boats to help with the fishing. It made us feel older and important to be able to help our families. By the time I was 9-years-old I was already a good swimmer and I wasn't afraid to out in the boat to the deeper water to catch fish. I still remember the excitement I felt when my father told me I could go out on the boat with him the next morning. I couldn't sleep at all! While the light of dawn was still mixing with the dark of night we were awake at the edge of the lake. I watched and listened as my dad looked over the boat and the nets, talked with other fishermen about the weather and where they were going to go that day – there was so much to do I couldn't quite follow it all – but, of course, I didn't let my dad know that.

It wasn't long after I began helping my dad on the boat that something amazing happened that changed my life forever. Like every Jewish family, we had heard the rumors about a man, a prophet like God promised Moses in the Torah, *"I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command."* One person said this man called Jesus had healed an official's son who had been near death and cured a man who had been ill for 38 years! 38 years. Unbelievable – that was longer than my parents had been alive. Someone else said he turned water into wine at a wedding.

Early one day we were out in the boat and we saw a host of other craft coming from the western side of the sea. My dad hollered out to ask what was going on and the reply was that Jesus had crossed over the sea to our neighborhood. We made for shore and before you knew it men and women were running every which way saying people who had been sick were being healed.

Jesus and his disciples went up one of the small mountains, it's more like a hill, beyond our village and it seemed like everyone was going there to see him, to be healed, to hear him, or just to be part of the excitement. It was almost time for the Passover and every year my father would tell us the story about how Moses was sent by God to deliver our ancestors. Moses was

the most important miracle working prophet in Israel's history. There had been no one like him *"for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt (Deuteronomy 34:11)."* The Passover flight of our people from Egypt to the wilderness appeared to be happening again. More people than I had ever seen, seemed to be coming from everywhere and hurrying to the mountain where Jesus was. We learned that several of Jesus' disciples – Andrew, Peter, and Philip were from a town to the north of us called Bethsaida. Andrew and Peter were even fishermen like my dad. My father decided we'd go and see this man everyone was talking about.

Since we didn't know how long we'd be gone, my mother gave us five barley loaves and a couple of the fish we caught that she'd prepared to take along to eat. We followed the crowds of people and by the time we arrived there must have been close to 5,000 people hanging around the grassy hillside.

When I got older and thought about that day and when I heard someone else's account of what happened, I realized Jesus and the disciples must have been wondering what they were going to do with all the people streaming towards them. As my father and I got closer to where Jesus was, my dad spotted a friend of his and he told me to wait where I was for a moment, he'd be right back. As I was waiting, I saw a man with a puzzled expression on his face looking around at all the people as if he was trying to solve a difficult math problem without being able to come up with the answer. I walked over to him and said, *"Hello, my name is Daniel. Are you lost?"* He smiled down at me for a moment and said, *"Hello Daniel, my name is Andrew and I'm very pleased to meet you. I'm not lost, but I am trying to figure out how we can feed all the people who have come to see Jesus. You see there are many people here who have come a long way and they're tired and having nothing to eat."*

"I haven't come very far," I replied. *"I live down in that village right by the lake. If you're hungry, you can have my lunch."* And I gave Andrew the barley loaves and fish my mother had prepared. Andrew smiled gratefully and said, *"Would you come with me for a moment?"* Just then my father returned and Andrew introduced himself and told my father he'd like to bring me to meet Jesus, if that was alright. To my delight my father said it was fine and then he gave me the *"make sure you're very good"* look as Andrew took my hand and led me through the crowd.

We passed through a lot of people and approached a small group of men having an animated discussion. Among them was one man who seemed utterly calm and self-assured. He was listening and observing and asking questions. As we approached I heard him ask one of the men who I soon learned was Philip, *"Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?"* The way Jesus asked the question reminded me of those times when my mother or father asked me a question when they already knew the answer, but they wanted to know if I did. Obviously this small group of men didn't carry large amounts of food or money and they were perplexed about

what to do next. Philip answered Jesus, *“Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.”*

By the way Jesus took a deep breath and looked up at the sky for a moment, it was clear that wasn’t the answer Jesus was looking for. Then Andrew said, ***“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?”*** A few of the disciples looked at us hopefully, a couple rolled their eyes, one said nothing, another remarked that at least they could have something to eat.

Jesus looked at me and smiled. He walked over to me looking almost like he had been expecting me or waiting for me. *“Hello Daniel,”* he said although I didn’t remember telling him my name, but in the excitement I may have forgotten.

“This is all the food you have for lunch isn’t it? Thank you for giving it to me. You are willing to trust God to provide for you rather than these few loaves and small fish.” He looked deep into my eyes and I saw a friend I knew I could always trust.

Jesus turned to his disciples and said, *“Make the people sit down.”* The disciples spread out and in just a few minutes everyone was sitting on the grassy hillside. I sat down right near the feet of Jesus so I could hear and see everything he did. Jesus took the barley loaves and gave thanks saying, *“Abba, we give thanks to you for providing for our needs. Thank you for giving us our daily bread. May we trust you more each day, believing in your word and relying upon your steadfast love and grace.”*

This is when things get a little hard to explain. While Jesus prayed this simple prayer many people lifted their hands and eyes toward heaven, others bowed their heads and closed their eyes. I was watching Jesus and I closed my eyes for a moment. When he finished praying I opened my eyes and there was a lot of bread in people’s hands and I don’t know where it all came from, but I know there was a lot more than the five barley loaves my mother gave me. I guess a man who turned water into wine and healed a man who was sick for 38 years, could take care of providing a dinner. Then Jesus began distributing the bread. At first people were afraid or too polite to take more than a little bit. But Jesus encouraged them all to take as much as they wanted. When he was finished passing out the bread, Jesus walked through the crowd offering everyone fish, as much as they wanted. As I watched this graceful man so generously providing for so many people, I realized he was more than a prophet, he was God’s chosen one. Looking at the crowd as they ate, he looked so pleased, so content, so joyful. I will never forget his expression or appearance as long as I live.

When everyone had eaten Jesus sat down and told the disciples, *“Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.”* My father leaned over and reminded me about how God provided manna in the wilderness and that we were experiencing something just as special. Something very significant had happened and Jesus’ didn’t want any of God’s gift to be wasted. While my dad was probably right, as I watched each of the twelve disciples lugging a big

basket of bread back down the mountain it reminded me of times when my mom and dad wanted to teach me a lesson. Philip and the disciples didn't know where to get bread or how to find the money to buy bread to feed so many people. But they had Jesus. With Jesus, they had more bread than they and over 5,000 other people could eat. With Jesus, they had so much left over they could hardly carry the leftovers.

As the disciples gathered up the fragments of bread the crowd began to recognize that a wonderful sign had taken place. Some people shouted praises to God, others sang, some laughed, others sat quietly wondering what exactly had happened and what it all meant. Some were saying, *"This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."* Others said, *"Let's make Jesus king and then we can quit working and eat a free meal every day."*

Jesus had provided the crowd with a glimpse of who he was, but people can be more interested in filling their own stomachs and using the gifts of God to serve their own purposes rather than perceiving what God is doing. Jesus left the crowd behind and went further up the mountain.

As we walked home, my father said, Jesus was more than a prophet - he was the Son of God. Who else could do all the signs he did? Healing the sick, feeding the hungry, not wanting anything or anyone to be lost – Jesus had let us share in a miracle. I always remembered after that day that Jesus is worthy of my trust and if **we give Him our all, He will take it, break it, and use it to bless others.**

Blessing: Now may we give Jesus all we are and Lord we invite you to take us, take us and break us and use us to bless others for your sake and your glory