

Stories of the Master

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~ Bread by the Sea of Galilee ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read Mark 6:30-52 which we provide for you and John 6.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

1. Read the text of the story.

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Mark 6:30-52 NASB	Mark 6:30-52 New Living Translation
<p>³⁰ The apostles *gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And He *said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.” (For there were many <i>people</i> coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) ³² They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves.</p> <p>³³ <i>The people</i> saw them going, and many recognized <i>them</i> and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things. ³⁵ When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, “This place is desolate and it is already quite late; ³⁶ send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” ³⁷ But He answered them, “You give them <i>something</i> to eat!” And they *said to Him, “Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them <i>something</i> to eat?” ³⁸ And He *said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go look!” And when they found out, they *said, “Five, and two fish.” ³⁹ And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. ⁴¹ And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed <i>the food</i> and broke the loaves and He kept giving <i>them</i> to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³ and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. ⁴⁴ There were five thousand men who ate the loaves.</p> <p>⁴⁵ Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the</p>	<p>³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then Jesus said, “Let’s go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile.” He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn’t even have time to eat.</p> <p>³² So they left by boat for a quiet place, where they could be alone. ³³ But many people recognized them and saw them leaving, and people from many towns ran ahead along the shore and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.</p> <p>³⁵ Late in the afternoon his disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. ³⁶ Send the crowds away so they can go to the nearby farms and villages and buy something to eat.”</p> <p>³⁷ But Jesus said, “You feed them.”</p> <p>“With what?” they asked. “We’d have to work for months to earn enough money to buy food for all these people!”</p> <p>³⁸ “How much bread do you have?” he asked. “Go and find out.”</p> <p>They came back and reported, “We have five loaves of bread and two fish.”</p> <p>³⁹ Then Jesus told the disciples to have the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of fifty or a hundred.</p> <p>⁴¹ Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he kept giving the bread to the disciples so they could distribute it to the people. He</p>

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boat and go ahead of *Him* to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. ⁴⁶ After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray.

⁴⁷ When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He *came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. ⁴⁹ But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; ⁵⁰ for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and *said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." ⁵¹ Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, ⁵² for they had not gained any insight from the *incident* of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.

also divided the fish for everyone to share. ⁴² They all ate as much as they wanted, ⁴³ and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftover bread and fish. ⁴⁴ A total of 5,000 men and their families were fed.

⁴⁵ Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and head across the lake to Bethsaida, while he sent the people home. ⁴⁶ After telling everyone good-bye, he went up into the hills by himself to pray.

⁴⁷ Late that night, the disciples were in their boat in the middle of the lake, and Jesus was alone on land. ⁴⁸ He saw that they were in serious trouble, rowing hard and struggling against the wind and waves. About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. He intended to go past them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the water, they cried out in terror, thinking he was a ghost. ⁵⁰ They were all terrified when they saw him.

But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage! I am here!" ⁵¹ Then he climbed into the boat, and the wind stopped. They were totally amazed, ⁵² for they still didn't understand the significance of the miracle of the loaves. Their hearts were too hard to take it in.

2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.

- Jesus said the people were like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34). This metaphor was often used in Israel. See Numbers 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chronicles 18:6; Zechariah 10:2. God himself becomes their shepherd, Ezekiel 36:8-16.
- Mark says it was late in the day which indicates it was close to sundown.
- The villages in Galilee would have fewer than 3000 and most had only hundreds. Village markets would have bread and if close to the Sea of Galilee, fish. A crowd of 5000 men shows Jesus to be very popular.
- A host was bound to feed even the most unannounced of guests and was to create such an abundance that food was left over. But they would also be concerned about waste. Thus, the disciples picked up the leftovers. Bread was a basic staple of life.
- It would be highly unusual to provide a meal outside a home or village and the wilderness was considered a place of chaos. Only a prophet like Moses or Elijah could provide food in the wilderness.
- Mark 6:39 mentions the grass was green and John 6:4 says it was the Passover season thus indicating this happened in the spring.
- Jesus looked up to heaven as he prayed which was the custom among both Jews and Gentiles.

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- Storms on the Sea of Galilee were sudden and could be violent.
- Bread is highly symbolic. In Arab countries, it is a symbol of hospitality and a family is embarrassed if they cannot offer fresh bread.
- In Jewish circles, Sabbath services among families begin with four blessings.
 - of the children
 - of the wine
 - the washing of hands followed by silence, and
 - the blessing of bread, “Blessed are you, eternal One our God, Ruler of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.” Each person breaks a piece of bread, salts it, and says, “Shabbat Shalom.”
- Bread from barley was the main staple. Meat and vegetables were supplements.
- In the biblical texts bread symbolizes fellowship with God and people, fundamental sustenance, a sacrifice to God, and hospitality.
- This is the only miracle in all four gospels.
- When the disciples said, “It is a ghost,” this reflected much popular belief that the spirits of people interacted with earth. Gentiles believed that the spirits of people who drowned at sea hovered near the area of their death. Some Jewish traditions warned of dangerous night spirits

These insights were taken from A Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels by Bruce J. Malina, The Bible and the Land by Gary Burge, and the NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible.

3. Answer these reflective questions.

Before Jesus fed the 5000, he taught them. What do you think Jesus would have said on that day to the people?

Jesus had several options to make sure the people were fed. He could have told them to spend the money they had. He could have told them to collect money from the people. He could have told them to go into the villages and buy their own food. And he could have multiplied the money they had. But he chose none of those options. Instead, he blessed the lunch of a little boy and multiplied his food. Why do you think Jesus chose that option?

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Here are three primary lessons we learn from the story of feeding the 5000. Which of these is your favorite and why?

- Do not send people away but minister to them
- Our resources are insufficient to get the job done
- Jesus is the one people need

What do you think Jesus meant when he said we must eat his flesh and drink his blood?

When Jesus told Peter, “O you of little faith. Why did you doubt?” do think he was angry with Peter?

How do you think the other disciples felt when they saw Peter walking on the water?
