

A Meal and a Walk

Matthew 14:15-33; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14

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The Feeding of the Five Thousand:

The Feeding of the Five Thousand is the only passage of Jesus' life that is recorded in all four gospels

This event occurred following:

- The disciples' return from their first preaching tour
- Jesus learning of the execution of John the Baptist

The death of John the Baptist is recorded in three of the four gospels (Matt, Mark, and Luke). Matthew tells us that when Jesus heard of John's execution, he departed by boat to a deserted place – apart from the multitudes that were following him.

He went to a place where the Jordan runs down from Mt Hermon at whitewater speed and finally slows down before it flows in to the Sea of Galilee. This is near a town called Bethsaida, which means “house of fishing.” It is assumed that Jesus wanted to withdraw so he could rest and reflect, but also to give rest to his disciples.

Peter, Andrew and Phillip were all three from Bethsaida.

This happened near the Feast of Passover (John 6:4). This was a time of preparation, which customarily began up to 30 days prior the actual day since it involved travel. The anticipation of the upcoming Passover, coupled with the miraculous works of Jesus, added to the attraction of the multitudes. They followed him to see if perhaps he was the promised Messiah and savior of Israel from their enemies.

The multitude followed Jesus up the mountain, even though he intended be alone with his disciples. It was late in the day and it became apparent that the multitude was in need of food. Jesus always responded with compassion when he saw human need. The disciples asked him to send the multitude away so they could get food, but instead he told the disciples to feed the multitude from their own resources.

Philip's response showed what they were all thinking. The task seemed insurmountable. He said that even 200 pennyworth would not be enough to feed the crowd. A pennyworth (denarius) was a Roman coin equivalent to a typical day's wage for a laborer, so 200 denarius was nearly a year's wages. This emphasized the size of the multitude, which though comprised of 5,000 men. It is estimated that the crowd could have been twice as many counting the presence of women and children.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand took place one year before the death of Jesus

The boy had a typical lunch for people of that time. The barley loaves were considered cheap food for common people. They were small round cakes like biscuits or small buns. The fish was pickled, making it suitable to pack in a lunch.

Jesus instructed the disciples to have the multitude sit in ranks of fifties and hundreds. This would prevent confusion and aid in distribution of the food. The multiplying of the loaves and fishes could have occurred as Jesus broke them, giving the disciples a constant supply. Or they could have multiplied as they were distributed from out of the baskets, much as the widow's oil never ran out (II Kings 4).

Afterwards, the disciples were told to gather the fragments, "that none would be wasted." This was reminiscent of Jesus' words regarding the disciples in John 17:12. The leftovers were collected in twelve baskets, which were large containers the size of a modern bushel basket. This meant that each disciple had as much at the end of the meal, as they did at the beginning.

After the meal, the crowd was determined to make Jesus their king. This was according to their design, not God's. Now Jesus definitely wanted to be alone on the mountain so he could pray, so he sent the multitude away, including the disciples.

The feeding of the 5,000 was at the peak of Jesus' popularity. Jesus began to lose public support after he gave the "Bread of Life" sermon.

Walking on the Water:

The word "disciple" is of Latin derivative and means a learner, a pupil.

It was late in the day when Jesus sent the disciples away. They were to go across the upper corner of the lake from Bethsaida to Capernaum. This same trip by land is only about 4 miles. The decision to go by water was likely to avoid the pursuing crowd.

The disciples began rowing in the early evening, likely around sunset or 6 pm. Suddenly a fierce storm hit, which started pushing them out toward the middle of the sea. It became exhausting as they spent most of the night rowing against the wind, from about 6 pm to 3 am. It has been suggested that this experience was preparation for the disciples as they launch out into the deep (world) to preach the gospel, toiling amidst strong, fierce opposition (Henry, p 491).

Jewish tradition divided the night into three watches, but by this time the Jews had adopted the Roman practice of four watches. It began at sunset and went until sunrise, each watch being three hours. The fourth watch was from 3am to 6am, the last watch before sunrise.

Jesus may have intended to meet the disciples on the other side of the lake, because Mark 6:48 says 'he would have passed them by.' The disciples saw the form of someone on the water, but could not see who it was. It seems they concluded the form

was a sinister spirit who had cause the storm. Jesus heard the fearful cries of the disciples, and moved in their direction.

The existence and appearance of spirits were generally believed in by the people of that time, except for the Sadducees. (Henry, p.205)

Jesus identified himself to the disciples, and Peter wanted to venture out to him. Peter's purpose was not to walk on water. He simply wanted Jesus to 'bid me to come to thee'. Peter wanted to be with Jesus, and the water was of no consequence. Jesus told Peter to come. He wanted Peter to learn two things. He wanted Peter to experience the power of the Son of God, but he also knew that Peter would sink. Jesus wanted Peter to experience his own weakness.

When he began to sink, Peter cried out and Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him. Once caught, Jesus scolded him for doubting. Jesus kept Peter securely in his grasp until they were safely in the boat. Immediately the storm ended.

The other disciples waited in the boat and watched while all of this was going on. They were awestruck by the power of Jesus and worshiped him, declaring 'of a truth thou art the Son of God.' Immediately they were all at their destination, master and pupils together.

The account of Peter walking on the water is recorded only in the book of Matthew.

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