

Dedication

For my Dad

Whose love of our Lord, His Word, His Church,
and the beauty of detail in this, our Father's World,
have been food more than enough to fill me since I was a boy.

Mark 6:30-44

Rossell's Translation

³⁰ And gathered the apostles toward Jesus and reported to Him all [their] many doings and teachings. ³¹ And said He to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a desert place and refresh [yourselves] a little." For there were coming and going [by] many, and could not eat conveniently. ³² And they departed in the ship to the desert place by themselves.

³³ And the many saw them departing and knew and afoot from all the cities they rushed together there and preceded them. ³⁴ And coming out to see many [of the] crowd He was deeply moved inside toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd. And He began to teach them much. ³⁵ And now the day was much done, approaching Him the disciples to him said, "Because desert is this place, and now the day is much [advanced]. ³⁶ Send them so that they may depart to the encircling farms and villages to buy themselves something to eat; ^[b] for they have nothing to eat."

³⁷ But answering He said to them, "You give them [of] yourselves to eat." And they said to Him, "Departing should we buy two hundred denarii [of] bread and give them to eat?" ³⁸ But He said to them, "How much bread have you all? Depart. See." And knowing they said, "Five, and two fish."

³⁹ And He ordered them to lie down all drinking party by drinking party on the green grass. ⁴⁰ And they lie down in garden row by garden row of hundred and fifty. ⁴¹ And taking the five breads and the two fish, looking up toward heaven, he blessed and he broke apart the breads, and gave his disciples it in order to spread before them and the two fish He divided for all. ⁴² And they ate all and were filled. ⁴³ And they picked up pieces [in] twelve baskets full and from the fish. ⁴⁴ And those who were eating the breads were five thousand men.

Footnotes:

- a. **Mark 6:33** NU-Text and M-Text read *they*.
- b. **Mark 6:36** NU-Text reads *something to eat* and omits the rest of this verse.
- c. **Mark 6:44** NU-Text and M-Text omit *about*.

³⁰Καὶ συνάγονται οἱ ἀπόστολοι πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ ἀπήγγειλαν αὐτῷ πάντα ὅσα ἐποίησαν καὶ ὅσα ἐδίδασκαν. ³¹καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· δεῦτε ὑμεῖς αὐτοὶ κατ' ἰδίαν εἰς ἔρημον τόπον καὶ ἀναπαύσασθε ὀλίγον. ἦσαν γὰρ οἱ ἐρχόμενοι καὶ οἱ ὑπάγοντες πολλοί, καὶ οὐδὲ φαγεῖν εὐκαίρου ν. ³²καὶ ἀπῆλθον ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ εἰς ἔρημον τόπον κατ' ἰδίαν. ³³καὶ εἶδον αὐτοὺς ὑπάγοντας καὶ ἔγνωσαν / ἐπέγνωσαν πολλοὶ καὶ πεζῇ ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν πόλεων συνέδραμον ἐκεῖ καὶ προῆλθον αὐτούς. ³⁴καὶ ἐξελθὼν εἶδεν πολὺν ὄχλον καὶ ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ὅτι ἦσαν ὡς πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα, καὶ ἤρξατο διδάσκειν αὐτοὺς πολλὰ. ³⁵καὶ ἤδη ὥρας πολλῆς γενομένης προσελθόντες αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ἔλεγον ὅτι ἔρημός ἐστιν ὁ τόπος καὶ ἤδη ὥρα πολλή· ³⁶ἀπόλυσον αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἀπελθόντες εἰς τοὺς κύκλῳ ἀγρούς καὶ κώμας ἀγοράσωσιν ἐαυτοῖς τί φάγωσιν. ³⁷ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· δότε αὐτοῖς ὑμεῖς φαγεῖν. καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ· ἀπελθόντες ἀγοράσωμεν δηναρίων διακοσίων ἄρτους καὶ δώσωμεν αὐτοῖς φαγεῖν; ³⁸ὁ δὲ λέγει αὐτοῖς· πόσους ἔχετε
⇔; ἄρτους ὑπάγετε ἴδετε. καὶ γνόντες λέγουσιν· πέντε καὶ δύο ἰχθύας. ³⁹καὶ ἐπέταξεν αὐτοῖς ἀνακλιθῆναι / ἀνακλῖναι πάντας συμπόσια συμπόσια ἐπὶ τῷ χλωρῷ χόρτῳ. ⁴⁰καὶ ἀνέπεσαν πρᾶσαι· πρᾶσαι κατὰ ἑκατὸν καὶ κατὰ πεντήκοντα. ⁴¹καὶ λαβὼν τοὺς πέντε ἄρτους καὶ τοὺς δύο ἰχθύας ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εὐλόγησεν καὶ κατέκλασεν τοὺς ἄρτους καὶ ἐδίδου τοῖς μαθηταῖς [αὐτοῦ] ἵνα παρατιθῶσιν αὐτοῖς, καὶ τοὺς δύο ἰχθύας ἐμέρισεν πᾶσιν. ⁴²καὶ ἔφαγον πάντες καὶ ἔχορτάσθησαν, ⁴³καὶ ἦσαν κλάσματα δώδεκα κοφίνων πληρώματα καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἰχθύων. ⁴⁴καὶ ἦσαν οἱ φαγόντες τοὺς ἄρτους πεντακισχίλιοι ἄνδρες.

Greek New Testament base text is the Westcott-Hort edition of 1881 with Readings of Nestle27/UBS4 shown via the following notation: [UBS4 only]; (WH only); WH / UBS4; WH ⇔ UBS4.

[transliterated]

30 kai sunagontai oi apostoloi pros ton iēsoun kai apēngeilan autō panta osa epoiēsan kai osa edidaxan 31 kai legei autois deute umeis autoi kat idian eis erēmōn topon kai anapausasthe oligon ēsan gar oi erchomenoi kai oi upagontes polloi kai oude phagein eukairoun 32 kai apēlthon en tō ploiō eis erēmōn topon kat idian

33 kai eidon autous upagontas kai egnōsan polloi kai pezē apo pasōn tōn poleōn sunedramon ekei kai proēlthon autous 34 kai exelthōn eiden polun ochlon kai esplanchnisthē ep autous oti ēsan ōs probata mē echonta poimena kai ērxato didaskein autous polla 35 kai ēdē ōras pollēs genomenēs proselthontes autō oi mathētai autou elegon oti erēmos estin o topos kai ēdē ōra pollē 36 apoluson autous ina apelthontes eis tous kuklō agrous kai kōmas agorasōsin eautois ti phagōsin 37 o de apokritheis eipen autois dote autois umeis phagein kai legousin autō apelthontes agorasōmen dēnariōn diakosiōn artous kai dōsomen autois phagein 38 o de legei autois posous echete artous upagete idete kai gnontes legousin pente kai duo ichthuas 39 kai epetaxen autois anaklithēnai pantas sumposia sumposia epi tō chlōrō chortō 40 kai anepesan prasiai prasiai kata ekaton kai kata pentēkonta 41 kai labōn tous pente artous kai tous duo ichthuas anablepsas eis ton ouranon eulogēsen kai kateklasen tous artous kai edidou tois mathētais ina paratithōsin autois kai tous duo ichthuas emerisen pasin 42 kai ephagon pantes kai echortasthēsan 43 kai ēran klasmata dōdeka kophinōn plērōmata kai apo tōn ichthuōn 44 kai ēsan oi phagontes tous artous pentakischilioi andres

Summary and Exegesis

Setting [v30-32]:

The feeding of the five thousand is the only of our Lord's miracles that is reported by all four gospel writers¹. It follows three key events chronologically: 1. the "hometown rejection" of Christ and His limited miracles among his family and native community in Nazareth²; 2. The sending out of the apostles village to village; 3. The beheading of John the Baptist³ by "king" Herod⁴. After such a battering of ministerial onslaught, [facing familial rejection, the missionary tour of each village, and receiving the news of John's violent death] Christ suggests to His disciples that they retreat to a secluded place for some rest⁵. Interestingly, the phrase used to communicate the frenetic level of commotion says that

¹ [Matthew 14, Luke 9, John 6] This does not include the miracle of Christ's resurrection. Additionally, it is difficult to harmonize the gospels to fit together their narratives precisely because of the amount of repetition and variation that is understandably present when documenting the itinerant ministry of an ancient teacher, miracle worker, and divine man. A helpful visual quick reference chart is widely available online, specifically here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miracles_of_Jesus.

² Traditionally the author of the second gospel was the Biblical character John Mark and further tradition insists that he acted as a scribe for Peter. If either of these traditions is true, it may give deeper meaning to the many episodes of compassion found in this gospel [because compassion and restoration would have been a theme quite near and dear to the hearts of both of these men.] The Mark 6 feeding miracle was one such instance. The very people Jesus was seeking to avoid and escape – His oppressors as it were – are the very recipients of His pity, ministry, and miraculous service in the wilderness feast. He was loving His enemies. Additionally, Wills and other commentators surmise that Mark's audience was "a persecuted community with internal divisions and conflict" who had been disowned by their families and displaced and relocated in the outer regions by early persecution [Wills pg 12]. If this is anyway close to being true, it would fit with the both the narrative and geographical setting of this miracle. Geographically, Jesus and the disciples are seeking rest away from the trouble in Galilee following the martyrdom of John. Additionally, the chapter begins with Jesus being rejected by His family, and the miracle pericope is immediately preceded by the story of how Herod is trapped by his family into executing John. Finally, the chapter closes with the disciples – those closest to Him – still not believing because their hearts were hardened. As John said, *He came to his own, but His own received Him not*. Jesus later condemns the people of Bethsaida because of the miracles which were done there – they ate to their own destruction.

³ Horne brilliantly contrasts Herod's meal – "*the feast of the cannibal king*" w/ our Lord's [pg 107]. Perhaps a small taste [PI] of this is found even earlier in Mark and Luke when Jesus insists on giving Jairus's daughter something to eat after she has been raised back to life [which also links to the giving of John's head on a plate to Herodias's daughter afterward], [Mk 5.43; Lk 8.55]. I believe a parabolic interpretation of this miracle is evident when it is read inside the context of John's martyrdom. John is imprisoned and then beheaded [broken apart]. His ministry as harbinger having ended, Jesus sends out the disciples [called '*apostles*' only here by Mark] to be His harbingers, preaching repentance, and performing miracles [something never said of John], thus multiplying the ministry of John by twelve and increasing it with great healing and exorcism miracles. All of this abundance resulted from John's being blessed and broken. I trace out the link via linguistic pattern in footnote 55.

⁴ Herod was most certainly not a king, though Josephus tells us he wanted to be in the worst way [and it was his shamelessly incessant requests to be made king that finally drove Caligula to exile he and his wife to Gaul]. Mark repeatedly digs at him with the term "King" [ironically mocking him as Jesus, the true King, was mocked at Calvary] rather than with the technically proper term "Tetrarch", as he was a sub-king.

⁵ In his commentary on Luke, Hendriksen dates this miracle as occurring in April of AD 29. Additionally, the pattern of withdrawing from Galilee for rest and food mirrors that of Herod before who assembled his Galilean officials for his birthday feast. Linking these two alleviates the tension so troubling to many commentators in assembling the Galilean officials outside of their territory in Herod's fortress of Machaerus, the probable location of the feast.

they were literally unable to sit down to eat without interruption⁶. These events set the stage for the Great Shepherd King's miraculous meal⁷.

Need, Compassion, and Ministry [v33-34]:

Jesus and His disciples took a ship out to the region which Luke tells us was in the vicinity of Bethsaida⁸. The people seeing this begin to run after him. Hendriksen surmises that they may have assumed that Jesus, out of fear for his own safety following the report of John's death, was leaving permanently⁹. France differs, suggesting that the mob was intent on coercing Christ to be the leader of their insurrection¹⁰. Either way they arrive in time to intercept¹¹ Jesus and the apostles, thus depriving them of their goal: much-needed solitude, refreshment, and a quiet place to sit down and eat. Based on their described actions, we can infer that upon seeing them, Jesus had a markedly different reaction than did His disciples. The same Lord who was concerned for the need of His disciples was struck by the greater need of the throng. Jesus was "deeply moved inside" by their plight¹². They were like helpless sheep

⁶ "καὶ οὐδὲ φαγεῖν ἡὐκαίρουν" – "did not even have time to eat", Gundry [pg 322]; or more pointed, "had no leisure to eat", Lane [pg 225]. Lane's rendering is preferable because it sets the stage for what the Good Shepherd will grant His people in the wilderness: rest [leisure time to recline on green grass] and food. It also serves to link this narrative with the one that came before wherein Herodias found a "convenient time / εὐκαίρου" to kill and serve John at Herod's feast [6.21].

⁷ Wills [referencing Joel Marcus] points out that at the time food production and consumption was a politically-charged issue. There was a shortage of agricultural produce in Galilee because most of the region's resources were consumed in Tyre. For this reason, "many (in Galilee) went hungry" [pg 29]. Girard and Richard pick up on this theme and, linking it with the heightened political awareness of the Passover season, interpret the Jews' response to this miracle [attempting to force Jesus to be their new king – Jn 6.15] in the light of this political context [pg 149]. France concurs [pg 261] with Gundry who says "Only by keeping in mind the hand-to-mouth existence of most people in the first century Palestine can we appreciate the stupendousness of feeding so many to the full, with an excess." [pg 333].

⁸ Βηθσαιῶν - Bethsaida literally means "house of fish" [Strong's, Smith's Bible Dictionary] or Hitchcock's Bible Names Dictionary renders it "house of fruits, or of food, or of snares." The irony here is that the people were in danger of starving at the house of food [similar to the famine that drove Naomi's family from Bethlehem: 'the house of bread']. There is a parallel here for Israel. This is an indictment. Her leaders were supposed to feed the people, but they were completely devoid of nourishment. As we're told, they were sheep without shepherding. Those hirelings charged with the oversight of the flock were in dereliction of their duty. Instead, they had become oppressors of Israel, and like Pharaoh, the Pharisees required spiritual bricks all the while withholding the straw. This is evident not only in the explicit condemnations of them by John and Jesus but also in their pattern of ministry. Both called people out, through water, into the wilderness. In doing this, they became Moseses thus condemning the religious leaders, especially Pharisees and Sadducees as Pharaonic oppressors [this is a point made by Jim Jordan across several Sunday School lessons here at TPC].

⁹ Hendriksen, Lk, pg 477.

¹⁰ France, pg 261. This reading may be supported by the fact that each of the synoptic gospels precedes the feeding miracle with a reference to Herod, a frightening prospect to his subjects.

¹¹ Scholars disagree in translating "καὶ προῆλθον αὐτούς" KJV: "and outwent them". It is complicated by attempts to harmonize this detail with the timeline provided by the other gospels as well as by efforts to uncover the exact location of this event. I can't hope to offer anything to resolve the debate, but do appreciate Gundry's observation that their speed is intended to be an impressive feat [npi] which "sets the stage for the story of Jesus' walking on the sea" [pg 323].

¹² "καὶ ἐσπλαγγνίσθη ἐπ' αὐτοῖς" – *splagchnizomai* is used 12 times in the N.T. as a direct derivative of the word σπλάγχνον, *splagchnon* - most often translated "bowels" {for spleen or intestines} [KJV – bowels 9, inward affection 1, tender mercy 1]. For Matthew and Mark, this word communicates what it is that animates Christ's feeding of the 5000 as well as the later miracle of feeding the 4000. It is the word chosen by Luke to express the

with no shepherd to lead or care for them. So He began to teach them many things. Luke and Matthew tell us that he taught them about the kingdom of God and also healed the sick¹³. It is interesting to note that in Mark, the need of the sheep which deeply provoked our Lord He met by teaching them as well as by healing¹⁴.

Miracle [v35-44]

At this point, time markers are provided and Mark tells us that evening was approaching¹⁵. The people had no food and the place was quite secluded and barren. The disciples asked Christ to send the people away to find their own food. But our Lord responds by commanding *them* to feed the people. Out of their poverty, He makes them instruments of abundance¹⁶. He had promised that those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness would be filled. Those who were seeking Him had taken no thoughts for so much as their next meal and so would have all these things added to them.

Because our God is a God of order, the God-man first had a count taken of the available food: five loaves and two fish¹⁷. He then divided the crowd into ordered groups¹⁸. And with a kingly command¹⁹ He made

response of Christ to the widow whose only son has died and of both the good Samaritan upon seeing the robbers' ravaged victim and the prodigal's Father upon seeing His son returning though still a far way off [7.13; 10.33; 15.20]. It is used to describe the visceral reaction of the righteous to the utter helplessness of another, especially an innocent, and as France notes, is only ever used of our dear Lord [or in parables describing Him][pg265]. Here again, a parallel exists with Herod who, looking out over his many guests [who had born witness to his drunken oath] was "*exceedingly sorry*" [6.26].

¹³ Lk 9.11; Mt 14.14.

¹⁴ We would be tempted to jump straight to the miracle but this is not what Jesus did in response to their need and helplessness. He taught them then he fed them. He helped them to seek first the Kingdom and then added all the rest.

¹⁵ We learn how truly desperate they were from John's additional explanation that this incident took place just before Passover [6.4] [though Wright asserts that Mark's mention of green pastures functions as a seasonal marker signalling the reader to think of Spring and Passover - pg 78] of when vendors and supplies would be even less readily available in the surrounding markets. This is a theme found elsewhere in the gospels – the "eleventh hour salvation". What I have called in sermons the "grand slam in the bottom of the 9th". It is not until the third day that the four thousand are fed later on [and not until the third day that our Lord resurrects]. It is at the end of the wedding feast that the wine supplies run out. But then, they are not only supplied but supplied in unthinkable, overflowing abundance. This same pattern applies here; a last-minute deliverance of outlandish proportions.

¹⁶ The pastoral implications of this charge are many. It is out of the void of resources that we are often called upon to minister. We who have nothing are called to keep giving. The first question to ask is, "*With what!? What do I have to offer here?*" But this is often where God works the greatest blessing. Like the Corinthians who gave from out of their poverty and Paul who saw God's grace perfected by his own weakness. Especially where the grind of everyday needs is at work, where housewives and mothers are operating at their wits end, this is a lesson of great comfort. God ministers richly through poor servants. Thick oil flows from empty vessels.

¹⁷ According to Girard and Richards, three ἄρτος "*loaves*" were a normal lunch portion for an adult eater [pg 151].

¹⁸ συμπόσια συμπόσια – symposia - which are literally "*drinking parties*". Again reinforcing the idea that He is the One Who makes the barren hills to overflow with good things and again linking with the previous Herod scene.

¹⁹ ἐπέταξεν αὐτοῖς - He ordered them before He fed them. Likewise we must submit to the orders of Christ before we receive His food. As I attempt to prove in the next section, I see this word as reinforcing the notion that Christ is a new Moses and King David, leading and ruling His people. In a private conversation, Jim Jordan referenced this detail in support of the liturgical tradition that insists partakers be seated for communion.

them sit down on a green pasture, planting them like garden rows²⁰, just as He had at the beginning. Having already righteously refused bread in the desert for His people, He now multiplied loaves for them. Taking the bread, and looking upward, He blessed, broke, and gave it to His disciples who in turn gave it to the partakers²¹.

Having received their daily bread from His hand²², each ate enough to be satisfied and the collected overflow filled twelve baskets²³. The crowd numbered five thousand²⁴ men²⁵.

Jesus' Fulfilling and Excelling [superseding] the Prophets:

Though we modern readers often miss it, Jesus' actions are frequently performed and/or described in such a way as to link Him with an Old Covenant prophet. Here we will examine the way in which Mark 6 accomplishes this.

²⁰ πρασιαὶ πρασιαὶ - *prasia* – which are literally “*garden beds*”. Like the above term, *symposia*, it is found only here in the New Testament. Hendriksen comments how the people must have resembled the rows or squares of a blooming garden in their colorful garb spread out in orderly plots as they were [Mk pg 254].

²¹ Mark [like Matthew before and Luke after] uses the verb εὐλόγησεν (*eulogasen*) v3saai “*he blessed*”, for the feeding of the five thousand, but [like Matthew] uses the verb εὐχαριστήσας (*eucharistesas*) Vaapmsn “*he giving thanks*” for the feeding of the four thousand shortly afterward. John, however, applies εὐχαριστήσας to the feeding of the five thousand [6.11&23], so that it may certainly be asserted that this is a Eucharistic meal at least in a technical, linguistic sense. Though the explicit mentioning of the four-fold Eucharistic pattern: taking, blessing, breaking, and giving bread is so obviously linked to the Lord’s meal as instituted later, it seems to be fruitless to deny this [no pun intended]. It is almost impossible to deny the link after a *prima facie* reading of Jesus’ own interpretation of the miracle in John 6 [25-71]. This pattern also matches that found in the Herod pericope before [see footnote 54]. And I submit that this miracle may be understood as Jesus’ parabolic eulogy for John [to use the modern connotation of the word] as described in footnote 3.

²² The synoptic gospels present this as a quiet miracle culminating in no great moment of astonishment or recognition of divinity. There is some question as to whether those present even knew they were experiencing the miraculous [Gundry 334]. But this is beautifully fitting reminder to us. What could be more normal than the quiet miracle of eating from the hand of our Lord? We do it several times each day.

²³ Remember, this miracle narrative follows Jesus’ rejection by His own family and Herod’s trickery by family and these set the stage for Jesus’ comment later in Mark [10.29,30] that when one gives up his family he gains a hundred times that. Here the “lad” gave up five loaves and gained a thousand times the yield. Behold the abundance of the Lord. What begins as a tiny mustard seed’s portion, grows to a majestic Redwood and shelters all around. Additionally, Gundry suggests that this is the bread the disciples use to feed themselves later in 7.2 [pg 326]. This is an important point to make. Christ took the disciples away for the express purpose of finding rest and food. He then requires them to continue to serve the multitude, but in the end, does not leave them empty and used up. After it all each is able to gather for himself bread enough to fill a κόφινος, which BDAG describes as a “large, heavy basket” [pg 447b].

²⁴ “To put this large gathering into perspective, the total population of Capernaum at this time, including women and children, was probably about ten thousand.” France, pg 268.

²⁵ The term ἄνδρες “*andres*” is a specific term used almost exclusively for males in the N.T. The more generic term often translated “*men*”, ἄνθρωποι “*anthropoi*”, is inclusive of both genders. But here, Mark [with the other gospel writers] is specifically counting only the males [and furthermore, as Gundry astutely notes, not the males who were simply present, but only those who were fed {pg 326}].

It's hard to pick the greatest miracle from the greatest prophet but Jesus covered all the bases, matching and surpassing each of the greatest feats. Working in reverse order, let us consider them in three groups.

Elisha/Elijah

Mark precedes the feeding miracle with the intercalation of Herod beheading John. The primary question that carries us through John's beheading and I believe the feeding miracle, is Herod hearing the rumors that Jesus was Elijah having returned²⁶. Luke immediately links the miraculous feeding with Jesus being called Elijah, or John, or a prophet of old, but Peter confesses – "*You are the Christ*"²⁷. Luke tells us directly after this [though he inserts that it was 8 days later] that Jesus was transfigured on the mount where Moses and Elijah appeared, but God scolded Peter for mistaking them as being in the same category. "*THIS is my chosen Son – hear HIM!*" This is what the feeding of the five thousand shows: He is with them, but greater than them.

Setting the stage in Mark 5 [just one chapter before], Jesus raised the daughter of the synagogue ruler in a room, shadowing Elisha raising the widow's son in the room.

But the most explicit and direct prophetic link from the feeding of the five thousand [and later the four thousand] to any Old Testament event is to Elisha, who multiplied 20 loaves among 100 men [probably just men²⁸] in 2 Kings 4.42-44. John makes the link with Elisha even more explicit by describing the loaves as '*barley loaves*' [ἄρτους κριθίνους] the exact same phrase used in the LXX of the 20 loaves brought to Elisha²⁹.

David

Mark seems to paint Christ in a Davidic light throughout his gospel. Christ is "the new David"³⁰. This miracle certainly fits that model snugly. A quick concordance search reveals that the only other time in Scripture that five loaves appear is in 1 Sam 21.3 where David receives five loaves [LXX: πέντε ἄρτοι] of the shewbread from Ahimelech in Nob³¹.

David, [who was anointed king at 30 also] was installed with the charge from the Lord that he do two things: "feed my people and be a ruler to them"³²." This is exactly what we see Christ doing here, commanding and assembling the people into orderly ranks and then feeding them.

It's hard to believe that anyone could read the details of the miraculous meal without hearing echoes

²⁶ This scene is mirrored by Jesus afterward - again, setting Jesus against Herod as the true and righteous King.

²⁷ Lk 9.19.

²⁸ "the sons of the prophets" were his regular companions, being mentioned ten times from 2 Kings 2.3-6.1.

²⁹ Manning also sees this as linking the event with Passover.

³⁰ Jordan, Matthew.

³¹ Interestingly, another intersection here is that [as some have shown] John's gospel follows a temple sequence and the feeding miracle of chapter 6 occurs at the "shewbread" stage [private conversation JBJ].

³² 2 Samuel 5.2-4.

of David's most-beloved Psalm 23, the Shepherd Psalm. With the Lord as their Shepherd, the people lacked nothing. He literally made them to lie down in the green grass [LXX: τόπον χλόης], resting by waters [both of the Jordan and lake/sea of Galilee]³³, restoring their souls and leading them in paths of righteousness by his teaching and healing, and preparing a table for them³⁴.

Isaiah 55 foretold a time when a new covenant would be made, and David would command and rule – that those without means or money would eat bread and be satisfied. That the Word of God would come down from Heaven like rain; go forth and not be unfruitful, but bear fruit [particularly bread - v10]; that joy would fill the mountains and clapping the hills; that barrenness would be defeated; and people would feast on abundance; that these things would be a sign of God's mercy and a call to repentance; that if the wicked turn from his way, God would have Compassion on him³⁵.

Ezekiel 34

Lane points out that the language of Mark 6 also draws from Messianic prophecies of Ezekiel 34³⁶. This prophecy begins as a condemnation of the "shepherds" of Israel for: 1. Feeding themselves rather than the sheep [v2,3]; 2. Failing to heal the sick [v4]; and 3. Failing to lead the sheep and so that they are scattered [v5]. For this, God promised to judge the evil shepherds by taking away their flock and food [v10]. Then, He would seek out and gather His sheep from where they were scattered [v11,12]; feed them on the mountains and cause them to lie down on lush pastures [v12-15]; heal the sick [v16]; send His servant, David, to feed, shepherd, and be Prince to them [v23,24]; cause them to dwell safely in the wilderness [v25] so that they are no more consumed with hunger or shamed by the heathen [v29]. This is exactly what Jesus, the new and greater David, has done here.

Moses / Joshua

Aside from the obvious throw-back to Elisha multiplying the twenty barley loaves, the most overt Old Testament connections here exist with Moses. Jesus seating the people in ranks shows His authority over them as the new Moses, who divided Israel into ranks of 100 and 50 in a desert place where he gave them bread³⁷. In the parallel passage of John 6, Jesus Himself interprets this miracle and links it explicitly w/ Moses and Manna – interpreting it as a sign of His own body being the Bread of Life and the

³³ Horne sees this aspect in Christ's water miracle subsequent to the bread miracle ["by the still waters" - pg 111].

³⁴ The whole pericope takes place in the valley of the shadow of John the Baptist's death [and its implicit dangerous implications on the lives of Christ and his disciples]. And in John's account of the miracle, Jesus interprets His own actions and describes the many that did not believe but were present, in fact not only disbelieved but were those who would betray Him. This is the first time that Jesus has mentioned Judas, His specific betrayer [though in character only, not by name] in John's recounting of the gospel narrative [Jn 6.64, 70-71] and is literally in the midst of his enemies and in the valley of death, because chapter 6 is nestled between 5.16 and 7.1 – both of which describe the simmering animosity of the Jews having fomented into a boil as "they sought to kill him". So, in a very real way, this miracle was a table spread in the presence of His enemies.

³⁵ If Isaiah 55 is a key or at least a lens through which we ought to be reading this miracle, then the abundance of bread is pointing us beyond itself to the abundance of redemption that is ours in Christ. We don't want to be like the disciples who mistook the leaven of the Pharisees for physical bread [Mt 16.6,7], nor conversely should we "*Labor for the food which perishes, but for that food which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him has God the Father sealed* [Jn 6.27]."

³⁶ Pg 226.

³⁷ Ex 18.21, 25; Deut 1.15.

Bread from Heaven for the life of the world³⁸.

Further still, Mark and John follow their record of the feeding of the five thousand directly and immediately with a water miracle: Jesus walking on water and taking the disciples miraculously to the other side. Both elements of victory over the sea and bread in the desert fulfill and excel Moses' miracles. It is not difficult to understand why the men of the crowd rise from their meal and respond by saying, "This is of truth that prophet that is to come into the world", wanting to make Him King³⁹.

Finally, Gary Wills points out that the wording of the phrase "sheep not having a shepherd" [ὥσεί πρόβατα οἷς οὐκ ἔστιν ποιμήν] hearkens back to Moses who prayed for God to make Joshua a leader of Israel so that they wouldn't be "sheep without a shepherd" [LXX ὅτι ἦσαν ὡς πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα]⁴⁰. It is also not insignificant that this is the point at which Joshua is given to be the leader of Israel. Not only has Christ fulfilled the role of Moses, He has done likewise as the new and greater Joshua, who in chapter 7 of Mark begins a conquest of foreign land after having made this desert place a land of abundant food, flowing with milk and honey⁴¹.

APPENDIX A: Fun with Numbers:

At the outset of such an inquiry, more than a little caution is in order. Searching out the symbolic significance of numbers can quickly devolve into an exercise that is, at best, a complete waste of time. In this instance particularly, Scripture itself stems the tide of our numeric zeal, by repeating the same basic miracle two short chapters later all the while assigning completely different numbers to it⁴². Still, there does seem to be some significance to the numbers and the narrative is chock-full of them. Christ did not act arbitrarily here, nor did the Holy Spirit through the Apostles when they chose the specific details in their writings.

200 denarii

Gill quotes Lightfoot's observation that '[200 denarii] was a noted and celebrated sum among the Jews, and frequently mentioned by them. A virgin's dowry, upon marriage, was "two hundred pence" (c); and so was a widow's; and one that was divorced (d), if she insisted on it, and could make good her claim: this was the fine of an adult man, that lay with one under age; and of a male under age, that lay with a female adult (e); and of one man that gave another a slap of the face (f). This sum answered to six pounds and five shillings of our money.'

Groups of 100 and 50

³⁸ France notes that the return of manna was an eschatological hope in Israel [pg 262].

³⁹ Jn 6.14,15.

⁴⁰ Num 27.17.

⁴¹ For an interesting introduction to the ministry of Christ as conquest, see Leithart's "Galilee of the Gentiles".

⁴² Much has been written regarding whether these two accounts are descriptions of the same event. The secondary miracle of the feeding of the four thousand is found in Matthew [15] and Mark [8]. And afterward in both accounts, Jesus Himself refers to the two events as separate incidents: "*Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?*" [Mat 16.9-10 NIV]

As has already been observed, this is exactly what Moses did in Exodus 18.

5 Loaves & 2 Fish:

We have already noted how the number of five loaves corresponds directly to the Davidic eating of the five loaves of shewbread. But how else have Christians understood these numbers?

Augustine's classic interpretation ties Jesus to Moses on the mount ⁴³where he brought the people the two tablets of the law which were expounded in his five books [Pentateuch]⁴⁴. When people heard five, or two they automatically thought of Torah. This makes for some interesting allegories relating to the grace of the Law, that God sits down his people on green pastures and feeds them Torah, Christ coming not to destroy but fulfill it. Even deeper than this we might see that the breaking of Christ's body [something that is clearly foreshadowed here] is the keeping of the Law we receive by partaking of Him⁴⁵. Bede agrees with the five loaves, but suggests that the two fish are the Psalms and Prophets⁴⁶.

Some have suggested that the numbers are less relevant than the substances themselves. Bread is to represent Israel and fish the Gentiles⁴⁷.

To confuse matters further, the number 5 was known to have had an instant association among early Christians with the 5 wounds of Christ. And given the undeniable Eucharistic tones here, this interpretation is appealing⁴⁸.

So what about the 2 Fish? Theophylact of Ochrid [an 11th century Byzantine commentator] asserted that they represented the gospels and epistles⁴⁹. If we are right to associate fish with the world, then perhaps an interesting case could be made that they point to Peter and Paul – the 2 apostles sent to the Gentiles.

12 Baskets of Fragments

This may simply indicate that the groups of hundred and fifty were arranged according to tribe. Again, this would be a link to the leadership of Moses and Joshua in the wilderness and Conquest eras. But of all the numbers mentioned, twelve seems to be the most significant symbolically. Mark has been building a theme of twelveness and this is his third specific reference. Previously, Mark alone tells us the

⁴³ For this miracle, John places Jesus "up on a mountain" [Jn 6.3].

⁴⁴ Homilies on John's Gospel; Tractate XXIV; chapter 6 1-14.

⁴⁵ Not to enter into the longstanding debate about the details of His active vs passive obedience.

⁴⁶ Catena Aurea, pg 123.

⁴⁷ JBJ

⁴⁸ So many have asked the question through the ages, "*How could the death of one man so long ago really mean so much in the big scheme of things?*" This miracle provides an answer in dramatic fashion. One lad with five smooth stones could conquer Goliath. One lad with five small loaves can feed a nation. Jesus used breaking the bread and tearing the [bloody?] flesh of the fish to feed the world. This was a lesson about Him and also His disciples and theirs'. Death, trouble, persecution: the world would be fed by their sacrifice – He gave Himself and left the next baskets for each of them to take up and do the same. '*Blessed are you when men persecute you – this is how they treated the prophets before you and this is also how they will treat Me, the fulfillment and supersession of each prophet – the greater and greatest Prophet. As My disciples, don't you expect any better.*' They were initially seeking to feed themselves, but were here challenged to feed the sheep instead.

⁴⁹ Catena Aurea, pg 123.

age of Jairus's daughter, interrupting that story by the woman with the flow of blood for twelve years [5.25/42]. Viewed as the third of this series, it is easy to see how twelve may be understood as representative of Israel.

Twelve baskets also signal enough for each of the disciples to take and use⁵⁰. Mark appropriately refers to them as apostles [ἀπόστολοι - a term used only here in his entire gospel ; Matthew and John likewise also only use the term once, though Luke uses it 6 times] because they were such, having literally just returned from their emissarial dispatches, and now Jesus commands them in the imperative "You give them bread!" This miracle was performed in Bethsaida, which Jesus later condemns and links with the apostolic condemnation of his emissaries as well⁵¹. His bread is their bread, and vice versa . They carry His authority as His apostles [Lk 10.16].

Another interesting link exists with the Syrophenecian woman's comment in the next chapter that the leftovers, crumbs, fragments [ψιχίον - literally, plucked or broken-off pieces] from the table of the [12 tribes – 12 baskets] children of Israel would be enough to feed the 'dogs' – Gentile nations⁵².

5000 Men

On the surface, this number is significant because it simplifies the task of calculating the magnitude of Christ's miracle. Our Lord fed one thousand men with each loaf⁵³.

Why only Men?

Much has been made of the question why only the men were counted [as if feeding only 5k men alone is not miraculous enough to warrant mentioning]. Matthew tells us explicitly that the figure of 5k includes only the men and does not take into consideration the women and children who were present and who assuredly partook [Mt 14.21]. It is unthinkable, after all, that the original five loaves and two fish which were taken from a little boy⁵⁴, would be divided miraculously by Christ, the Compassionate Shepherd,

⁵⁰ In a private conversation with Jim Jordan, he sees the number 12 as a detail pointing to the fact that throughout the many long hours of Mark 6, Jesus kept the disciples busy in service and, while they were looking forward to a time of respite, they were forced not only to feed the thousands but also turn right around and clean up after them, each having his own basket. Something of their resentment may be evident in v52 which states "*they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.*" [NKJV]

⁵¹ Mt 11.21; Lk 10.13.

⁵² Mk 7.28. 12 is **the** prominent number for Mark here. Meyers points out that just before this incident, Jesus heals the woman who has been left uncured [and actually worse off] by her physicians for 12 years, the immediately afterward, Jesus raises Jairus's 12 yr old daughter back to life [5.25,42]. In both cases [and presumably now here in ch 6] this number seems to orient Jesus' miracles toward Israel, the people of 12 tribes.

⁵³ Additionally, Mark likes to close each episode with an ironic punch or surprising contrast. I submit that we should be reading the number of men present as a shocking contrast to Herod's feast. If we are right to believe Josephus here, then Herod had to call his top officials out of Galilee [a famished region as discussed in footnote 7] to travel to Perea [just like John had done in his ministry] at Machaerus where the men's *triclinium* [banquet hall] measured 14.5 x 9.5 meters [Netzer pg 216] and that space was divided/disrupted by rows of columns. The women's triclinium was even smaller at 9.5x9.5m. This would limit the number of men present to a rather small number, not exceeding the low hundreds at most. King Jesus, on the other hand, fed a party represented by five thousand men, in a desert region of famished North Galilee, with plenty to spare.

⁵⁴ παιδάριον *paidarion* – Thayer's Lexicon renders the word "*a little boy, a lad*". Kittel repeatedly resorts to the simpler "*child*".

and then used to feed only the adult men [“Sorry kid, this meal is for adults only!”⁵⁵].

However, two alternative explanations are available: First, it appears to have been a conventional Jewish way of counting attendance at a meal⁵⁶. But secondly [and more probably], as was implied earlier, only counting the men further links this miracle with the details of Elisha’s feeding which was given to feed a group of a hundred men⁵⁷. Our figure provides an easy comparison.⁵⁸

APPENDIX B: Sermon Outline and Map

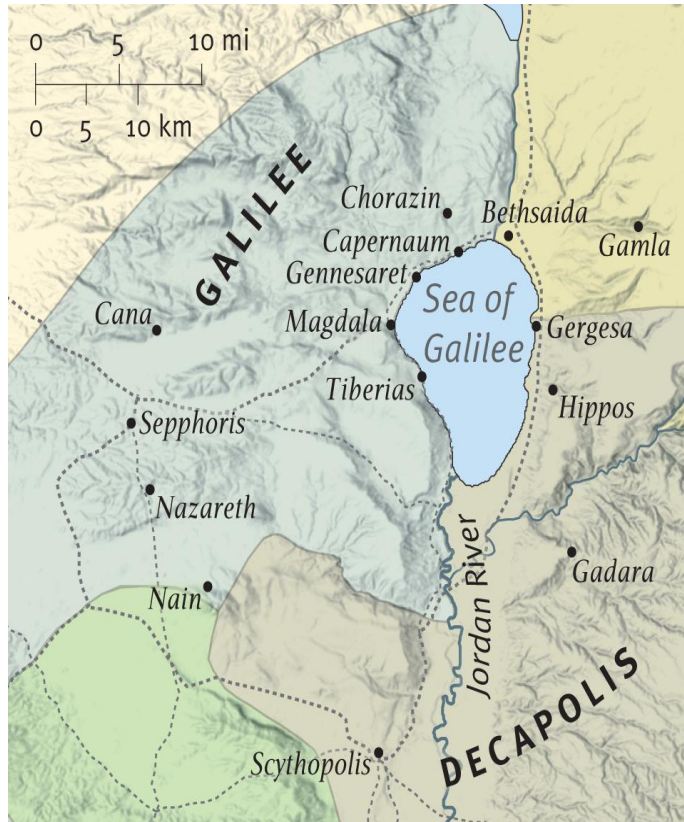
1. Intro illustration [lack of preparation/worry/hunger]
2. Context
 - a. Hometown rejection
 - b. Sending out of Apostles
 - c. News of John’s beheading [Herod’s gruesome meal].
3. Seeking Rest, Ministry Onslaught, Seeing the Need
 - a. Timing, Numbers, Region
 - b. Behold, the compassion of our Lord
 - c. What is true Shepherding?
4. Miracle
 - a. From the Lad to the Many
 - b. Shadows of the Eucharist
 - c. Leftovers and what to make of them
5. Applications
 - a. What are our needs?
 - b. Whence our food?
 - c. Whence our strength to minister?

⁵⁵ ... I mean, who would do that!?! Right!?!?

⁵⁶ D. Instone-Brewer, Traditions, 1:79-81, a male count relates to the rabbinic provision of different forms of “grace” depending on the number of men present ... [M. Ber. 7:3]

⁵⁷ It also links this feeding with the prior one, described in Mark’s intercalation of Herod’s birthday feast. Though some commentators have wrongly dismissed this flashback as a sloppy Markan addition, [W. Wink calls it a “rambling, unedifying account ... bearing all the marks of bazaar gossip”.] it beautifully links the feeding miracle with the individual episodes that have come before involving a daughter who is ‘given something to eat’, a frustrated woman behind the scenes who finally is satisfied, a regional official, a would-be King [Jesus vs Herod], a sending out “ἀποστείλας” of emissaries with authority to bind, imprison, and/or conquer [Jesus’ disciples vs Herod’s soldiers], and a supplanting / rejection from family members. Looking forward to the feeding of the five thousand, the Herod pericope links with the sequence of: requesting food, an initial search for food, the food being called for, divided, given to intermediaries who then give it to recipients and then the “leftovers” being collected [John’s corpse] by disciples. Here again, as Herod’s guests are a male audience [being titillated by the erotic dance of the daughter], so only the men are counted in our Lord’s miracle here, linking it masterfully with that which came before.

⁵⁸ It may also serve to formally link with the “legion” of demons earlier, though I’m not aware of anyone marking this correspondence in outline form.



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