

## **John 33 – The Fourth Sign: A Miracle of Feeding**

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### **Scripture 1: (Jn. 6:1-15 ESV)**

After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples.

Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.

Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little."

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?"

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. Jesus then 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.

And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"

Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

### **Scripture 2: (Exod. 16:1-15 ESV)**

They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily."

So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, "At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?"

And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him-- what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD."

Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.'" And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

And the LORD said to Moses, "I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat."

### **Sermon:**

Despite John's reported persecution of Jesus' by the Jewish religious authorities, apparently His verbal defense and presented evidence was received and believed well enough to generate uncertainty about Jesus' alleged offenses and support for His claim of authority, such that after the feast {likely the Feast of Tabernacles, 5:1; The Third Sign: The Healing of a Paralytic} He was allowed to leave Jerusalem and Judea without any further negative incidents. Although it is not expressly stated, we presume that Jesus immediately returned to Galilee and resumed His itinerant ministry throughout the region {as further described in the Synoptic Gospels}.

Thus *"After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand."*

Once again, John slips in several seemingly minor yet important details which help to establish the physical context for the following events, describing both their time and place:

- *"After this..."* tells us that there was a substantial, yet indeterminate, passage of time between this and the previous narrative.
- *"Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand."* tells us the season during which this story occurs.
  - This is the second Passover mentioned by the evangelist, implying that Jesus has now been engaged in His public ministry for about a year.
  - *"...was at hand."* implies that the annual Passover was approaching, which marks this story as happening in the early Spring before the feast. However, based on the narrative which immediately follows, it is clear that the Passover was not yet close enough for them to be beginning the annual pilgrimage up {down South} to Jerusalem.
- *"...went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee..."* could be a subjective statement, since we are not given a clear starting point, but there are other details which strongly imply one area over any other possibilities.

- To describe the location and direction of travel, John uses the Greek term *peran*, a preposition that most simply means “beyond”; so, the evangelist simply says that Jesus traveled “...[beyond] the Sea of Galilee...” which, since most Jewish directional references are made from Jerusalem, implies that Jesus went somewhere along the northern coast of the Sea.
- To narrow the location even further, the disciples will soon get in their boats and sail to Capernaum (6:17), a town located on the north-west coast of the Sea, immediately following this event.
- Furthermore, Jesus will ask Philip a question about where provisions might be procured, which suggests that Philip may possess knowledge about local shops or families where they could purchase food, reasonably implying that they were possibly near his home town of Bethsaida (1:44), his familiar territory, on the north-east coast of the Sea {and incidentally, Bethsaida was also the hometown of Andrew and Simon, which further implies that the boy with was probably familiar to Andrew (perhaps even a relation?), and strengthening the argument for this location}.

Now some of you may find these kind of details fascinating because of the life that they bring to the story, while some of you may think that they are just trivial or irrelevant to the grand scheme of the Gospel. But these details matter greatly!

Why do I spend so much time drawing out and explaining these intricate contexts, trying to bring to our understanding the world of the past? Because these details are evidence supporting Scripture and its truth! Because these detail would have also been implicitly understood and known by the original hearers and readers of Scripture.

These small details are evidence that these things really did happen, in real places, with real people. Made up stories do not have details like these; details that are verifiable and logical. Although we cannot verify certain specific details today, they could be confirmed back when the New Testament was written.

- If this story did not happen as the evangelist records, then someone could have and would have denied it as being false.
- The Church Fathers who initially received the text of Scripture, were able to examine and verify the truth of its claims and if they had any doubt about them, then they would not have used it, promoted it, or preserved it.

Therefore, all of these little, seemingly minor details, which hover around the edges of the story, serve to convince us of its truth! Authors of fiction do not waste their time on such details, preferring instead to focus on “the action” and the “grand narrative” of their story and let our imagination fill in the gaps.

So, now that we know the “Where” and the “When”, we turn to the “Who”, “*And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples.*”. We have Jesus, the disciples, and a “large crowd” but, we are not immediately told either the size or composition of the crowd, beside it being “large”.

Then, John also tells us “Why” the crowd was following Jesus, “...because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.”, telling us that {as the Synoptics demonstrate} Jesus had performed more and other acts of healing than just those of the royal official's son and the paralyzed man at Bethesda, suggesting that Jesus had developed a good and popular reputation as a healer and miracle worker through His itinerant ministry. So, having such a reputation, what can we presume about the composition of this crowd of followers? Perhaps some of them were beginning to believe in Jesus and His message, but as we will see over the next while, the greater

impression that John suggests, is that they were actually a bunch of “looky-loos”. They were following Jesus but they were not followers of Jesus.

- If they were following Jesus merely because of the “signs” they had seen, then many, if not most, of them were following because they just wanted to see more miracles. They were just looking for a show.

They were not following Jesus because they had some depth of faith or any understanding about who Jesus is. They were not following Him like the disciples. They were not learning from Him and they were not being discipled by Him. Instead, they were just following along behind Him like a puppy hoping for a special treat.

Then lastly, John tells us the “What”; what the purpose of the story is, “*Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples.*”. Jesus went up the mountain and then He sat down. Jesus' act of sitting is the most important detail which establishes the whole scene because in the ancient world of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, sitting was an expression of authority:

- Judges sat to deliver their verdict;
- Teachers and Jewish Rabbis sat when teaching, while their students stood around them, gathered together.

Which means that this story is given to us, as it was to His hearers, to teach us something about Jesus. What Jesus does here, is perform a fourth Sign through a miracle of feeding, thereby manifesting His divine glory as the great Provider and Provisioner.

So now, seated on a mountainside and surrounded by His disciples and this large crowd of wonder-seekers {Perhaps this story is actually meant to be, “seeker-sensitive”?}, “*Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.*”.

What was Jesus testing by asking Philip this? He was testing Philip's reaction and response; to see whether he would react with a worldly response or a spiritual response. He was testing whether Philip would lean upon his own worldly understanding or if he would trust the LORD and His providence.

- “*Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little."*” Philip answered Jesus with a very worldly answer; his mind went immediately to the monetary cost. Two hundred denarii is roughly equivalent to eight months of wages {NIV translation}. That much money would buy a lot of people, a lot of lunch, and yet he still expected it to not be enough. The disciples were just a bunch of poor, out of work fishermen and other tradesmen. Where could they get enough money to provide for so many people? Obviously, they could not.
- Then Andrew tried to rescue Philip. {This is another example of why Andrew has a reputation for being a great evangelist, because whenever he appears in John's Gospel, he is always mentioned bringing people to Jesus (John 1:40, 6:8-9, 12:21-22)} “*One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?"*” {This is also more evidence suggesting that they were near Bethsaida because, the boy and Andrew are presented as being familiar with one another (and the boy himself is never mentioned in the other Gospel account), as if they were related or knew one another. Otherwise, it seems as if he was just some random child whose lunch the disciples stole; but, if he and Andrew knew one another, it is reasonable to assume that either the child would have offered what he had or that Andrew might have asked him.} Andrew at least, proved that he was beginning to think outside of the “worldly” box because he was looking for alternative solutions. He was getting onto the right track but, he was not there yet.

- Perhaps one of his idea to suggest was: as is often wrongly interpreted and promoted by liberal, miracle-denying scholars; that if everyone pitched in with whatever they had with them, then maybe everyone could just share and everyone could have a little something. Perhaps Andrew thought that this would be a great social “miracle” and example of sharing, by a community tangibly demonstrating love for their neighbors. But, no.
- Regardless, both Philip and Andrew failed Jesus' test. Jesus, as God the Son, knew how they would answer as surely as He knew what He intended to do. So in reality, they actually failed themselves, by proving to themselves that they did not get it, yet.

“Jesus said, *“Have the people sit down.”* Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. Jesus then 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.” This story should be familiar to everyone but, it is unusual in John because it is the only story from His ministry {the period which includes everything prior to the last week of Jesus' life} that is shared across all four Gospels (Matthew 14:21; Mark 6:44; Luke 9:14). Amazingly, every specific detail is also identically recorded in each version.

- There were five thousand men {some of the accounts also mention women and children (Matthew), but their lack of mentioning here does not imply their absence};
- They were in a remote place and the people were unprepared to take care of themselves;
- There were five loaves and two fish, to start; and
- There were twelve baskets filled with leftovers, at the end;

Taken together, this great consistency helps to emphasize both the story's importance and its veracity, because everyone remembered it the same.

However, John's version presents a different, yet related, unique purpose, point, and intended meaning of the story, from the Synoptics:

- that just as the LORD provided for Israel in the wilderness, so too Jesus, the Son of God, will provide for His people.

After offering thanksgiving to God for the food, Jesus distributed it to everyone. Jesus served them their meal. He brought it to them wherever they sat. This did not become a massive potluck because there was no opportunity. There was no opportunity for people to “share and share alike”. Since people did not come to Jesus to be served, the disciples could not be hiding and passing food forward to Him from behind, to then serve the people. There is only one way to rightly understand this story and that is as a miracle, because the LORD always provides what we need.

Did Jesus need the child's fish and bread? No, because He is the God who spoke everything into being, yet this is a reminder that ordinarily, God works His miracles through secondary means. God is the absolute First Cause and the created, natural elements are His secondary means. God made the fish and God made the barley which had been dried and ground into flour, along with the olives which were pressed into oil, as well as the water and salt, which when combined and cooked became the bread that Jesus served. Even baking bread is ultimately a miracle of God. Jesus was able to give this increase because He is the LORD God, the Provider, “*And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had*

*eaten*.”. Not only did Jesus give them enough, He provided them an abundance; giving them far more than necessary, so that everyone could eat and be satisfied.

But, beyond the mere fact of this miracle, this story is also another sign of Jesus's divinity as the LORD, God Almighty; it is more evidence. This miraculous story of provision echoes and reflects the LORD's provision for Israel in the wilderness during the exodus.

*“And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”*, back then, although it was a different circumstance, they had the same problem.

The Israelites were hungry and tired. The provisions that they had brought out of Egypt, had already run out. So, hungry, fearful, and anxious about their needs, the Israelites began to grumble against Moses and Aaron. They blamed their leaders for the circumstances. They began to wish that they had died as slaves in Egypt with full stomachs, rather than die in freedom with empty bellies.

But truly, if we are honest with ourselves, if we were in their same circumstance and only knew what they knew, then we would not blame them for their grumbling, because we would be saying and doing the very same thing. At that moment, they did not know what they could or should expect and hope for from God. Their understanding of who the LORD really is, was still too small. They did not yet understand that they could and should be relying entirely upon Him, as they had thus far since they left Egypt {only ~45 days prior}. A divine solution was far beyond the scope of their present ability to imagine, because the LORD had not yet shown them Who He Is.

Following the LORD's direction, *“So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, "At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?"*”. God had heard the people's grumbling and assented to satisfy their need. He assented to show forth His glory: His Power, His Majesty; to show that He carries the weight of responsibility for them and to show them that, by naming and claiming them as His covenant people, He shall always provide for them.

Meanwhile, Moses already understood; he trusted God, so he took the people's complaint before the LORD. Moses knew that God would provide for them. He trusted that, since God put them in the situation they were in, God would be the one to get them out of it. *“And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him-- what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.”*”.

Moses understood who their sinful grumbling was really against, although they did not, telling them *“Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.”*

- Remember, grumbling and unjust complaints against God's appointed leaders: no matter who they are, whether parent, teacher, preacher, or government official; is sinful because God appointed them, therefore you are questioning His judgment and complaining against His rule and Sovereign authority.

*“Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.'" And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.*

*And the LORD said to Moses, "I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"*

But why did God allow them, permit them, and cause Israel to be in the situation that they were in? To display His glory **and** so that they "...shall know that I am the LORD your God." The LORD was proving the truth of His divinity to a people who grew up in a world filled with "so-called gods" that were fanciful, fantastical, and utterly dependent on blind-faith because no one had ever seen them, heard them, or experienced evidence of their power or their existence. The Egyptian gods were simply made up stories that were appropriated by Satan and his demonic forces.

Then, after chastising them for their grumbling, the LORD provided them the food that they needed, "*In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat."* Truly this was a miraculous event. Again, we see God using ordinary means to do extraordinary things; the First Cause uses secondary means to achieve His purposes. At the LORD's Sovereign command, a massive flock of birds flew into their camp and settled, and the manna just appeared along with the morning dew {perhaps being deposited by it?}; both are simply miracles of God that He performed using the natural world.

- The probability odds of a flock of birds, large enough to feed so many Israelites, arriving just in time must be approaching Zero.
- Even if a person wanted to claim this event as a "natural occurrence", a Christian would recognize that the birds arrival was still ordained, appointed, and directed by God to happen right then, with as many as there were.
- Meanwhile, there are no attempted "natural" explanations for the manna. This could only be a miracle, which was why Aaron was instructed to preserve some in a container kept within the Ark of the Covenant, as proof and evidence to future generations (Exodus 16:32; Hebrews 9:4).

So, just as God gave them both meat and bread: quail and manna; giving them enough to be satisfied, Jesus also gave this hungry crowd, out in the Galilean wilderness, meat and bread: fish and barley loaves; giving them more than enough to satisfy them and leave them with an excess of abundance. These people followed Jesus hoping to see a Sign and He gave them one. Not only did they see it, but they also recognized and understood the Sign; at least, in part. "*When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"*". They understood that this miracle was evidence that Jesus was sent by the LORD. They recognized a relationship with Moses's provision in the wilderness, but they missed what the relationship actually was. They thought that it proved Jesus's similarity to Moses; demonstrating that He is the "second Moses", hence why they declared that He is "the Prophet" of Deuteronomy 18:15, and why "...they were about to come and take him by force to make him king..." because, not only would He be a Davidic king, He would also be a wonder-working leader like Moses! However, they missed the point; they missed what the Sign was actually saying about Jesus. They did not rightly understand "who" was doing "what":

- Moses declared to the people what God would do and then, God did it. God miraculously sent the quail and the manna appeared. Moses merely told the people what to expect before it happened, he provided nothing himself.

- Jesus commanded the people to sit and then, He served them. Jesus miraculously multiplied the loaves and fishes, right before their very eyes.

The miracle of quail and manna demonstrated to Israel, that the LORD is God, and it proved that He would provide for them. Moses was just a man and he could do nothing, in himself. Moses could not provide for Israel. The miracle of loaves and fishes demonstrated before Israel, the Jesus is the LORD God, and it proved that He would provide for us. This miracle proved that Jesus was more than a man, demonstrating that He was greater than Moses.

Beyond this miracle being evidence that Jesus Christ is the LORD and our Provider, it also teaches us that we need to increase our expectations about God. Both of these stories teach us that, “The LORD is bigger than our expectations and our wildest imaginings!”. Our view of God is far less than His reality.

- The hungry Israelites grumbled in the wilderness because they could not imagine a God who could and would be able and willing provide for them.
- Philip could not imagine a way to get enough food for the people except by spending an outrageous sum of money and even then, he could not imagine how the available supply could possibly meet the demand.
- Andrew, although hopeful, could not imagine how far Jesus could make such limited resources go: five loaves and two fish to feed over five thousand people.
- But maybe, perhaps the boy who offered up the food, he might have imagined and hoped for what Jesus could do with his offering. Maybe there is a lesson about our need for “childlike faith” here, as well (Matthew 18:1-6; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17)?

Regardless, even knowing and believing that God, that Jesus, can and will provide for us; that He will give us as much as we need and more, we expect and ask for far less than He is **able** and **wanting** to give us. When we pray, we often fail to “Pray Big!” and we often fail to “Pray Small” because, deep down, we doubt God; we doubt **who** the LORD is.

- We doubt that He is willing and able; or we fear that He is willing but unable, or that He is neither willing nor able.
- We doubt that He actually cares about our little, minor, and insignificant human concerns when there is still so much evil, pain, conflict, and sorrow in the world around us.
- We doubt that God actually cares for us as a Father therefore, we fail to pray because we assume that we would be bothering Him if we even ask.

We forget that God made the world and everything in it for us. We forget that God loves us and He wants to bless us because He loves us as His chosen children of adoption. We forget that He gave His Son, Jesus, **for us** as the propitiation for our sins: for our forgiveness and to be our righteousness, received by Faith in Him, alone.

There is no limit to what God can and will do for His children, within His Sovereign will for us. Yes, sometimes we will pray and God will tell us “No”, but that is never because He cannot do something; that is never because He does not love us. Instead, He will tell us “No” because He does love us; because He wants what is best for us; because He knows that what is best for us is His will.



However, the great challenge for us is that we must trust Him, entirely. We must depend upon Him, entirely, because when we do, He is sure to give us whatever we need and even more, in abundance. Jesus, God the Son, is our great Provider and we must trust that He will always provide for us, His people; that He will give us what we need and more than we can ever imagine. **AMEN**



Illustration 1: <https://bibleatlas.org/sea-of-galilee.htm>