

# MIRACLES OF JESUS

## THE FEEDING OF THE 5,000 (JOHN 6)

### The Crowd Chases Jesus (vv. 1–4)

Having welcomed his apostles back from a recent missionary trip (see Mark 6:12–13), Jesus wanted to spend time alone with them. (Mark 6:30–32). He knew they were both excited and fatigued from the experience. Together, they boarded a boat and set sail toward Bethsaida on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee (Luke 9:10).

They reached the shore but never made it to Bethsaida. People who had been on the lookout for Jesus from the land caught sight of their boat's sails on the water and raced on foot to intercept them (Mark 6:33). Thousands of people filled an open field near the shore and were visible from the approaching boat. Jesus postponed his private time with the apostles to accommodate the crowds. He healed many and taught them (Matt 14:14; Mark 6:30; Luke 9:11).

### The Feeding of the 5,000 (vv. 5–15)

Late in the afternoon, the apostles asked Jesus to dismiss the crowds. In response, Jesus asked one of his apostles, Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" Philip, who was originally from Bethsaida and knew the area well. He knew there was nowhere to buy food from in that area. But Jesus wanted him and his fellow apostles to use their faith to solve the impossible problem.

The crowds consisted of about 5,000 men, besides women and children (Matt 14:21). How could they possibly feed so many people? Jesus knew what he was going to do, but the apostles had no clue how to respond. Andrew found a boy with five barley loaves and two small fish. "But what are they among so many?" he asked.

It was springtime, and the grass was green in the open fields. Jesus instructed the hungry crowds to sit in groups. He took the bread and the fish, blessed them, and broke them into pieces. He never ran out of food!

### Jesus' "I Am the Bread of Life" Discourse (vv. 22–59)

After the miracles of bread and fish took place, Jesus and his apostles at last made their way to the Capernaum synagogue, people excitedly came to find him, including those who had been the recipients of Jesus' miraculous feeding of the 5,000. But, as Jesus was about to point out, they were looking for him for all the wrong reasons.



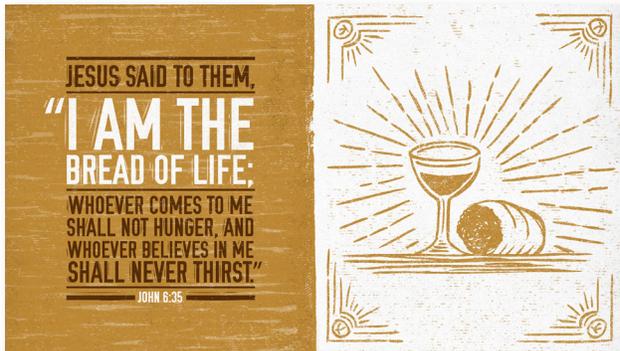
A view of the Plain of Bethsaida taken from the hills above Capernaum and east of Chorazin.



Jesus knew why the crowds were seeking him: They wanted him to provide continually for their physical needs (cf. John 6:15, 26–27). The miracle should have produced strong faith in the hearts of the recipients, not a desire for an unending buffet.

The feeding of the 5,000 occurred in a deserted place. The symbolism was not lost on the people who knew their Jewish history: God also had fed ancient Israel with manna in the wilderness (Ex 16:4, 15). These parallels added fuel to their misguided Messianic fervor.

Jesus proceeded to tell them that he was the true bread from heaven, not the manna in the wilderness. “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35). This is the first of seven “I am” statements uttered by Jesus in the Gospel of John (Figure 1). They are incredible self-declarations, which he made throughout his ministry.



### Jesus’ Seven “I Am” Statements in John

“I Am Statement”	Citation
1. “I am the bread of life”	John 6:35, 48, 51
2. “I am the light of the world”	John 8:12; 9:5
3. “I am the door of the sheep”	John 10:7, 9
4. “I am the good shepherd”	John 10:11, 14
5. “I am the resurrection and the life”	John 11:25
6. “I am the way, the truth, and the life”	John 14:6
7. “I am the true vine”	John 15:1

Figure 1.

The people who heard this first “I am” statement at last began to understand that free bread came with a price. Jesus wanted genuine disciples who would truly repent and change their hearts toward sin (John 6:50–53).

### Defection Among the Disciples (vv. 60–71)

These challenges issued by Jesus were accompanied by strange language. Jesus said that people would have to eat his flesh and drink his blood. This is not what they wanted to hear! Many “disciples” stopped following after Jesus altogether. “This is a hard saying,” they said. “Who can listen to it?” Jesus then turned to his apostles and asked them, “Do you want to go away as well?” Peter rose to the occasion:

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68–69).

In a moment of spiritual clarity, Peter had answered wisely. It is what our world needs to hear today, too. We need Jesus!