

A SYSTEM ENGINEER LOOKS AT THE FEEDING OF THE 5,000

The feeding of the 5000 stands out in my mind as one of the most amazing and irrefutable miracles Jesus performed. There is no other miracle in the Gospels where there were thousands of actual witnesses who clearly understood that a miracle had occurred and the absolute impossibility of a human logistical solution. It is recorded in all four gospels and here is the brief account in John 6.

John 6:5-14 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."

Being a bit of an engineering type, I pulled out my calculator and after a few calculations began to realize that to feed 5000 men and another 5,000-10,000 women and children. we are talking about thousands of pounds of food. Probably this would be enough weight and volume to fill a couple of semi tractor trailer rigs today. In that day's transportation system, it would have required a camel or donkey caravan of 100-200 animals to haul this much food out into the desert. But I began to realize, that on an entirely different level, the feeding of the 5000 is not about the thousands of pounds of food or the 5000-15,000 people that had a feast that day, or even about what Jesus disciples learned from the experience. It is about only two people.

It's about Jesus who performed the miracle and about a small boy who gave up his lunch for something bigger than himself. I think at the end of the day, after the banquet was finished and everyone was full, that little boy was the most blessed individual there. His example shows us some simple elements of giving. His giving was sacrificial. He did not hold back part of his food. He didn't attach any strings or conditions like telling the disciples that he expected to be paid back when they reached the next village. Like so many people in the Bible, who had encounters with Jesus, we really don't know anything about what happened to the little boy but I'm pretty sure his life was never the same after that.

Now we know that Jesus could have fed those people without those 5 loaves and 2 fishes, but somehow in God's economy He encourages and blesses our participation in what He wants to accomplish. What giving is all about is putting some feet to our faith like this little boy did.