

# Jesus Provides Bread from Heaven

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** Jesus is the Son of God who provides bread from heaven.

Nobody looks forward to filling someone else's shoes. Nobody. For example, do you want to be the small forward in Cleveland when LeBron James retires? Do you want to coach women's basketball at the University of Connecticut when Geno Auriemma decides he's done? Would you have wanted to follow after Walter Cronkite or Johnny Carson and tried to fill their shoes?

 Whose shoes would you dread trying to fill? Why?

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Now let's think for a moment about who wore arguably the biggest shoes in the Old Testament—*Moses*. Saved by the hand of God as a baby (Ex. 2) and called by God from a flaming bush to set His people free (Ex. 3). Long story short, he did just that.

The *miracles* that God worked through Moses were—so to speak—the stuff of legend. Among many others, the Red Sea parted at Moses' raised staff, and after the Israelites walked through on dry land, its waves crashed back down, killing every last Egyptian soldier in their pursuit (Ex. 14). And though God's people spent the next 40 years wandering in the desert because they didn't believe and obey Him, He still revealed His glory when He twice provided water from a rock and manna that appeared like dew every morning of their wandering.

*Manna* is translated “What is it?” which was what the Israelites called it because they didn’t know what it was. Just as the Israelites had decided they were going to die of hunger and should go back into slavery in Egypt, God told Moses that He would “rain bread from heaven” (Ex. 16:4), not simply to fill their bellies but to fill their souls with the truth that He is Yahweh (16:12). And God commanded them to preserve some in a jar in the ark of the testimony as a reminder of His provision for them (16:32-34).

*Moses. Miracles. Manna.* Definitely some big shoes to fill, but One was up to the task. As great as Moses was, he was only preparing the way for this One to one day follow after him.

In this session, we will see that Jesus provides not only for physical needs but also for spiritual ones. He showed compassion for the crowd following after Him, He took what was available and worked an amazing miracle to feed a multitude, and He chose to communicate that blessing to the crowd through His disciples. Jesus’ miracle of feeding the 5,000 demonstrated His deity in providing bread for the crowd, even as He Himself is “the bread of life” (John 6:35).

## **1. Jesus provides by showing compassion (Matt. 14:13-14).**

There are times of deep grief and sorrow when you just want to withdraw from everyone. Jesus experienced this. John the Baptist had been His cousin, His prophet, His forerunner, His Elijah. And because of John’s willingness to share God’s commands without fear, he found himself beheaded at the hand of a ruler who would rather make a tragic mistake than admit he was wrong. After John’s disciples heard about his death, they gave him an honorable burial and then went to tell Jesus (Matt. 14:1-12). This is where we begin:

*<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.*

*<sup>14</sup> When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

The crowds “heard it,” meaning they heard He was on a boat heading to a new place. We get no indication that they ever stopped to wonder if He *needed* time alone or *why* He left them. We picture Jesus in the boat grappling with the emotions and pain and struggle surrounding John’s unnatural death. This is yet another example of the Son of God becoming like us in every way so that He could stand in for us and take the punishment for our sin (Heb. 2:17).

When Jesus stepped off the boat, the crowd was there waiting for Him because *they needed Him*. He alone had the power to heal them inside and out. He alone brought the words of eternal life. He alone could do what no one else could do. They weren’t seeking simple entertainment; they were seeking Jesus to work the miracles in them that they had only heard about from the stories of long ago. Their parents had taught them about Moses and the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea and water from a rock and manna, and this Man seemed to be just as strong as Moses in the power of Yahweh Himself. And so, though no doubt tired and worn and emotionally spent, Jesus had compassion on them.

 What are some reasons we might refuse to show compassion to others? Are any of these justified? Why or why not?

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## 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

### 46. *Jesus’ Deity*

Within the person of Jesus Christ, there are two natures—the divine nature and the human nature. Scripture teaches He is fully divine and fully human. His divinity is on display in passages that describe Him as being equal with God (John 1:1-18; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-3). The New Testament also points to the deity of Christ by showing how He possesses attributes that God alone possesses (Mic. 5:2; John 1:4), how He performs works that only God performs (Mark 2:5-12; John 10:28; 17:2), and how He Himself claims to be the Son of God (Matt. 26:63-64; John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5).

Compassion was not just something Jesus had; it's something we as His followers should have as well. When we see people desperate, hurting, grieving, and full of sorrow, we must remember that we have the solution. We know the Miracle-Worker. We know the One who has power over sin and the grave.

Our compassion for others leads us to share our money, our meals, and our home. We give words of peace and comfort and hope. And even when we're exhausted or grieving or raw ourselves, we don't harden our hearts. As Jesus would say in John 15:9, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." The Father has proven His love by sending His one and only Son (John 3:16). The love of the Father and the Son and the Spirit was not limited to emotions—God acted on it. Likewise, we as followers of Christ are not called to *feel* compassion but to *be* compassionate.

Before He ever provided the crowd with a meal, Jesus provided them something far more valuable—Himself. The bread from heaven in the exodus nourished God's people, but the Bread of Life satisfies forever (John 6:35-38). So, in His compassion, He healed their sick.

## Voices from the Church

"The greatest miracle of all, however, is the miracle of a changed life—and this can happen, as we open our hearts and lives to Christ. Do others see Christ in you—His love, His compassion, His purity, His joy? Make sure of your commitment to Christ, then ask Him to change you from within by His Holy Spirit, and make you a living witness to the miracle of His transforming power."<sup>1</sup>

—Billy Graham



What situation led you to deep compassion recently? How did you act on it?

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What difference did your act of compassion make in the life of another? In your own life?

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## 2. Jesus provides by doing the impossible with what we have (Matt. 14:15-18).

Sometimes we think we know who Jesus is and what He can do, but we don't fully buy in to the idea that He's truly all-knowing, all-powerful, and eternal. So you'll pray about your friend's broken leg but not your broken heart. Or you'll ask Him to protect your kids but only when you feel you've lost control. So we're often shocked at how God works when we actually give Him control.

Unfortunately, we don't tend to give Him control; we tend to simply blame God for not doing what we think He should do. The Israelites had said to Moses and Aaron, "You have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Ex. 16:3). Instead of seeking God for food, they blamed Him because they were hungry. Instead of presenting their requests to God, they handed Him their frustration.

Of course, God had the meal plan and was just waiting for the request. And even though the Israelites lacked faith, God was faithful to meet their needs in spite of their anger.



What are some circumstances for which people blame God?

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What does blaming God say about a person's understanding of who God is?

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*<sup>15</sup> Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." <sup>16</sup> But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." <sup>17</sup> They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." <sup>18</sup> And he said, "Bring them here to me."*

The disciples had prepared their argument:

- **The place was a wilderness**, with no resources to meet the need.
- **It was already late**, and of course, everyone needed to eat before going to bed.
- **The crowd needed to be sent away to the surrounding villages so they could buy food for themselves.** It was the only logical solution to the problem. Lack of resources plus hunger equals the end of ministry, from a human perspective.

How very human. How very much like us, trusting Jesus to handle the spiritual stuff but not the day-to-day hurts and needs and desires. And we use the same excuses today.

- **We declare our lives or surroundings a wilderness:** “There’s just no hope in this town/family/job.” “I’m just not being fed at my church.” “My marriage has been dead for years.”
- **We put our own timeline on spiritual matters:** “I’m too old to really make an impact.” “He’s too set in his ways to change.” “If only I’d heard God call me 20 years ago.”
- **We decide that we just can’t help others with their needs:** “I can’t help her until she’s ready to help herself.” “I just give up; he never listens to me.” “I’ve wasted my last breath. I’m done.”

In the wilderness. A late day. Hungry people. Only enough food for a poor boy (John 6:9). The disciples had already taken a quick inventory of the food on hand, and somehow only one boy in the huge crowd of 5,000 men had planned ahead. A hopeless situation, right?

Only one thing could help, so Jesus said, “Bring them here to me.” And He is saying the same thing to you today.



What is your impossible situation today? What would it mean for you to take your situation fully to Jesus?

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### 3. Jesus provides by meeting needs through His followers (Matt. 14:19-21).



*<sup>19</sup> Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>20</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. <sup>21</sup> And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.*

So, though the power and the miracle came through Jesus, it was carried out by the human hands and feet of the disciples. Jesus blessed the food but then turned over the heavenly meal to the very men who had said, “This is a desolate place. . . We have only five loaves here and two fish” (Matt. 14:15,17). And before their very eyes, the loaves and fishes became food for thousands. Not just a morsel or a half-serving; they ate and were satisfied!

The same men who had attempted to come up with a very human logical answer to their problem watched the miracle unfold over and over and over again as they handed out the food. And just in case they didn’t fully appreciate Jesus’ miracle, they gathered 12 baskets of leftovers. Each disciple had an entire basket of heavenly bread *that wasn’t even eaten*. More than the manna that disappeared at the heat of each day, this bread sat in baskets as a visible reminder of God’s provision and bounty.

When we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, we learn that we’re called to be servants, but sometimes that servitude leads to much more—sometimes we are conduits of His miracles. Sometimes we think we’re crazy (or we’re sure others will think we’re crazy), but we step out in faith. Sometimes we have no idea why we left our everyday routines to go out of the way, but then we see clearly that *God used us to show His glory to someone*. And we saw it too.



How has God used a person to reveal Himself to you?

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How has God used you to love or lead someone in His name?

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## Conclusion

Both Moses and Jesus were involved with miracles of bread being provided from heaven. On both occasions, the bread was nourishing. Both filled stomachs and strengthened hearts to believe God and the men He sent. But Jesus completed the lesson that began with Moses' manna when He proclaimed, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35).

Perhaps you're as one of the crowd in this passage in the Gospel of Matthew, partaking of the bread and feeling Jesus' compassion but not quite grasping what He's talking about. He is offering Himself—the bread of life—to you right now.

Maybe you're a living, breathing disciple and you've experienced firsthand the joy of knowing "the bread of life" personally. If so, then hold out the Bread of life to the lost and dying world around you that they too may be filled and satisfied!

### Voices from the Church

"The world loves the spectacular. God has proven that He is certainly capable of the extraordinary, but He often chooses to work through the ordinary and seemingly insignificant. In this way He demonstrates His love and His power... Christians often accept the adage 'the bigger the better.' We measure success by the number of people involved in our ministry. We seek spectacular displays of God's power. We must learn to view success as God does. God is interested in the heart; He is pleased with obedience."<sup>2</sup>

—Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** When the Israelites were hungry in the wilderness, God provided manna from heaven. Jesus is the greater Moses, the One who not only provides bread from heaven but who also speaks of Himself as the Bread who gives life to the world.

# HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** God calls us to be the people through whom Jesus meets needs today.

1. What steps do you need to take in order to be a person through whom Jesus can meet people's needs?

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2. List some of your gifts and resources, no matter how mundane, that Jesus could use to meet the needs of others.

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3. What are some specific ways you can demonstrate the compassion of Christ to your family and friends? To coworkers? To people in need of Christ?

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### **Send questions/comments to:**

Managing Editor,  
*The Gospel Project: Adult Personal Study Guide*,  
One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0102;  
or make comments on the Web at  
[www.lifeway.com](http://www.lifeway.com).

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## About the Writers

### Unit 1:

**Ed Stetzer** (sessions 1-2) holds the Billy Graham Distinguished Chair of Church, Mission, and Evangelism and is the Executive Director of the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton College. He serves as the general editor for *The Gospel Project* and is the author of numerous books, including *Transformational Groups* and *Compelled*.



**Trevin Wax** (sessions 3-6) is managing editor for *The Gospel Project* and author of several books, including *Gospel-Centered Teaching* and *This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in Light of the Gospel*. He has served in pastoral roles in churches in the United States and Romania. He and his wife, Corina, have three children.



### Unit 2:

**Leslie Hudson** (sessions 7-8) is living her life calling to let others know the full riches of Jesus Christ (Col. 2:2-3) by teaching, speaking, and writing about God's Word and its power. She and her husband, David, live with their children in White Bluff, Tennessee, where she works with Youth and Women's ministries at First Baptist Church, Dickson.



**D. A. Horton** (sessions 9-10) currently serves as a pastor at Reach Fellowship, a church plant in North Long Beach, California, and as the Chief Evangelist for UYWI. He is also working toward his PhD in Applied Theology at Southeastern Seminary. He and his wife, Elicia, have three children, Izabelle, Lola, and Damon Jr (aka Duce).



**Vance Pitman** (sessions 11-13) is senior pastor of Hope Church in Las Vegas, Nevada. He also serves with the North American Mission Board as a national mobilizer, engaging and mobilizing pastors to plant more churches. He and his wife, Kristie, have four children and one son-in-law. Fellow pastors **Jordan Smith** and **Tom McCormick** assisted in writing these sessions.



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