

BREAD ENOUGH!

This sermon was preached in Shalom Church, Singapore in 2004.

Scripture Reading: **John 6:1-15, 22-40**

This is something we all know. Because this is something we all experience, from babies to grandparents: **Hunger**. Hunger implies emptiness. The stomach is empty, which is why we are hungry. Hunger spells actions. When we are hungry, we are not satisfied. When we are not satisfied, we will act. Some will express it through crying. That's what babies do. Others will express it through searching. If in the middle of the night, you hear some sound coming from the kitchen, it may not be a rat. It could be your teenage son giving expression to his hunger by opening the fridge, the cupboard, everywhere, searching for something to fill his empty stomach!

Hunger implies emptiness and hunger spells actions. Physical hunger is something we all know, from babies to grandparents. Now, after we have satisfied our physical hunger, we soon become aware of a deeper kind of hunger --- a longing for something that will really satisfy. Some hunger for money, for fame, for achievements, for power. Some hunger for relationships, for love, for friends, for significance. We feel that, we believe that, when we have them, we will be satisfied, we will be fulfilled. But it will not be too long before we realised that this is all very elusive. Many will tell us that any kind of fulfilment or satisfaction has eluded them thus far. *'Whatever it is that has the power to satisfy truly and deeply, I have yet to find it'* is the common sentiment and complaint. From a distance, they look so promising, but when we finally have them in our hands, they fail to live up their promise. It is like what Plato has said: *Human nature is like a leaky jar. No sooner have you filled it than it begins to empty.*

Therefore we move from one thing and place to another, lingering only long enough to discover that it is not what we were hoping for. We roam around, searching but never finding, yearning but never satisfied. For some, we have become rather cynical. We say, *"To travel in hope to a destination is better than to arrive there."* Why? Because what we hope

to find is often far better than what we actually find, upon our arrival. The grass looks greener on the other side, but when we reach there, there is no grass. It is empty.

How can we explain this hunger, and this always-searching-but-never-finding phenomenon? Physical hunger and the deeper hunger --- they are there to point us to something even deeper and more basic. "*There is a god-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man, and only God can fill it,*" says a man called Pascal. In the great kindness of God, He allows all of us to know and experience physical hunger. Our stomach goes empty every day, and we become hungry. This is true even for a little child. This physical hunger is meant to teach us about our spiritual hunger. Our empty stomach is meant to teach us about our god-shaped vacuum within. Just as we would seek to satisfy our empty stomach, so we should also fill this god-shaped vacuum in us. Since it is a god-shaped vacuum, no amount of human achievements or human relationships can fill it. This is like trying to fill a square hole with a round peg. There will always be holes and emptiness. What will truly and really satisfy is not a 'it', but a 'he'. A Person. Not any persons, but the divine Person --- God. God, and God alone, can satisfy the deepest longings of your soul. "*God has made us for Himself, and we remain restless until we find our rest in God,*" says Augustine.

This is the focus and the message of the miracle that we find in **John 6**. We normally call this miracle "The Feeding of the Five Thousand". It is a miracle. To be able to feed five thousand men, not counting the women and children, with just five loaves and two fishes, is a miracle. But it is more than a miracle. It is a sign. A sign does not point to itself. A sign points to something. In this case, it points to more than something, it points to Someone. To Jesus Christ, the One who performs this miracle. This is the 4th sign we find in the Gospel of John. Like the previous 3 signs, it has only one purpose. To show to us that Jesus is the Christ, the appointed Saviour and that He is the Son of God, the true and living God Himself. When we know that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God, the only right response, the only acceptable response, is to do what Thomas did in **John 20** -- to bow before Jesus and to cry out to Him in worship, "*My Lord and my God!*"

My dear friends, it is my prayer that you will do so for the first time in your life, as a result of hearing this sermon this morning. And my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is also my prayer that this sermon will lead you to continue to bow your knees before the Lord Jesus Christ in worship. To worship Jesus is our highest calling, the most satisfying act anyone can be engaged and the most God-glorifying act anyone can carry out. But before we can bow and worship Jesus, we must know Him and see His glory. This is what this miracle, this sign wants to achieve -- to tell us truths about Jesus and to lead us to Jesus. What does this miracle tell us about Jesus? It tells us the following four things about Jesus.

1. JESUS IS POWERFUL.

We can see the great power of Jesus from this miracle, and it can be seen from many angles. We can see the power of Jesus against the backdrop of human inability. Five thousand men, not counting women and children, all hungry, in need of food. The disciples were totally helpless and overwhelmed.

There is Philip, a top student in the area of doing mental sums. Seeing the vast multitudes, knowing the price of food, and hearing the question of Jesus in **verse 5**, his supercomputer starts to work. One denarius is the wages of a labourer per day. 200 denarii are the wages of a labourer for about 8 months. That is a huge amount of money. We have more than 5 thousand mouths to feed here. Knowing the price of bread been sold nearby, this is perhaps how much we need. We don't have that amount of money! And even if we have, and can use them to buy bread, it will be just a little for everyone. Not enough, totally inadequate! So here his words in reply to Jesus in **verse 7**. What is he saying? He is saying, "*It cannot be done. It is a hopeless case!*"

Now look at Andrew. He is not the mental-sums type. He is the personal-relationship type. He found a boy, talked to him, and manage to get him to offer his five loaves and two fishes. It was something that was meaningful. But then, hear what he says in

verse 9. What is he saying? He is saying, "*We have something here, but it's not enough. I agree. It is a hopeless case!*"

That's very much a picture of our life, isn't it? We can analyse problems like Philip, we may even be able to do something meaningful like Andrew. But we can't solve the problem! Yet Jesus did! Against the backdrop of human inability, the power of Jesus stands out. We can also see the power of Jesus in the context of simplicity.

In fact, this is a common feature with the previous 3 signs. Turning water into wine, healing the dying boy and the man paralysed for 38 years. Can you recall these 3 miracles? Can you remember how it was done? In majestic simplicity! Similarly here. There is no elaborate rituals, no shouting and screaming. Instead, Jesus performs this miracle so naturally, so easily.

Imagine we have a huge dumb-bell here, a very heavy one. All of us tried to lift it. We heave and pant, we shout, we do all sorts of stunts. None of us can lift it. Here comes a man, and using his left hand, which is the weaker hand, he quietly, in a matter-of-fact manner lifts it and then puts it down. What a contrast! And this is what happened here. All Jesus did was to take the five loaves and two fishes, gave thanks and then gave them to the disciples to be passed on to the people. One disciple came, took a loaf from Jesus and hand it to the first person seated. He came back, took another loaf from Jesus and hand it to the second person. The other 11 disciples did exactly the same. And they keep coming back, and keep having food to pass on. How simple, yet how majestic! My dear friends, this is my Jesus!! Not only can He mend that which is broken; not only can He heal him who is sick; He can even call into existence that which did not exist before! And He can do it so naturally, so simply, so easily!

My dear friends, if my Jesus can perform a miracle as you have read here in **John 6**, He can change you, from a sinner into a saint. No problems! He can rescue you from the devil's grip, from the

bondage of your sins, and make you into one who loves God and holiness and heaven. No problems, not at all!

Friends, who can feed five thousand with just 5 loaves and two fishes? Can you? Can any man? Friends, you are face-face with more than just a man. He is Man, no doubt, but He is also God. Bow your knees to God, oh friends, to Jesus.

Dear Christians, surely we are not ignorant of this, of the power of Jesus. So come to Him once again. Bring to Him your irreconcilable differences, your insurmountable problems. Is it a titanic struggle with that rebellious child of yours? Is it a many-years tension with your spouse? Is it a super-stubborn sin in your life? Yes, by all our calculations and analysis, even whatever useful and meaningful things we may do, the knot cannot be untied, the web cannot be untangled. That is because in all our calculations and analysis, we have not considered Jesus. Considered Jesus and His power. *He's able, He's able, I know He's able; I know my Lord is able to carry me through!* Of course He is, for He is God!

2. JESUS IS COMPASSIONATE.

Once again, we can see the compassion of Jesus from this miracle. And once again, we can see it from two angles. One, He deals with confused people. These five thousand men, how clear are they about who Jesus is and His purpose in coming to this world? Not totally ignorant, I must say. But not totally clear as well. They have the idea that Jesus will be someone special, even someone the Old Testament has spoken of. But what He brings is free food and political freedom! We can see this from **verse 14** and **15**. Yes, this is after the miracle was performed. But Jesus knew what is in their minds and in their hearts. As hinted to us by John in **verse 2**, they were following Jesus, they were chasing after Him (so to speak) because of the many wondrous things He has done. They were excited about the miracles. They were interested in the wonders. But they failed to see that these were signs, to point them and lead them to Jesus, the Saviour of sinners.

They were confused. So confused that after they have witnessed a most amazing display of power from Jesus, they thought they could use physical strength to force Him to be king! How confused can you get? Yet that did not stop Jesus from moving to minister to them and meeting their hunger needs. In this we must see the compassion of Jesus. The compassion of Jesus overcomes the confusion of the people. And surely this must be greatly encouraging to all of us! He does not wait until all our confusions are cleared up. He does not demand that our views of Him be as accurate as it can be, before He will deal with us. He comes to us at where we are! You say, Pastor WEI, don't you have something new to say? You have said this, including today, four times already! Yes, I know and I admit, but my job is to faithfully bring out for you what is here! And it is here, just as it is in all the previous 3 signs.

The bridegroom did not really know, the nobleman has his faults, the paralytic was totally ignorant, and now these five thousand are confused. Yet none of them stopped Jesus from ministering and blessing. I say, Hallelujah, praise the Lord Jesus! What a compassionate Saviour He is! If He demands the total absence of confusion and absolute clarity from us concerning who He is and what He is to do, we will never be blessed, never be saved! The compassion of Jesus can be seen in that He deals with confused people.

Secondly, He does not want to leave us confused. This is why there is the dialogue, the teaching that we find in **verses 26** onwards. He deals with us at our level, but then His aim is never to leave us there. He wants to bring us to something higher and better. We can say that the one thing Jesus aims to do is to clear up the confusion they have. Yes, it is true that after the dialogue, the teaching, less people followed Jesus. Less people followed, not because they are confused, but because they are clearer now. They have a deeper and clearer idea now of who Jesus is and what His mission is. They left because they were offended. They left because they could not accept His claims. My point here is, Jesus will not leave us confused, leave us in our pitiful and miserable state. He comes to our level, and He seeks to bring us higher. Very

gentle, very compassionate. That is my Saviour, the Hero I want to introduce you to and pray that you will know Him and love Him.

3. JESUS IS GENEROUS.

For many of us today, when we are in need, just go to the store. 7-11, perhaps. You can get what you want, and often, more than you need.

Then, you do not always get enough to eat. That's a fact. To have enough to eat is a great blessing. Here is a case where these people are hungry. The fact is, not only did they have something to eat, enough to eat, they have more than enough!! What Jesus produced is 'bread enough and to spare!' It is abundant supply! Do not miss those last 5 words in **verse 11** --- *as much as they wanted*. Do not skip over the fact that they filled up 12 baskets of leftovers --- **verse 13!** *And my God shall supply all your needs, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus*, says Paul the apostle. *God is He who gives to all liberally and without reproach*, says James the brother of Jesus. This is the style of my God, ladies and gentlemen, the style of Jesus. He does not just do a bit, provide just a little. He is the generous, liberal and lavish God. So abundant is His supply that it shall overflow! Does not this tell you of His goodness? He is powerful, He is compassionate, and He is generous! How attractive a Person, don't you agree? If you are looking for a friend, would you not choose someone who is powerful, compassionate and generous? If you are an orphan, and a man comes along and adopts you, and He turns out to be powerful, compassionate and generous, wouldn't you agree that you are very blessed? My God is like that, and more! This is my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. There is no reason why anyone should reject Him!

4. JESUS IS THE ANSWER.

This miracle was performed to satisfy the physical hunger of the people. But it was not meant to remain there. Like the presence of

that physical hunger, so spiritual hunger is real. There is really a god-shaped vacuum in the heart of everyone. The fact that you don't feel it nor sense it nor know it, it does not mean it is not there. There are pills you can take today that will make you not feel hungry, though you actually need food. In the same way, sin has masked and hidden and deceived us, so that we don't feel our spiritual hunger. But it is there! That vacuum is there and needs to be filled!

Just as Jesus is the One who meet the needs of these people, providing them with bread to eat, so that their empty stomach is filled, so the answer to your spiritual hunger is Jesus. Not what He can give you, but first of all, who He is. He says in **verse 35**, *I am the bread of life*. Jesus is not just the One who gives you spiritual bread for your spiritual hunger. He is the Bread. He is the One you need. Without physical bread, these people will die. Without Jesus, we will all die --- spiritually and eternally. How important and how crucial physical bread is to physical life, the same is true for Jesus to our soul, and more! O friends, you cannot live without Jesus! There is no life, no real life without Jesus!

To the physically hungry man, bread is the answer. To the spiritually hungry man, Jesus is the answer. The only answer!

Now, how is Jesus, the Bread of Life, going to satisfy the deepest longings of my soul? A similar account recorded in **Matthew** tells us that Jesus actually broke the bread as He gave them out to the people. This breaking of the bread is an important point to note. Jesus is the Bread of Life. But He is of no use to us, unless He is first broken. And this, I refer to His death on the Cross. At the Cross, His body was broken, His blood was shed. He died there, for the sins of His people, to pay for the penalty of their sins. After the bread has been broken and distributed, the people must eat it. Until and unless they eat it, their hunger remains. This is yet another important point. Jesus died on the Cross for sinners. I must now eat this Bread of Life. By that, I mean I must now trust in His death on the Cross to pay for my sins. I must believe in Him, accept Him, receive Him into my life, like a man receives that

physical bread into his system by eating. It is only when I believe in Jesus that my sins will be forgiven, I will be a child of God, and God will come and live in me. When God comes to live in me, speaks with me and walks with me everyday, then that god-shaped vacuum is no longer a vacuum. It has been filled. God has filled it. Dissatisfaction, un-fulfilment are words that no longer in my dictionary. I know what they mean, but I do not experience them at the deepest level, in my soul. Because I have Jesus.

Hunger. All of us experience it physically. God puts it there to lead us to realise our spiritual hunger. There is only one answer to your spiritual hunger. The answer is not in the form of things, but of a person. He is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Bread of Life, the Satisfier of the hunger of the human heart. This is why Charles Wesley called him, following the Scripture, the desire of all nations. This miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is meant to lead us to see Jesus as that. He is the Bread of Life, the Desire of all nations, the only One who can satisfy the deep longings of the human heart. If He can feed five thousand and satisfy their stomach, He can fill you and satisfy your soul. He has done it, and done it many times, to all people down through the ages. Why remain aloof, at a distance. Come near, come to Jesus. Friends, God has made us for Himself, and we remain restless until we find our rest in Him. And that rest is in no others but Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. Bow your knees and worship Him today, now.