

**Sermon on
Your faith must show that Jesus is God and that he can
miraculously provide.**

Kwabena D. Akufo

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Text:

John 6:3-13 ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Feast was near. ⁵ 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?" ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" ⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹ "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

1 Introduction

This passage on the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 by Jesus is very familiar to Christians. It is a common passage that has been used in many sermons. The miracle of feeding 5,000+ people from five small bread and two small fish is fascinating. So, you may be expecting me to minister on the miraculous work of Jesus Christ. This will not be an unusual expectation. But I am not going to fulfill your expectations today because I want to examine the real reason for the miracle and not the miracle per se.

1.1 Jesus' miracles are signs for the witnesses

The Greek word that is commonly translated as “miracle” really means “sign.” That is, Jesus performs miracles as a sign to people about his divinity. The miracles, while helping an individual or group, are meant for the onlookers – the witnesses. Jesus also performs miracles only when a situation is hopeless and cannot be remedied by natural means and hence the performance of the miracle will reveal his divine power over natural laws. To restate, therefore, Jesus performs a miracle as a sign to the witnesses and in a hopeless situation.

1.2 This miracle was a sign for Philip as a witness

In the passage that we read the situation of the people was not hopeless. They did not seem to be starving to death and therefore the situation did not warrant intervention by the God incarnate in the natural laws of food production. Yet Jesus performed the miracle to feed the 5,000+. Was this miracle meant as a sign to the people that Jesus has the power to feed them? I doubt that is the reason because later on he will chastise the people for coming after him for more food. This means that the miracle was not meant for the people! I believe the miracle was

intended for Philip. This whole event was to test Philip's faith to see whether he believes that Jesus is God and the God who provides – the Jehovah Jireh. And then this miracle is also meant to bolster Philip's faith for his future role in evangelizing Samaria and Africa. In your Christian walk, your faith must show that you truly believe that Jesus is God in every way.

2 Jesus staged the miracle to bolster Philip's faith for his future role

2.1 Jesus targeted Philip because of his paucity of faith for his anticipated future role

When Jesus sat down at the mountainside with his disciples – all twelve of them, he turned to Philip and asked him, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” (John 6:5) Why did he ask Philip in particular? Philip was not part of the inner circle of Peter, James, and John. Philip was not the treasurer who might be expected to buy the bread. Was it a random selection? No. Because our text says that Jesus “asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.” (John 6:6)

Jesus knew the heart of Philip. He was eager to follow Jesus when he was called without any doubts and most likely he had a lot of zeal. This zeal led him to evangelize Nathanael who was the hardest one to convince to follow Jesus. In spite of his zeal, Jesus knew that Philip did not have the type of faith he was looking for in the future evangelist for Samaria and Africa.

2.2 Jesus targeted Philip also because he was not getting the import of Jesus' teachings

Mind you this was not an unfair test for Philip. Philip was present when Jesus turned water into wine in Cana, he was present when Jesus healed the dying son of the Royal Official by remote control, and he was present when Jesus healed the invalid at the pool of Bethesda. So, by now Philip's faith should have demonstrated the belief that Jesus is God and can do all things. But Philip was not getting the underlying principle of these signs that Jesus is God incarnate. In fact, Philip would later ask Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." (John 14:8) To which, Jesus would answer, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:9) Philip took in all the teachings of Jesus and the accompanying miracles through one ear and out the other. He learned nothing and he remained unchanged until he was targeted by Jesus.

I have noticed that sometimes unless a person is specifically told to change in a certain area they think that the message is not for them. When we attend church we hear the word of God preached in various powerful ways. Yet some people who are very impressed by the message remain unchanged year after year. They don't get the reason for the powerful message. They take it as a performance, a message to be enjoyed in the mind and heart and then spat out. The message is meant to convict you that Jesus is God to the point that you believe in his all-surpassing power to provide, to protect, to heal, and to deliver.

2.3 Jesus setup the episode for Philip's benefit

When the FBI wants to catch a dangerous criminal who is considered a high risk for the security of society, sometimes they will open a business or store that will attract the particular criminal that they are looking for. An entire business with full operations is established just to catch one person. In the same way, I believe that God can cause a church to be established in a given city just to bring a particular person to salvation because God wants his soul or wants to use him in his kingdom work. This is the providence of God working in tandem with his grace.

Such was the case of Philip in this episode. Philip was going to play an important role in the initial thrust of the kingdom work beyond Jerusalem and Judea. If you recall he launched the first major evangelistic thrust in Samaria fulfilling the Samaritan part of Jesus' prophecy that the disciples will be "witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) Philip was also going to play a foundational role in taking the gospel to Africa, which is part of the ends of the earth. Recall that he was sent to evangelize the Ethiopian Eunuch, whom it is believed took the gospel to Africa.

These two assignments were important assignments that Jesus saw in the future of Philip but knew that Philip did not have the faith required to perform them successfully. And so, Jesus decided to teach him that his faith needs to demonstrate the unshakeable belief that Jesus is God and can do anything. Just like the FBI's setup, the entire episode was, therefore, set up to bolster Philip's faith. The test was not for the benefit of Jesus but it was for the benefit of Philip! Philip must realize his standing, his poverty in faith and hence be amenable to learning the ingredients of a faith that moves mountains, a faith that casts out demons, a faith that heals the sick, and a faith that evangelizes strangers.

3 Philip failed the faith test

3.1 Philip could not be sure of the hope to feed the 5,000+ or certain of seeing 5,000+ fed

When Jesus tested Philip's faith by asking him the question, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" he failed. Philip responded, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" (John 6:7) In effect, Philip said it is impossible to feed the people. Philip portrayed the situation as hopeless, unrealistic, and not feasible. In doing so, Philip showed that he cannot be certain of what he does not see and he cannot be sure of what he hopes. He failed 100% the definition of faith as given by Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Let us compare Philip's reaction to Ezekiel's reaction when he was tested in the valley of bones. As recorded in Ezekiel 37:3, God asked Ezekiel, "Son of man, can these bones live?" Ezekiel responded, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know." Philip could have exercised faith and responded in a similar way to Ezekiel but he did not because his faith lacked the necessary ingredients of being certain of what he does not see and being sure of what he hopes for.

3.2 Philip's lack of faith infected Andrew

His attitude not only lacked faith but was very negative and that may have infected Andrew. Andrew chimed in without being asked saying, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" (John 6:9) He also demonstrated that his faith was wanting in both aspects of the definition of faith: certain of the unseen and sure of the hope. They were using their intellect, which dissects the present reality and declares it as impossible. If you hang around faithless people you will also become faithless.

Attitude is transferable. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:33, “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’” You need to find people with strong faith and befriend them and use them as your mentor. Their strong faith will infect you and cause you to grow in your ability to be certain of the unseen and to be sure of your hopes. Your faith must contain the ingredients that allow you to believe that Jesus is God and that nothing is too hard for him! He is the God that works the impossible for your good!

4 Philip learned the ingredients of faith that receives a miracle

The exchange between Jesus and Philip exposed Philip’s faithless condition. And so Jesus proceeded to give him an object lesson. Jesus asked the disciples to distribute the five small loaves of bread and two small fish to the 5,000+ people. This was an insane request. But the disciples obeyed and it was out of this obedience that the historic miracle took place. Jesus miraculously multiplied the five small loaves of bread and two small fish to feed 5,000+ people with twelve baskets left over.

That day, Philip must have stared at Jesus and shaken his head in wonder and amazement. From this lesson, he would have learned the following ingredients of faith that is able to receive a miracle:

1. You must believe that Jesus has the power to multiply resources and has the power over anything in this world.
2. You must believe that Jesus can solve the impossible.
3. You must believe that Jesus can change a hopeless situation into a hopeful situation and act with surety of hope.
4. When Jesus is involved, you must accept as real what may appear to be unrealistic or unworkable.

5. When Jesus is involved, you must visualize your desired situation as a certainty even if you cannot see how to get there from here.

5 Conclusion

Jesus' miracles are signs for onlookers – the witnesses. This miracle was a sign for Philip as a witness. Jesus staged the miracle to bolster Philip's faith for his future role as the foundational evangelist for Samaria and Africa. Jesus targeted Philip because of his paucity of faith for this future role and because he was not getting the import of Jesus' teachings. Philip failed the faith test. He could not be sure of the hope to feed the 5,000+ or certain of seeing 5,000+ fed. His lack of faith infected Andrew. From this experience Philip learned the ingredients of faith that receives a miracle.