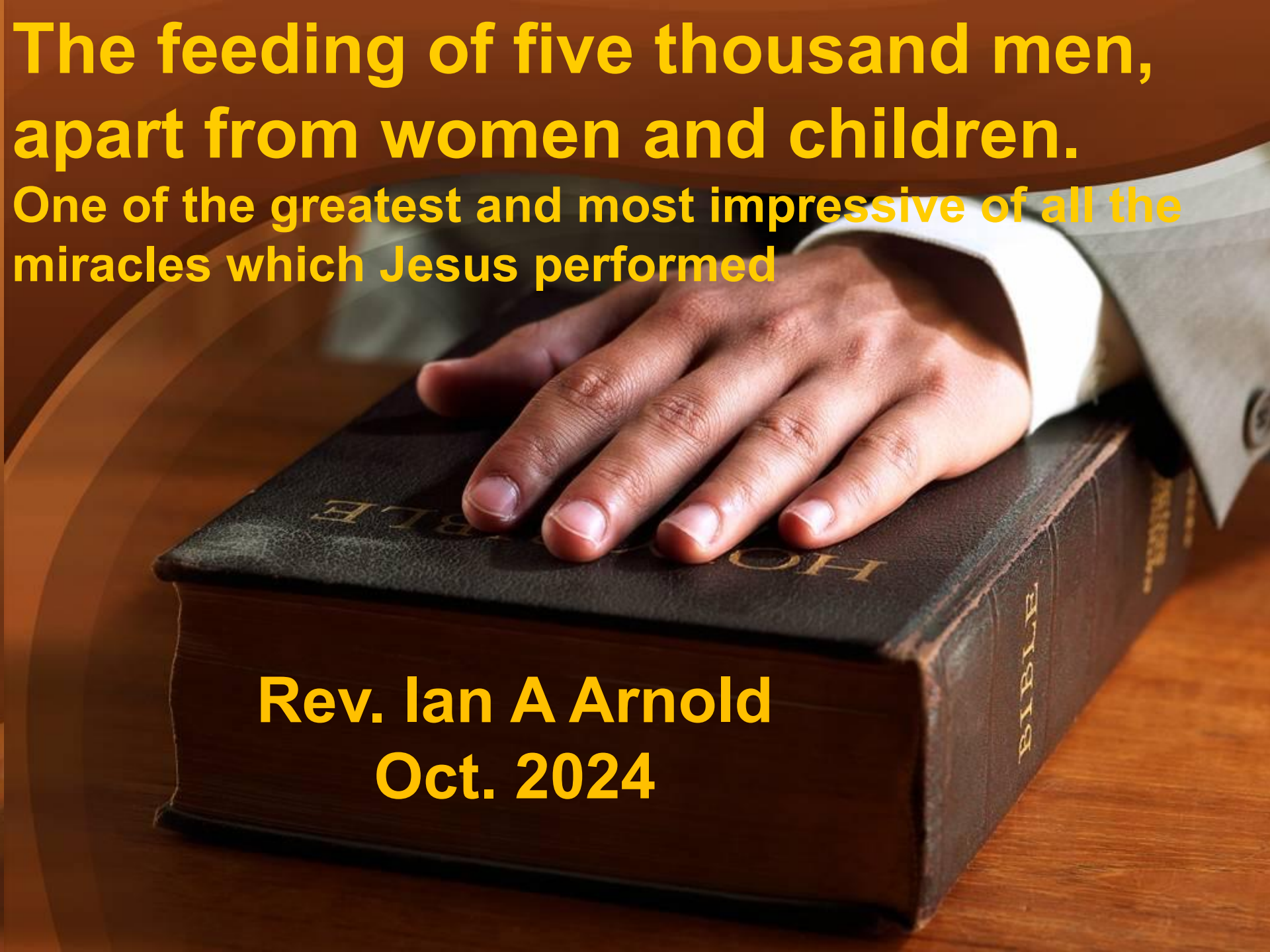
The feeding of five thousand men, apart from women and children.

One of the greatest and most impressive of all the miracles which Jesus performed



Rev. Ian A Arnold

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From the Gospel through Matthew 14:19, we read:

"Then Jesus commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave to the multitudes."

The three great defining features of the Lord's work and ministry in this world

Once we start to think about it we can see that there were three great, defining, features, of the Lord's work and ministry in this world.

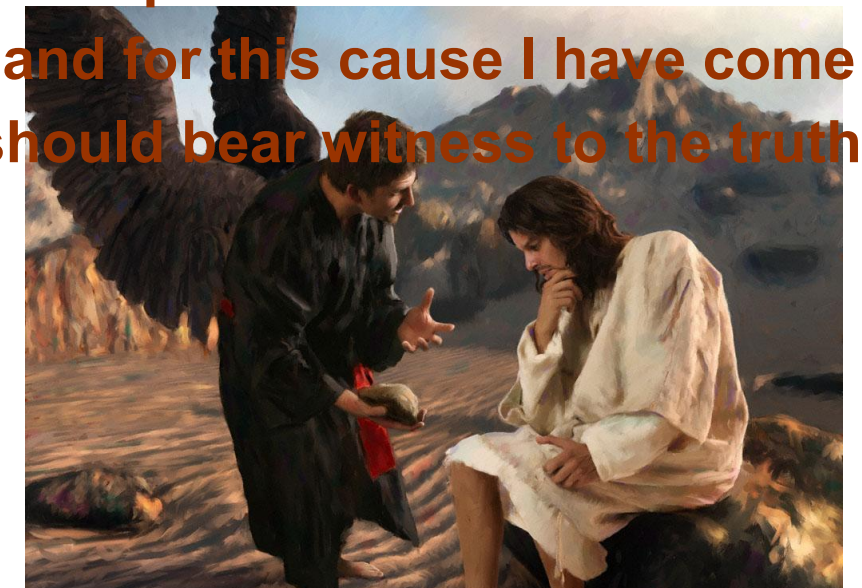
The first was His unwavering affirmation of the truth, not just outwardly, but within Himself.

Both in Matthew's Gospel and in Luke's Gospel (Chapter 4 in each) we read of how, even before He began His public ministry, the devil attacked and tempted the Lord. And each time He re-affirmed Scripture teaching and that He was – without hesitation - deeply committed to it.

When tempted to turn stones into bread, He replied, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

When tempted to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, He replied, “ You shall not tempted the Lord your God.”

And when the devil offered Him all the kingdoms of the world His reply was, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.” As He made plain: ”For this cause I was born”, He said, “and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.” (John 18:37)

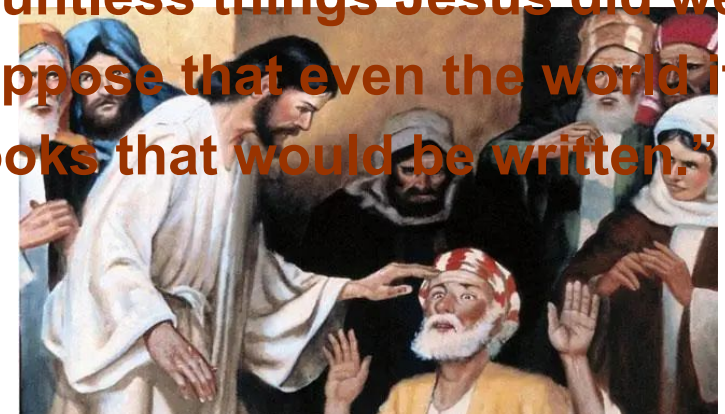


The second was the Lord's Teaching.

What He taught was radical, different, an amazing contrast to what religions authorities had been teaching, having totally new perspectives on things, and said with such sureness that left those who listened to Him astonished. "And so it was", we read, "when Jesus had ended His sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." (Matthew 7:28-29)

The third was the miracles He performed.

The Lord healed blindness, even the blindness of a man who had been born blind. (See John Chapter 9).He restored hearing and made it possible for people who had been dumb to talk again. He brought back to life at least three people who had been pronounced dead. He made it possible for crippled and paralyzed people to walk again. He healed lepers of their leprosy, one of the most feared diseases of that time. And it is almost certain that there were many more of these miracles He performed than we read about in the four Gospels. At the end of John's Gospel it is said that if all of the countless things Jesus did were written "one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (Chapter 21:25)



All of the miracles must have been astounding, but some more astounding than others.

And of the more astounding ones the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand men, apart from women and children, is one of these. Remember, "Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children." (Matthew Chapter 14:21). Perhaps, then, there were several thousand in addition.

The teaching in the Writings is that along with all of the miracles this feeding of many thousands of people actually happened and even the way it happened is described. It was the same with the feeding of the ancient people of Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness to the Promised Land. (Exodus Chapter 16) Each time there was an intensifying of influx out of the spiritual world

Apart from satisfying the hunger people felt at the time, what did this miracle accomplish. What – if any – additional purpose did it serve?

We need to ask these same question of all of the miracles.

Here, again, the teaching in the Writings is clear and helpful.

If the Christian Church was to be successfully established, which is one of the objectives the Lord had in coming into this world, miracles were needed to catch the attention of people; to fill them with wonder; to cause them to stop and ask questions and to – hopefully - give more than the attention than they otherwise would have done, to the teaching Jesus gave and to Who, in fact, He might be. "Could this be

Interestingly, reading and hearing about the miracles serves the same purpose today. As is the teaching in in the Writings,, “Miraculous faith is the first faith with all in the Christian world <u>at this day</u>, and therefore the miracles done by the Lord have been described, and are also preached.” (Apocalypse Explained 815:9)

There is this, too: miracles the Lord performed were an outward sign of the healing and renewal, <u>spiritually</u>, that would result from the Lord’s work on earth.

The teaching given is that “All the miracles which the Lord Himself performed when He was in the world were signs of the future state of the Church. Opening the eyes of the blind, for example, and the ears of the deaf, loosing the tongues of the dumb, enabling the lame to walk, and making the maimed whole, and the leprous too, were signs that the kinds of people meant by the blind, deaf, dumb, lame, maimed and leprous

And that happened.

Wonderfully, this is ongoing. Whenever and wherever people welcome the Lord into their lives His coming holds the promise of being “spiritually restored to health”.

I am asking you to stop a moment and be encouraged by this: All of the miracles we read about are repeated within us continuously.

The reality is that before we become re-born people and as long as our old, unregenerate self, rules us, we are spiritually blind, deaf, dumb, maimed, lame and leprous. And the message, spiritually, is that the Lord can heal and restore all of these afflictions.

This, too, is a reality that just as our bodies need food, appetizing and nourishing food, so do our spirits. We have our waves of hunger, when we feel spiritually weak. Maybe our faith has been shaken or we tire from the effort to do good, to trust the Lord, or to genuinely - and from our hearts - love others. And there are times when we feel unworthy and inadequate. Most of us, I am sure, have known such times. And this is this specific purpose of this miracle, to assure us that during these times, and experiences, the Lord is there to feed us, strengthen us, empower us, and renew us, such as to enable us to continue the journey of regeneration.

And it is in connection with such states that the Lord's miracle of the feeding of the five thousand men, apart from women and children, is so relevant, so helpful and what we can learn from it so encouraging.

Both the context and the details of the miracle are important.

- Having been told of the murder of John the Baptist, "Jesus departed from there by boat to a deserted place by himself." (Verse 13)
- people from everywhere followed Him to where he had isolated Himself.
- maybe it was the noise of this huge crowd, Who knows(?), but the Lord went out and "He was moved moved with compassion for them and healed their sick" (Verse 14)
- " They were", to Him, "like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things." (Mark Chapter 6:34)

- But No. “Jesus said to the disciples, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.” (Verse 16)
- the disciples, now perplexed, tell the Lord how little food they have discovered among the people, just five small loaves and two fishes.
- The Lord tells them to bring this food, so inadequate as it seems, to Him.
- He next tells the disciples to get the people to sit in rows on the green grass; blesses the food; and gives is to the disciples to distribute. “So they all ate and were filled.” (Mark 6:39 to 43)

Now let us see how all this applies to ourselves, to our times when our faith becomes uncertain and fragile, when we come into states of doubt and when our love to do what is good and right, to love our neighbour as we should, tires.

- <u>The murder of John the Baptist,</u> in the spiritual sense, is about those times when we **reject some key teaching from the Bible**. John the Baptist had been an irritant to Herod, because he had pointed out a truth to Herod that Herod didn't like (Matthew 14: 3,4). We know from the Gospels that for certain of the Pharisees and scribes, the Commandment about Honouring father and mother was an "irritant" to them, and so they devised ways they could avoid the responsibilities which obedience to this Commandment would have required of them Similarly, and so often, **different truths can be an irritant to us**. An obvious example is the truth about forgiving others. In many situations it is an irritant to us. We don't want to hear it. We don't want to know about it.

- This leads to the Lord being more or less compelled to becomes isolated, and even lost to us. And this is what is meant by the Lord departing by

- And what happens next? Well, we start to feel, quite acutely, our loss of the Lord, and so seek to find Him again and to have Him back, centre stage, in our lives. Remember? "When the multitudes heard it" (that He had gone away), "they followed Him on foot from the cities."
- And so, we now humbled, the Lord is able - again - to resume His healing ministry within us.
- Soon, a hunger develops. We know now, for certain, that we cannot make the journey involved in becoming a re-born person, by ourselves.
- but what do we have that can sustain us? The answer is very little.
- And yet in the Lord's hands, and blessed by Him, this little that we have can be multiplied exceedingly.

When the father of the epileptic boy came to Jesus to ask for the healing of his son, Jesus asked him, “Do you believe?” And, in tears, he replied, “I believe, help my unbelief.” (Mark 9 (Mark 9:24).

That’s all Jesus wanted to hear. It is as if the father of the boy said to Jesus, ‘I only have a little faith. I cannot claim any more than that.’ But it was sufficient. And small as it was the Lord was able to turn it into something much larger.

It can be a challenge to self - to our ego - to stand by and listen to another person being thanked and applauded. I know of students at Universities doing most of the hard work on some new research project and, when the outcome is announced, the acclaim and praise is heaped on the Professor and little, if any, on the students who had done the work. And yet, in such a situation, if the person - or persons - who are overlooked can summon even a tiny amount of graciousness and goodwill, and hand it to the Lord, He can greatly expand it so that it fills their whole being. And when it does, envy or resentment evaporate.

At the end of the Old Testament, in the book of Malachi, **the Lord invites us to actually test His readiness to bless our lives abundantly.** " 'Prove me now in this', says the LORD of hosts, 'If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.' " (Chapter 3:10)

Similarly, we have the Lord promising, as He did when here on earth, " Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together; and running over will be put into your bosom."
(Luke 6:38)

A little given to the Lord, and blessed by Him, can become so much. So, let us believe this and trust that it is so. Even put it to the test!

Amen

Readings:

Ezekiel Chapter 34: verses 11 to 16

Matthew Chapter 14: verses 13 to 21

Arcana Caelestia 5340

" 'Food, in the spiritual sense, means everything by which our spirits are nourished, namely good and truth. And this can be recognized from the correspondence of earthly food which nourishes our bodies with spiritual food which nourishes ou spirit."…

Arcana Caelestia 8410

"In the spiritual sense 'bread' means the chief thing that nourishes the soul and maintains the spiritual life, that chief thing being the good of love, as life in heaven demonstrates, which consists wholly of that good."

Arcana Caelestia 8562

"A person whose life is spiritual desires to sustain such life with such things as are called heavenly food and drink, which are the forms of good and the truths

THE END