

Super Bowl Sunday has become known as America's unofficial holiday; I bet there will be a lot of people calling in sick for work tomorrow morning! Some people have even suggested that the Monday after the Super Bowl should be a national holiday. The Super Bowl is the premier sporting event for most people who live in the United States. In addition, it is broadcasted in 30 languages. The price for tickets for this afternoon's game is going for an average of \$10,000 per seat, the range is from \$6,300 to \$44,000. People start planning weeks in advance for their parties where they will eat, it is reported, more snacks than on any other day of the year. There goes some people's New Year's resolution to lose weight.

For example, it is predicted that 1.3 billion chicken wings will be consumed this weekend; in addition, 28 million pounds of potato chips, 8 million pounds of popcorn, and 14 billion hamburgers will also be consumed while watching the game. In addition, more pizza is sold today than on any other day in the year. Fans will wash all this down with 900 million pints of beer. \$5.6 billion will be spent during the four days prior to the game. This is the second biggest day of the year for food consumption, second only to Thanksgiving. However, I didn't find any figures on how many Tums or Roloids will be consumed tonight.

It has been said that more Americans watch the Super Bowl than any other program on television. In fact, this year over 152 million are expected to watch (that's almost half the population of the United States), and during that time advertisers will pay almost \$7 million dollars for 30 seconds to promote their product. Now some of you may be like my wife Judy who enjoys the commercials more than the game itself. The revenue for the entire event is estimated to be over \$10 billion; that's enough to fund the startup of a small country or to make a small dent in the national debt. This is truly a national event.

Now in contrast many churches will see a significant drop in attendance today at worship even though the game does not actually start until 4:30 pm this afternoon. I guess there are some people who really like to listen to all that pre-game analysis or have to get ready for their party. I also seriously doubt that anyone would pay \$7 million per 30 seconds to hear me preach.

Sports is one of the biggest pastimes in the world. Billions of dollars are spent on sporting events and sports related items – look at the jerseys here this morning. Events like the Super Bowl and the World Series attract worldwide attention. Now some Christians think that sports are the biggest idol in the lives of some people. But many Christians follow sports; and most of you know how much I love my Clemson Tigers. I personally don't believe that sports are bad; as a matter of fact, we as Christians can learn some important lessons from sports. For example, there may be more praying during football games than during some worship services; think about that. I know I did a lot of praying this past year, especially during the Clemson games.

And depending on how close the game is this evening, there will be a lot of praying on both sides.

Do you believe in miracles? I know a lot of football fans do. You can bet that the San Francisco 49ers fans do; it was a miracle that their receiver was able to catch the ball when it bounced off the helmet of the Lions defender. Football coaches also believe in miracles. For example, right before the College National Championship Game one year, the head coach of the Alabama Crimson Tide went into the locker room and went up to one of his big defensive linemen and said: "I'm not supposed to play you tonight because you failed algebra, but we really need you in this game. So, I'm going to ask you one math question and if you answer correctly, you can play." The player agreed and the coach looked him straight in the eye and said: "Okay, now concentrate as hard as you can on this question; what's two plus two?" The player thought for a moment and answered "4?" "Did you say 4?" the coach asked excitedly. Suddenly, all the other players on the team started shouting: "Come on coach, give him another chance."

Now the Bible is full of miracles, with Jesus performing countless miracles during His ministry here on earth. A miracle can be defined as an event that is considered unusual or extraordinary in that it appears to be contrary to the laws of nature; something beyond the expected. One of the greatest miracles by Jesus was the feeding of the 5,000 which is the only miracle besides the Resurrection that is recorded in all four Gospels. This morning, let's look at the account as recorded in the 14th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, verses 13 through 21.

Read Matthew 14:13-21

Prior to this text, Jesus has just received news that John the Baptist had been killed by King Herod. So, Jesus withdraws to a secluded place to mourn the loss of this great prophet, the voice in the wilderness who came to prepare the way for Him. No doubt Jesus realized that His time had now come for His destiny with the cross. Thus, Jesus was probably seeking some time alone with His Father to gather the strength and guidance necessary for the journey ahead.

But as the old saying goes: "There is no rest for the weary." The crowds follow Jesus and when He reaches the other side of the Sea of Galilee, the people are already there waiting for Him. Instead of being angry or put out as we might be, the Bible tells us that Jesus put aside His own grief and had compassion for the crowd and immediately set about meeting their needs.

It was getting late and the disciples, being clock watchers, wanted to call it a day and send the people away. So, they go up to Jesus and say: "We are way out here in the middle of nowhere and it's getting dark. Why don't you dismiss the people so that they can go into the nearby towns and get some supper?" Jesus' reply must have really caught them off guard: "No, you guys feed them – all 5,000 men plus the women and children." With a negative attitude, they respond right back that they only have a sack lunch that a little boy had brought: five small

loaves of bread and two tiny fish, sardines; basically, a redneck meal! Jesus tells them to bring the bread and fish to Him. As we often do, they failed to realize that a little is always a lot in the hands of the Master. Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to the disciples to distribute among the people. Well over 5,000 are fed with enough food leftover to fill the bags of all twelve disciples.

So, how do you explain this miracle? The Bible indicates that Jesus just gave thanks, but didn't say anything else like hocus pocus as He broke the bread and gave it to the disciples for distribution to the crowd. Some commentaries state that once the rest of the people saw how the little boy had shared his sack lunch, they also shared the food that they had brought with them from home, and thus they had an old fashion Methodist potluck. Or did the bread and fish keep multiplying as the disciples distributed it? Was it like the miracle of the never-ending flour jar and oil jug of Elijah in 1 Kings? Or was it like the manna that came down from heaven each morning to feed the Israelites as they traveled across the wilderness? Who knows? That's one for biblical scholars to debate, but what we do know is that all four Gospels report that well over 5,000 people enjoyed a satisfying meal with the Lord Jesus Christ as their host that evening.

But the real question for us this morning is why did all these people rush around the lake to see Jesus? Why did they leave the comfort of their homes and go out to the hillside? There was no promise of a free meal or a Super Bowl Party. I believe that they were hungry, but not for some bread and a few sardines. They, like most people today, had a hunger deep down inside for something that was missing in their lives, something that only Jesus Christ can offer. They were searching for hope, for a personal relationship with God, for spiritual food, not physical food.

They were searching for the Bread of Life. Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life; He alone can satisfy the hunger of the human soul. You see we are all created in the image of God, to be in fellowship with Him, and until we find this relationship, there will always be a void in our life, an empty feeling deep down inside us. Jesus alone can bridge the gap between God and us, and restore the personal relationship for which each one of us was created. Only Jesus can satisfy the longing of our souls.

In the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John, we are told that the next day the people came looking for Jesus after He had fed them on the hillside the day before. Here Jesus tells the people and us today to not seek physical food that is temporary, but food that lasts for eternity. Then Jesus acknowledges that He is the Bread of Life, and that to really live we must feast on Him; in other words, on His Word and on His teachings.

You know there are basically two kinds of hunger: there is physical hunger which of course the tailgate snacks after worship can satisfy; and then there is a spiritual hunger which no Super

Bowl food can ever satisfy. The people who followed Jesus to the other side of the Sea of Galilee the next day were initially only interested in satisfying the hunger in their stomachs. They had received an unexpected free meal and wanted more. However, Jesus was telling them and us today that there is more to life than a good meal and a full stomach. It is as if Jesus was saying: "You cannot think about your soul for thinking about your stomach." Now I know that this is hard for some of you to believe, but satisfying one's physical appetite is not the most important thing in life. Have you ever felt like something was missing in your life; that there was a hunger deep inside of you that you could not satisfy? Well, that's what Jesus is trying to tell us; that He alone can satisfy the hunger of the human heart and soul.

The people in this story, like people today, were focusing on the wrong kind of food; they were worrying about temporary things when they really needed to invest their time and efforts in eternal matters. Jesus tells the crowd and us today to not waste our time and energy striving for food that will spoil, but to focus on food that sticks with you; food that nourishes your spiritual life; food that makes life worth living; and food that only Jesus can provide.

As we read the account of the feeding of the 5,000 did you recognize the similarities with the Lord's Supper? The images of the Lord's Supper are throughout this miracle. The familiar verbs of the Lord's Supper are repeated: "He took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to the disciples." Then He said: "Take eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In a way, the feeding of the 5,000 is a forerunner of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Fred Craddock, a former Methodist preacher, had a theory about the importance of this miracle. He believed that it is closely connected with the Lord's Supper, and that it was told and retold every time the early church gathered at the Lord's Table. Every time Christians gather around the Lord's Table, we are reminded that God provides our daily bread; we remember that this bread is more than physical bread. This is the Bread of Life; the Body of Christ that nourishes the soul as well as the body. This is a miracle which is re-enacted every time we gather at the Lord's Table; this is the spiritual food that gives strength for our daily journey through life. It does not matter if we can ever explain this miracle, because one thing is certain; when Jesus is present, the weary find rest and the hungry soul is fed.

This afternoon, people will consume tons of food, feel like a stuffed pig, and later go looking for the Tums or Roloids for their indigestion. Wouldn't it be great if all those people had the same hunger and desire for Jesus Christ? Think about the difference it would make in our world. I hope and pray that there is a hunger deep down in each of you not for Super Bowl snacks, but for the spiritual food that only Jesus can offer. I hope and pray that you will seek a closer relationship with your Lord and Savior; where He offers you life beyond death, joy beyond sorrow, hope beyond disappointment, and grace and love beyond your wildest expectation. By

the way, if you want to be on the winning team this afternoon, then give your heart to Jesus!
Amen