

The Bread of Life, Part 1

John 6:1 ESV After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. **2** And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. **3** Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. **4** Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. **5** Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” **6** He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. **7** Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.” **8** One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, **9** “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” **10** Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. **11** Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. **12** And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” **13** So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

- I. It's been several weeks since we last studied the book of John, and actually about a month ago, Randy began our study of this chapter in particular.
 - A. But this morning, I wanted to take another look at the beginning of John 6 because I felt a refresher will be helpful for better understanding what follows.
 1. First, because it is a particularly long chapter, (consisting of 71 verses), it is important that we keep the events of it closely related in our minds as we proceed.
 - a) John 6 begins with Jesus' 4th of 7 miraculous signs recorded in this book, and it is immediately followed by the 5th miraculous sign.
 - b) John 6 also records the first of 7 “I AM” statement that Christ makes throughout the book of John.
 2. Second, The opening scene of chapter 6, where Jesus feeds the multitude is prophetically significant to the discussion that he will have with the Jews later in the chapter. It will be helpful to reacquaint ourselves with it.
 - B. The first four verses of chapter 6 tell us everything we need to know about the circumstances of the miracle.
 1. The location: Although the events of John 5 had Jesus in and around Jerusalem in the south, he has now (after an unspecified amount of time) made his way back north to his home turf, the region of Galilee.
 2. The players: John tells us that a large crowd had surrounded him in response to the healing miracles that they had witnessed him performing. We are told that that crowd numbers five thousand men. Because the culture of that day would not have counted women or children, we can assume that the crowd numbered more; potentially including as many as 20,000 people.
 3. The timing: In verse four, John tells us that the Jewish Passover was at hand.

- a) This is the second of three times that John uses the Passover as the setting for what he relays in his Gospel. Every time John does this he is pointing to a redemptive significance connected with the particular event.
 - b) For example, the first mention of Passover was in chapter 2, when Jesus ran the money changers out of the Temple with a whip.
 - (1) When challenged by the authorities about what right he had to do these things, he responded that if they were to destroy “this temple” (speaking of his body) that he would raise it three days.
 - (2) His point was that he was the redeeming sacrifice, literally the “Passover Lamb”, whose blood would deliver us. Yet though they might destroy him, He would “raise the temple up” by his own glorious resurrection, which we celebrated last week.
 - c) This mention of the Passover here in John 6 is important because the Passover is a **feast**, and the prophetic symbolism of this chapter centers on food. Questions like, “What was the manna in the wilderness all about?” and “What is it that will truly satisfy us?” will be answered.
- C. Another thing that makes this scene really unique in the book of John, is that it is one of the rare times that John tells a story from Jesus’ life that all three of the other Gospel writers share as well.
- 1. Most of John’s 7 signs of Jesus (like the raising of Lazarus, turning water into wine, and the healing of the Paralytic man at the pool of Bethesda) are recorded no where else in the Bible, but this was something that he was compelled to put in his eyewitness, first-hand account of Christ’s life.
 - 2. While each gospel writer clearly tells what happened with striking similarity, only John includes Jesus explanation of what the miracle means (John 6:22-59).
- II. So with all of that information as “set up”, let’s begin to explore the miraculous sign itself.
- A. As I mentioned earlier, the feeding of the multitude is the fourth of seven signs in the book of John. Each sign told something unique about his identity and mission.
- 1. The first was his turning water into wine at the wedding of Cana in chapter 2.
 - a) On the surface, this showed that Christ was sensitive to our needs, responding to the request of his mother for the sake of the wedding party.
 - b) But on a deeper level, it pointed to a more glorious wedding that was on the horizon, when the bride (the church) would be eternally united with her groom (Jesus). It also showed that cleansing would no longer be achieved through ceremonial washing, but by the blood of Jesus.
 - 2. The second sign was when he healed the government official’s son in Galilee in John chapter 4. He did this from a distance and with just a word. This emphasized that Jesus was not obligated to our formulas and expectations, but that he was sovereign and far more powerful than we could imagine. In truth he was God.
 - 3. The third sign, in which Jesus healed the paralyzed man by the pool of Bethesda, showed that Jesus was Lord of the Sabbath and re-emphasized

that he was God; a truth which he spent the remainder of chapter five proclaiming to the Scribes and Pharisees.

B. So John 6 begins with Jesus and his disciples somewhere in Galilee, having been pursued by several thousand people who had witnessed his miraculous healings and wanted to get in on the action. There are two things the other Gospels tell us that you should be aware of...

1. First, when Jesus fed the multitude, He and the other disciples were on vacation. The timing of this miracle, as reported by the other gospel writers, immediately followed the execution by beheading of John the Baptist.

a) John was the one who had heralded Jesus coming, eventually identifying him as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”. He was most likely a close friend of Christ, in fact he was Christ’s cousin. We also know that some of Jesus’ disciples were first disciples of John.

b) Because of this, we can assume that Jesus, who, remember, was fully human, and as such, was capable of feeling sadness (which we’ll see more clearly in John 11) was grieving. And the disciples may have been disillusioned and emotionally exhausted.

c) Additionally the demands of their ministry had become burdensome.

Mark 6:31 ESV And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. **32** And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. **33** Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

2. The second thing you learn is that though they were on a much-needed retreat, when Jesus saw this massive crowd coming, he didn’t say, “Oh no! Quick, boys! Pack up the boat and let’s get out of here!”

a) Matthew and Mark both say that when Jesus saw the crowds that he had compassion on them, because they were like aimless, wandering sheep without a shepherd.

b) **Luke 9:11b** “...he **welcomed them** and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.”

3. What is the take-home? Jesus is never tired for you! He has compassion on you, he welcomes you, he wants to teach you, to heal you and to feed you.

C. Hebrews 4:15b ESV “...we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses...”

III. So now this impromptu mega-church service has formed, and a logistics problem soon occurs to Jesus. So he turns to Philip and says, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?”

A. One small variation from the other Gospels exists on this detail. Matthew, Mark and Luke say that the question originated with the twelve, suggesting to Jesus that he send them away to “buy food for themselves” in the surrounding villages.

B. But Jesus’ response in all three of the other gospels is the same, “You give them something to eat.”

1. Have you ever been asked by your boss to do something that you were neither qualified nor resourced to do? Did panic set in when that happened? Well now you know what the disciples felt on that Galilean hillside!
 2. They quickly pull out their iPhones and open the calculator app only to discover that it would take 8 months of a working man's salary to pull this off and ensure that everyone gets even a snack, let alone a meal!
- C. However, in spite of the seeming insurmountable odds, Christ didn't even break a sweat, and he never reconsidered his intention to feed them. **John 6:6 ESV** He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.
1. Jesus loves to lead us to places where the resources are not enough to meet our needs, where the demands of the people depending on us are too great. There he asks us, "What are you going to do?"
 2. The Bible says he was "testing" Philip. But he wasn't testing him like some cruel trick to see what he was capable of. He already knew what Philip was capable of...absolutely nothing!
 3. The test was about giving Philip and the others the opportunity to believe in him in the face of insurmountable obstacles, when they and others were hungry. He was leading them to trust that he alone was enough for them.
- D. So the disciples begin to calculate what they can bring to the table. Despair must have begun to take hold upon the realization that they had five loaves, two fish, and 20,000 bellies to feed.
1. It's time for us to realize that we can never bring enough to the table to fix what ails us. Our resources are too limited, our guilt is too deep, and our brokenness too irreparable for us to do anything about it.
 2. But instead of acknowledging that, many of us walk around bragging about what is in our lunch box! "20,000 appetites need satisfied, so thank God I can contribute a couple of sandwiches to the cause!"
- E. But obviously, we're talking about something so much more important than lunch, we are talking about the great need of our souls, and the great need of a spiritually starving world that needs real nourishment...yet our hands are empty!
- IV. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah illustrates beautifully what is being said in this passage (and I think that Jesus will clearly affirm this later in the chapter).
- A. **Isaiah 64:1 ESV** Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence—**2** as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence! **3** When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. **4** From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.
1. Isaiah is saying that they need an intervention, just like the 12 and those gathered on the hillside did. Isaiah recognizes that God is mighty to save, and that he is the nation's only answer.
 - a) He wants God to come down in such a delivering way that no one will be able to dispute that he has moved on the nation's behalf. "Tear the

heavens and come down! Make the mountains quake, and burn up our enemies.”

- b) He recalls when God did “awesome things that we did not look for” isn’t that what the disciples need in our story today? For God to solve a problem they can’t solve? Have you noticed that the 12 were not looking for, or much less asking Jesus to respond the way he did?

B. Isaiah 64:5 ESV You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? **6** We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. **7** There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.

1. He’s saying, “Lord you respond to righteousness, but that’s clearly not who we are! We’ve been sinning for such a long time that we have become as useless as a horribly stained undergarment. We’re fading and it’s not getting better, no one is calling on your name, or even attempts to connect to you. You are hidden from us in our sin and we are melting in it!”
2. The first step to getting what you need from God (which is righteousness, resurrection, and renewal, not power, money and fame -or even lunch!) is honesty. Who are you really when no one is looking? How little do you really have in your hand?

C. Isaiah 64:8 ESV But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. **9** Be not so terribly angry, O Lord, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, please look, we are all your people. **10** Your holy cities have become a wilderness; Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. **11** Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised you, has been burned by fire, and all our pleasant places have become ruins. **12** Will you restrain yourself at these things, O Lord? Will you keep silent, and afflict us so terribly?

1. O the power of “now”! He’s saying that they’ve blown it and they acknowledge that on their own they are hopeless. But something has changed! “But now, O Lord, you are our Father”. They are looking to him to remake them. “...we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.”
2. In the recognition of their helplessness and need, the nation cries out to God.

V. This is what this miracle is saying to us! On our own, we do not have anything we need to fix our situation. Not enough spirituality, or goodness, or talent, or charm, or resources of any kind. Only Jesus can supply what we need to survive and be satisfied.

A. So the disciples take the meager scraps they’ve collected and place them into the Lord’s hands. He then raised them to give thanks and broke them in order to distribute them to the crowd.

1. Notice that anytime you place something in Jesus' hands, even to him it's worthless until it's broken. But if you let him break it, I can become useful to him!
 2. What are you placing in his hands today? Your reputation? Your rights? Your resources? Your religious esteem? I assure you that he will break it. But only then will you become useful for his purposes and of his glory.
- B. Remember Philip's panicked words? "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little." He was saying, "Lord, even if we had a lot more than what we've got, everybody would only get a little."
1. But what happens when what little we have goes into the master's hands?
 2. **John 6:12 ESV** And when they had **eaten their fill**, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." **13** So they gathered them up and **filled twelve baskets** with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.
- C. Jesus is not only never too tired for you, but he will always be enough for you! Though you may feel frightened to place what you have in his hands (especially since I said he will most assuredly break it!), I can promise you that Jesus collects all of our broken pieces that we place in his hands, "that nothing may be lost".
1. We will learn later in this chapter more about how Christ is committed to satisfy you, but his satisfaction always begins with trust.
 2. Will you place what you think you have in his hands? Will you just let him let you eat until you're full, or are you just satisfied with a couple sandwiches in your lunchbox?
- D. **Isaiah 55:1 ESV** "Come, **everyone** who thirsts, come to the waters; and **he who has no money**, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk **without money and without price**. **2** Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that **which does not satisfy**? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food."