

John 6: 1-21 Fish sandwiches for all and storms for the Disciples

THEME: Jesus feeds five thousand near Sea of Galilee (fourth work and word).

We come now to the miraculous feeding of the five thousand—a miracle recorded in all four Gospels. In the Gospel of John, Jesus follows this miracle with a discourse on the Bread of Life. John records only certain miracles, and he calls the miracles signs because signs are for a purpose. You will remember that he said, “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (Joh_20:30-31). This is an important verse because it is actually the key to this entire Gospel. - McGee

Joh 6:1 After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias.

The expression **after these things** means that a period of time had elapsed since the events in chapter 5 took place. Just how much time we do not know, but we do know that **Jesus** had traveled from the area around Jerusalem up to the Sea of Galilee. When it says that He crossed the sea, it probably means that He went from the northwestern shore to the northeastern side. **The Sea of Galilee** was also known as **the Sea of Tiberias**, because the city of Tiberias was located on its western bank. This city, the capital of the province of Galilee, was named after the Roman Emperor Tiberius. – Believers Bible Commentary

After what things? Well, the things that were recorded back in the fifth chapter. He had left Jerusalem and probably had come up on the east side of the Jordan River. Now he crosses over the Sea of Galilee and, apparently, comes to the north section. This took place about six months to a year after the events of chapter 5. It was about one year before His crucifixion, by the way.

The way the events are dated is by the feasts that John mentions. As we have said, John ties his Gospel down to a calendar and to a map. The One who came out of heaven's glory, the Word who was made flesh, the One who pitched His tent here among us, that One walked by the Sea of Galilee, went to Cana and to Nazareth, Capernaum, Bethsaida, Jerusalem, Decapolis, etc. So, we read that “after these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee.” John says, “And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh” (v. Joh_6:4). So, apparently, He had been back in the land of Galilee, because in chapter 5 He had been in Jerusalem and had gone in the sheep gate. This indicates a time lapse between chapters 5 and 6 when He went over the Sea of Galilee. - McGee

Joh 6:2 Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased.

The tense of the verb would be more accurate if it were translated, “And a great multitude was following Him” and “because they were seeing His miracles.”

This great multitude didn't actually believe in Him in a saving way. They didn't trust Him. They were interested in His miracles. They wanted Him because He could make them well.

Friend, the mission of Jesus was not to restore our physical bodies. He wants to be Lord of our hearts. This is why John had said at the very beginning that He “needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man” (Joh_2:25). He didn't commit Himself to that crowd back there at Jerusalem, and He's not about to commit Himself to this crowd that is gathering around now. They simply want to see the miracles that He can perform.

Joh 6:3 And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.

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The place that is pointed out to tourists visiting Israel is not what we would call a mountain. Actually, in that land three thousand feet is about as high as they go, but the hills are very rugged. The one they point out is a very lovely spot and could well be the place where He fed the five thousand. It's near Capernaum, by the way.

Jesus went up into the mountain and sat there with His disciples. Passover was near. - McGee

Joh 6:4 Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near.

It is not clear why John mentioned that Passover was near. Some suggest that the Lord Jesus was probably thinking about the Passover when He gave His wonderful message in this chapter on the true Bread of Life. He had not gone to Jerusalem for Passover. John spoke of the Passover as a feast of the Jews. Actually, of course, it had been instituted by God in the OT. He had given it to the Jewish people, and in that sense, it was a feast of the Jews. But the expression a feast of the Jews might also mean that God no longer recognized it as one of His own feasts because the Jewish nation celebrated it as a mere ritual, without any real heart interest. It had lost its real meaning and was no longer a feast of Jehovah. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Joh 6:5-6 Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.

Philip was the quiet one; he never had much to say. Our Lord was drawing him out at this particular time. You will find in verse Joh_6:8 that Philip and Andrew seem to have gotten together. Andrew and Philip evidently were quite active men, very busy, but just not speakers. You don't hear either one of them. Yet Andrew is the one who brought Simon Peter to the Lord, and the Greeks came to Philip and Andrew when they wanted to see Jesus. Philip got together with Andrew to find out what to do. So, we find them together here.

Is our Lord asking for advice in His question to Philip? May I say to you, He never asked for advice. Then why did He ask Philip the question?

He was testing Philip. Philip looked over that crowd that was coming—five thousand men besides women and children. I estimate it must have been at least fifteen thousand people. Friend, that's a pretty good-sized crowd, especially for that land and in that day. When Philip saw them coming, he wasn't thinking of a miracle at all. - McGee

Joh 6:7 Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little."

Why did Philip light upon that fixed sum of two hundred denarii? I think that is what they had in the treasury at that time. Probably Judas had made a treasurer's report that morning, and that was the total. Philip looked at the crowd, then thought of what they had in the treasury bag and said that two hundred pennyworths of bread would not be sufficient for them. The "penny" was the Roman coin denarius. One denarius represented a day's wages for a common laborer.

The other Gospel writers tell us that the disciples advised the Lord Jesus. They wanted to be on the board of directors. They said, "Why don't You send the multitude away?" Our Lord answered, "We're not going to send them away. We're going to have them sit down and we're going to feed them" (cf.

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Luk_9:12-15). These men who had elected themselves to the board of directors found themselves waiters, serving the crowd. And that is what they should have been doing all the time.

By the way, this leads me to say that there are too many men in the church today who want position. They want to have an office; they want to be on the board of directors. They like to tell the preacher what to do. Yet they do not have all the necessary information to begin with, nor do they have spiritual discernment. They don't realize that they are the ones who ought to be out doing the work of the ministry. They ought to be out witnessing for the Lord—passing the bread to the hungry multitudes. But generally, they would rather advise the pastor how to do it.

So here our Lord is drawing out Philip, and Philip says they don't have enough money to buy sufficient bread. Since Philip and Andrew are together, Andrew speaks up. – McGee

Joh 6:8 - 9 One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"

Andrew, you see, had been circulating around through the crowd, making a survey. Surveys are important, I guess, but they are seldom very helpful. You can see Andrew and Philip there together. Philip says the money in the treasury won't feed them. Andrew says all he's found is a little lad with five barley loaves and two small fish. Remember, these five barley loaves were not big commercial loaves of bread or family loaves. They were more like a hamburger bun. They were just big enough to put with the fish. That's all this man Andrew could produce. It was a hopeless project— "What are they among so many?" - McGee

Joh 6:10 Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So, the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

In making the people sit down (literally, recline), the Lord Jesus provided for their comfort. Notice He chose a place where there was much grass. It was unusual to find such a place in that region, but the Lord took care that the crowd would eat in a clean, pleasant place.

It is recorded that there were thousands of men (Greek: "males"), so this means that there were women and children in addition. The mention of the number five thousand is made to indicate what a mighty miracle was about to take place.

Joh 6:11 And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.

Jesus took the loaves and gave thanks for them. If He did this before partaking of food or serving it, how much more should we pause to thank God before eating our meals. Next, He distributed the food to the disciples. There is a real lesson for us in this. The Lord Jesus did not do it all Himself. He enlisted the service of others. It has been well said, "You do what you can do; I'll do what I can do; and the Lord will do what we cannot do."

By the time the Lord distributed the bread to the disciples, it had been wonderfully multiplied. The exact moment when this miracle took place is not recorded, but we know that in a miraculous way those five loaves and two small fish became enough in the Lord's hands to feed this great throng. The disciples went about serving the bread and the fish to those sitting down. There was no scarcity because it is distinctly stated that they gave them of the fish as much as they wanted.

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Griffith Thomas has reminded us that in this story we have a beautiful picture of:

(a) the perishing world; (b) the powerless disciples; (c) the perfect Savior. This miracle involved a true act of creation. No mere man could take five loaves and two small fish and expand them in such a way as to feed so many people as this. It has been well said, "'Twas springtime when He blessed the bread, 'twas harvest when He brake." And it is also true, "Loaves unblessed are loaves unmultiplied." – Believers' Bible Commentary

Joh 6:12 So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost."

This is a very beautiful touch. If Jesus had been a mere man, He would never have bothered to think about the remaining fragments. Any man who can feed five thousand does not worry about a few leftover crumbs! But Jesus is God, and with God there must be no wasting of His bounties. He does not want us to squander the precious things He has given to us, and so He takes care to instruct that the broken pieces which remained should be gathered up so that nothing might be lost.

Many people try to explain away this miracle. The crowd, they say, saw the little boy give his five loaves and two fish to Jesus. This made them realize how selfish they were, so they decided to take out their lunches and share them with each other. In this way, there was food for everyone. But no such explanation will fit the facts, as we shall see in the next verse. - Believers' Bible Commentary

Joh 6:13 Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

Twelve baskets of bread were gathered up after the people had finished eating. It would be a sheer impossibility to gather up as much bread as this if it had just been a matter of each person having his own lunch with him. Man's explanations prove ridiculous. There can be only one conclusion, and that is that a mighty miracle had been performed. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Christ feeding the five thousand

I. THE ZEAL DISPLAYED BY THE PEOPLE IN FOLLOWING JESUS.

1. Although they knew He had gone into a desert place.
2. Some were doubtless actuated by curiosity, but others were anxious to profit by His words.
3. We may blame those who came from improper motives, but their zeal should condemn our coldness and neglect.

II. THE READINESS OF CHRIST TO PROVIDE FOR HUMAN WANT.

III. THE TRIAL OF THE DISCIPLES' FAITH. Often in this way God opens our eyes to our own weakness and His sufficiency.

IV. THE PREPARATION FOR THE FEAST.

1. Confusion avoided.

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2. Women and children protected from rudeness.

3. Quick distribution facilitated.

V. THE NATURE AND METHOD OF THE MIRACLE.

1. The quality of the food was not changed, but its quantity was increased. Our Lord does not pamper luxury but satisfies hunger.

2. The people received the bread from the apostles. Thus, Christ taught respect for His ministers, because they act on His behalf.

3. The same miracle is repeated every day by a different process, and we give no heed to it (Psa_104:14-15).

VI. The narrative teaches us a lesson of ECONOMY and FRUGALITY. The bounties of Providence are never to be wasted; when we have more than we need, let it be given to others. (J. N. Norton.) – Biblical Illustrator

Joh 6:14 Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

The people themselves recognized that it was a miracle. They would not have done so if they had simply eaten their own lunches. In fact, they were so convinced that it was a miracle that they were willing to acknowledge that Jesus was the Prophet who would come into the world. They knew from the OT that a prophet was coming, and they looked for him to deliver them from the control of the Roman Empire. They were waiting for an earthly monarch. But their faith was not genuine. They were not willing to admit that Jesus was the Son of God or to confess their sins and accept Him as Savior. - Believers' Bible Commentary

Joh 6:15 Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

As a result of Jesus' miracle, the people wanted to make Him king. Again, if Jesus were only a man, He doubtless would have submitted readily to their request. Men are only too anxious to be exalted and to be given a place of prominence. But Jesus was not moved by such appeals to vanity and pride. He realized that He had come into the world to die as a Substitute for sinners on the cross. He would do nothing to interfere with that objective. He would not ascend the throne until first He had ascended the altar of sacrifice. He must suffer, bleed, and die before He would be exalted.

F. B. Meyer writes:

As St. Bernard said, He always fled when they wanted to make Him King and presented Himself when they wanted to crucify Him. With this clearly in mind let us not hesitate to adopt the noble words of Ittai the Gittite: "As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be" (2Sa_15:21). And He will surely answer, as that same David did to another fugitive who came to identify himself with his cause: "Abide with me,

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fear not; for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life, but with me thou shalt be in safeguard.” – Believers’ Bible Commentary

Jesus Walks on Water

Joh 6:16-17 Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them.

It was evening. Jesus had gone to the mountain by Himself. The crowd doubtless returned to their homes, leaving the disciples by themselves. And so, the disciples decided to go down to the sea and prepare for their trip back across the Sea of Galilee.

As they went over the sea toward Capernaum, it was already dark. Jesus was not with them. Where was He? He was up on the mountain praying. What a picture of Christ's followers today. They are on the stormy sea of life. It is dark. The Lord Jesus is nowhere to be seen. But that does not mean that He is unaware of what is going on. He is in heaven praying for those He loves. – Believers’ Bible Commentary

Joh 6:18-19 Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing. So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid.

The Sea of Galilee is subject to sudden and violent storms. Winds travel down the valley of the Jordan River at a great speed. When they hit the Sea of Galilee, they cause the waves to rise very high. It is not safe for small boats to be out on **the sea** at such a time.

The disciples had rowed about three or four miles. From a human standpoint, they were in great danger. At the right moment, they looked up and saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat. Here is another marvelous miracle. The Son of God was walking on the waters of the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were afraid because they did not fully realize who this wonderful Person was.

Notice how simply the story is told. The most amazing facts are being told to us, but John did not use big words to impress us with the greatness of what was taking place. He used great restraint in setting forth the facts. – Believers’ Bible Commentary

Joh 6:20-21 But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.

Then the Lord Jesus spoke wonderful words of comfort. “It is I; do not be afraid.” If He were only a man, they might well be afraid. But He is the mighty Creator and the Sustainer of the universe. With such a One close at hand, there was no reason to fear. He who made the Sea of Galilee in the first place could cause its waters to be calm in the second place and could bring His fearful disciples safely to shore. The words “It is I” are literally “I AM.” So far this is the second time in John's Gospel where Jesus used this name of Jehovah as applying to Himself.

When they realized that it was the Lord Jesus, they welcomed Him into the boat. Immediately they found themselves at their destination. Here another miracle is stated but not explained. They did not have to row any farther. The Lord Jesus brought them to dry land instantly. What a wonderful Person He is! – Believers’ Bible Commentary

Parallel passage in

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Matthew 14:25-33

²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear.

²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."

²⁸ And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." So, Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

14:24-27 Meanwhile, the boat was now far from land and battling a contrary wind. As the waves battered the boat, Jesus saw the disciples' plight. In the fourth watch of the night (between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m.), He went to them walking on the sea. Thinking it was a ghost the disciples panicked. But immediately they heard the reassuring voice of their Master and Friend, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." How true to our own experience! We are often storm-tossed, perplexed, in despair. The Savior seems far away. But all the time He is praying for us. When the night seems darkest, He is near at hand. We often mistake Him even then and push the panic button. Then we hear His comforting voice and remember that the waves that caused us to fear are under His feet. - Believers' Bible Commentary

14:28 When Peter heard the well-known, well-loved voice, his affection and enthusiasm bubbled over. "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." Rather than magnify Peter's "if" as a sign of small faith, we should see his bold request as a mark of great trust. Peter sensed that Jesus' commands are His enablements, that He gives strength for whatever He orders. - Believers' Bible Commentary

14:29-33 As soon as Jesus said, "Come," ... Peter jumped out of the boat and began walking toward Him. As long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, he was able to do the impossible; but the minute he became occupied with the strong wind, he began to sink. Frantically he cried, "Lord, save me!" The Lord took him by the hand, gently rebuked his little faith, and brought him to the boat. As soon as Jesus went on board, the wind ceased. A worship meeting took place in the boat with the disciples saying to Jesus, "Truly You are the Son of God."

The Christian life, like walking on water, is humanly impossible. It can only be lived by the power of the Holy Spirit. As long as we look away from every other object to Jesus only (Heb_12:2), we can experience a supernatural life. But the minute we become occupied with ourselves or our circumstances, we begin to sink. Then we must cry to Christ for restoration and divine enablement. - Believers' Bible Commentary