

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

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[0 : 0 0] John's Gospel, chapter 6, verses 1 to 15. Sometime after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee, that is, the Sea of Tiberias, and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing those who were ill.

Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover festival was near. However, when Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards him, he said to Philip, Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?

He asked this only to test him, for he already had it in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite.

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?

Jesus said, Make the people sit down. There was plenty of grass in that place. Jesus said, And they sat down. About five thousand men were there. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted.

[1 : 2 6] He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.

So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world.

Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. So we're in the fifth of seven signs that John records, the feeding of the five thousand.

And here's what I want us to recognise today. It's that it's possible to see who Jesus is, but fail to understand the significance.

This sign, sign number five, it centres around one of the national highlights for the Jews in Jesus' day, Passover.

[2 : 3 8] Nationalistic hopes often running high as they look back to the time when their freedom was secured, as they looked forward, hoping that another deliverer would come.

So when Jesus gives this sign that Duncan's just read for us, supplying bread in the wilderness, just like Moses, the people rightly conclude that Jesus is the prophet to come, but their response is, well, let's make him king so that he can lead a freedom movement.

Like any political movement or campaign, it can be really significant to have a figurehead to rally around or someone to take the lead in that campaign. We can think about the footballer Marcus Rashford, his amazing efforts to get that free school meal provision over the holidays, that determined leadership bringing a U-turn in government policy.

So many in Israel's cities and countryside at the time of Jesus, they want change. They want freedom from Roman oppression and they think Jesus can light that fuse.

So when we left our reading, they want to make Jesus king, but within 24 hours and by the end of this chapter, we see grumbling about Jesus, opposition towards him and the crowds leave and many of his followers doing likewise because he won't be that king and he won't operate to their agenda. So they've seen who Jesus is, but they fail to see the significance.

[4 : 1 3] And you know, that's something that is really possible for us today to find ourselves in that same situation, maybe especially in church, maybe especially if we've been brought up in church for young people listening in today. It's quite possible for us to believe what the Bible says is true about Jesus, to believe that he's the son of God, to believe that he died and rose again, to be the

saviour of the world, but never to see the significance for us personally. It's as if we can answer the what questions about Jesus, the significant facts of his life, but we never answer for ourselves the so what or now what? We never think about significance or response. Now it's one thing to believe the gospel with our minds, to believe those facts, but it's another to have God's love through Jesus affect not just our head, but also our heart and also our hands, to have it shape our thought life, our actions, our words and our relationships. What we discover from this sign is that Jesus is the true prophet and

Jesus is God's king and as such he must be heard and he must be obeyed and that's fundamentally missing at the Lake of Galilee and the question for us to answer is, is that something that's present or absent in our lives today? So let's have a look together at the sign. John is deliberately recording details that emphasise Moses' connections. So this follows on from chapter 5 and in verse 46 of chapter 5, Jesus says quite deliberately, if you believe Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. His opponents often claim that they were disciples of Moses. Jesus says, now if you would believe him then you would believe me because Moses points forward to me. And then in chapter 6 we read these details, we see crowds in the wilderness calling to mind the wilderness wanderings of Israel. We see Jesus going up on a mountain just like Moses went up on a mountain to meet with God and to receive the Ten Commandments and we discover this is all happening around the time of the Passover. Passover, that greatest reminder of their story as a nation. How did they come to be a nation and to be the people of God? Well it's because of the Exodus story. So the second book of the

Old Testament, God by miracles leading the people out of slavery in Egypt to freedom and doing that through Moses as deliverer. That book which in many ways is a God conflict between Pharaoh and the false gods of Egypt and the true God, the God who had made a covenant promise to Abraham and his descendants that he would be for them and he would bless them and he would take them to the promised land. And that conflict that brings those ten plagues that perhaps we remember climaxing in the death of the firstborn. And the people of Israel would be spared that through the provision of the Passover lamb. So each Israelite family had to take a lamb and care for it and then kill it as a sacrifice and sprinkle the blood on their doors so that the angel of judgment, the angel of death would pass over their houses. And following that, Pharaoh let the people go free. And they were free to become the people of God. They were free to meet with God on Mount Sinai led by Moses. So all of that's being called to mind here. And the next thing that happens in our story is Jesus up on the mountain, he sees the great crowd coming towards him. And what John makes clear is that Jesus is in control. Jesus has a plan, but Jesus wants to give a test for his disciples. At this stage in the story, do they see his identity?

As they think about the signs he has already done, do they see that Jesus is one who has generous provision that he makes for people in need? And I wonder whether we have seen that ourselves. We get two different responses. We get Philip, very practical, thinking in very natural terms. [8 : 56] It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for even one bite. It's impossible. We don't have nearly enough money for that kind of feeding, Jesus.

You've got Andrew who moves things a little bit further. He says, here's a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish. But that tiny meal is inadequate. We can't just give people the tiny little crumb. What does Jesus do? Jesus steps in, he organises the people, and then he works this amazing miracle, this powerful sign to provide food for the people in the wilderness. Now, some people, when they read this, and you'll find this in some books, they go on to give lessons on the ethics of sharing. Now, that's not what this story is teaching, but of course, sharing with what we have with others is a beautiful thing to do. One of our friends in our church family called Matthew, he's back home in India for the moment, and he's working alongside his dad, helping to feed some of the poorest in their community as a church, trying to provide cooked meals or to provide the ingredients for meals. And that's a wonderful thing to be able to do, and for us who know him, to be able to pray for him. But that's not what Jesus is teaching about. What we have here is a wonderful miracle of multiplication. We have this feeding in the desert. We have Jesus providing satisfaction for a huge crowd.

We're told they have enough to eat, but still there's leftovers. Here is Jesus' generous provision being highlighted. There's 12 baskets of leftovers. Jesus provides a feast, not just a crumb. So that's the sign as we have it presented in John's Gospel. What about the significance? And here's where we want to see that Jesus is the greater prophet than Moses, and Jesus is God's true

king. Now the people, verse 14, after they see the sign, they began to say, surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world. So they draw this conclusion. Moses in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 18 had promised a prophet like him would come. And so the people conclude, well, this must be who Jesus is.

That's so far so good. But then they try and make him king by force, and Jesus removes himself. Jesus has not come to secure political or national freedom for Israel.

[11 : 45] Jesus has not come to bring justice down on the enemies of Rome. Rather, he has come to face the judgment of God on behalf of enemies of God, to turn us into friends of God by sheer grace alone.

But in this sign, we are being reminded, Jesus is not like the genie in Aladdin. You know, we can't just rub the magic lamp and Jesus will make our wishes come true. We cannot make Jesus serve us. We cannot squeeze Jesus into our preferences. But that's what the people had tried to do. They tasted food, they sensed freedom and victory, and they were willing to accept him on that basis. But very quickly, when it became apparent that he was talking about something deeper and he wasn't going to bring instant freedom, there was a walking away. They read the signs wrong, and they draw the wrong conclusions, and they miss the joy that could be theirs.

So what should they have seen? And what should they have understood? How is Jesus the prophet who is greater than Moses? And how is Jesus the true king? Well, let's think about these themes that emerge of food and freedom. And let's hear from Jesus on these. Now, the rest of chapter six, if you've got time in the rest of the day, the rest of this week, read John chapter six, where Jesus, in lots of different ways, is saying he is better than merely physical satisfaction that came in the time of Moses.

Jesus is saying, my food is better. My food is what everybody needs, not just for our physical good, but for our spiritual good, and not just for time, but also for eternity. So he began our service with Jesus saying, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never grow hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. And Jesus then went on saying, verse 41, I am the bread that came down from heaven. Here is Jesus speaking of himself as what will satisfy.

And he compares himself with Moses and the manna in the time of the Exodus. When we think about the source of the bread, Jesus says, remember this, when you think about the story of the Exodus, it wasn't Moses that gave you the bread, God did. And what's happening now, Jesus is saying, is that God has sent me his own son. I am who God has sent for your lasting satisfaction. Back then, God sent bread. Now, God has sent Jesus, the bread of life, to give lasting satisfaction.

[15 : 08] Moses, as a prophet, he was the middle man between God and the people. Jesus, the greater prophet, he is God, who both gives and who is in himself the bread of life. We need nothing beyond Jesus. What he gives us is himself. Not only is there a different source between the bread of Moses and the bread of Jesus, there's a different quality. So Jesus can speak about the bread that Moses supplied and he reminds them. See, after one day, it went mouldy, that bread that came from heaven. And Jesus says, those who ate that bread, they still died. None of them are around till this day. But what about the bread that Jesus brings? Verse 27, he says, do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man, that is Jesus, will give you. For on him, God the Father has placed his seal of approval. Or in verse 54, whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.

And I will raise them up at the last day. Verse 51, whoever eats this bread, the living bread, will live forever. We all want happiness and joy. And we all want and long for happiness and joy that lasts. And the truth is that we all know that experience of sorrow and joy. Because we have that sense of everything coming to an end. So we had it as a family last week, you know, not having seen family for ages, we got to see the boy's cousin. It was a time of great excitement for her birthday party.

And there was sadness in the middle of joy, knowing that party was coming to an end.

And there was real sadness on the way home from that party because it had come to an end. It's our experience, isn't it? When we go on holiday, we get excited thinking about the holiday.

We love the experiences we have. But even sometimes before the holiday is finished, we get that wistfulness, that sense of sadness. Here is something else that will come to an end.

[17 : 56] And that's true of every joy in life. It comes to an end. And we feel the pain of that. Why do we feel that pain? It's because we were made with eternity in our hearts. We were made for a joy that would last forever. So these small joys that we have in life are pointers to ultimate joys that God brings and that Jesus came to bring. The one joy that will never be taken from us is eternal life of

knowing God. So in the present, we have God with us as Christians every day to know that friendship, to know that love. And we have the hope that that will be our reality forever. That's the bread of life that endures forever. And that takes us to the second point of significance for our purposes today.

To think about the freedom that Jesus has come to bring. And it's not a political freedom. Jesus has come to lead his people in a new exodus.

He wants to bring us freedom to become the people of God. He wants to release us from slavery to sin so that we could know and enjoy God personally. So that we could be, in reality, who we were made to be.

Made in the image of God to know and enjoy God. There is freedom when we find that as our own personal reality. But how does Jesus do that? It's not victory at the point of a sword.

Jesus doesn't just come as the greater Moses. Jesus also comes as the ultimate Passover lamb. Remember that spotless lamb who was killed and the blood was sprinkled so that the judgment would pass over.

[20 : 06] Jesus is that Passover lamb. He is the one who in himself bears the sin of the world. He is the one who dies and his blood is shed as a sacrifice to cover our sins.

To satisfy God's justice against our sin. But to give us forgiveness by an act of God's mercy and grace. We deserve death and judgment.

But Jesus takes that willingly for us as our substitute so we can enjoy life and life everlasting. Jesus is the king who doesn't bring down political judgment.

He is the one who takes on himself The judgment of God to give us true freedom. His death is a sacrifice.

And the point that Jesus makes in the rest of John chapter 6 is that sacrifice is something that must be received by us personally. To have our sins forgiven.

[21 : 14] To have the judgment pass over us. We need to respond with faith to what Jesus has already done for us.

To believe that what he did on the cross he did for me. And to receive it gladly. There is nothing greater that Jesus can do for us.

Nothing in this life would compare to Jesus securing eternal life with God for us. And so again the conclusion is that we are to read that sign and we are to respond by putting our faith in Jesus.

To recognise that Jesus hasn't come to be some kind of lifestyle coach. He's not Joe Wicks for the soul.

You know to give us a little bit of peace or a little bit of a pep talk when we feel down. He's not a personal advisor for crisis intervention. And the rest of the time we cast him aside.

[22 : 24] Jesus is nothing less than the full and final revelation of God. You want to know who God is and what God's like? You look at Jesus. You want to know how God saves?

You look at Jesus and his perfect life and his death on the cross. And he is the Lord. He is the true King. And that means we must allow him to rule.

We must allow him to direct us. We follow his lead. We don't ask him to follow ours if we are to have that eternal joy.

So maybe today you're at that stage where you know the facts. And you're happy to accept that Jesus is a real person. And he is the Son of God.

And he died and rose as the Saviour. Don't stop there. Make sure you can say he is my Lord and my God.

[23 : 23] He is my Saviour. He is my hope in life and in day. He is my hope in life.