

Sign 5. Feeding the multitude

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[0 : 00] or what am I pinning my hopes on now or for the future? Whether we're Christian or not, to really honestly ask that question, what is my life built on? Where does my hope rest?

And to push ourselves a little bit further, when I need it most, when I most need help and salvation, how does that thing, that person that I look to, how are they able to deliver?

How do they stack up with Jesus? Sometimes, perhaps even if we're Christians, we come to rely on ourselves or our money or our intelligence or our families. So it's an invitation for us all to consider, is my life, is my hope bound up with Jesus as Redeemer? So today, who is the greatest of all time? Who's the great Redeemer, the great Savior, that we would all say He's Jesus and that we would worship? So like I say, there's four points of contact, and the first is to do with the Passover, where John wants us to recognize in his gospel that Jesus is the true Passover Lamb. So chapter 6 begins, verse 4, verses with the setting. And in the setting, we see some parallels with the Moses story.

So there are great crowds, just as Moses was leading a huge crowd into the wilderness. There's the mountainside meeting, here's Jesus on a mountain, Moses famously up the mountain meeting with God, and of course in verse 4, we're told the Jewish Passover festival was near. This Passover festival associated with the time of Moses in the first place, and the Exodus event, the time when God's people were set free from slavery in Egypt. Now, the Passover festival as event was the most significant one in the national life of God's people, Israel. The national mood would be one of great expectation and also of great longing, especially when we bear in mind what's happening in Jesus' day. Israel is under the occupation of Rome, Rome rules. And so there was a longing for a second Exodus event, freedom from Rome, just as there was freedom from Egypt. Reading this reminded me of the new coach of the Scottish women's football team, who's not native to Scotland, Pedro Loza is his name. And he was saying that as part of his sort of preparation for their opening game, he said that he's finally learned the anthem.

Our anthem, like it or not, at the moment is Flower of Scotland for sporting events. And that theme in that song is the victory of Bruce over King Edward and English armies. And within that song, there's a longing for those days to be back again, days of independence. And what we see from the Exodus event and the longings of Israel, what we see from our own anthem, is that freedom is regarded as precious.

[3 : 18] And it often comes at a cost. Now, that may be war, but there is often cost to do with freedom. Now, when we think of the first Exodus event, as Israel enjoys their freedom from Egypt, there is a cost. And the cost is the Passover lamb.

Israel were not perfect, pure, holy people compared to Egypt. Israel, too, were sinful.

And for Israel to be spared God's judgment in Egypt, there needed to be a payment that was made. They could enjoy freedom because of the Passover lamb, which was both a substitute and a sacrifice. There was freedom for the people at the cost of the blood of all those lambs.

Forgiveness, freedom comes at the cost of blood sacrifice, is the clear message of the Bible. And that speaks to the seriousness of our sin and our need. So come to the Passover festival. What are they doing?

All these hundreds of years after that first time, they're remembering with thankfulness that God provided the payment to secure their freedom so that Israel could walk free to become God's people.

[4 : 49] And where was Moses in that? Moses was the leader. Moses is the one who gives the instructions from God. So we know how Moses is connected to the Passover. What about for Jesus? How's Jesus connected with the Passover? How can we say that he's greater than Moses in this regard? Well, we need to understand what John does in his gospel. And he does something really significant. In a sense, he brackets the ministry of Jesus around references to the Passover. So at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry, John chapter 1 verse 29, you find John the Baptist saying, look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

So that's the beginning of his ministry. And then on the cross, as Jesus has now died, John 19 36, we read, these things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled. Not one of his bones will be broken, just like those Passover lambs.

So Jesus is understood by John to be the true great Passover lamb. He is our sinless, perfect substitute.

Jesus, the Son of God, is the one who bears the sin of his people, takes the judgment due to his people, faces the wrath of God that his people deserve. So that in believing in Jesus, we can know that our sin is forgiven, that our freedom has been secured, that we can know God, that we can have eternal life because of Jesus, the Passover lamb.

So just as the Israelite in Egypt could say, I am walking free to meet with God, to live in the promised land because of the blood of the lamb and by God's grace, how much more is that true for each and every Christian? We walk in freedom as the people of God.

[7 : 03] We have God living with us. We have the hope of eternity because of the blood of Jesus. Jesus, our sinless Savior, and by God's grace in sending him to be that perfect gift for us.

And that call for our worship calls for our joy, as we understand that no Savior loves like Jesus. No Savior rescues like Jesus. So Passover shows that Jesus is the greatest. Now we need to turn to the theme of bread, which takes us to the sign. In verse 5 to 13, we focus on the sign, and we see that Jesus is the bread of life as we anticipate where his teaching goes. You'll notice in verse 5 to 9 that there's a test, especially a test for Philip. Philip, Jesus says to him, where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? It's a test, we're told, in verse 6. The test is this.

Philip, can you read the signs? Can you look at all that I have done? And can you understand my significance? Can you understand my identity in light of all that I have done? And can you trust that I can provide? And what we see is that Philip fails, doesn't he? He thinks, well, where are we going to find half a year's wages to provide enough food? And then Andrew, he fails to read the signs as well. He finds the boy with the packed lunch, but he doesn't understand how that could possibly get anywhere close to meeting needs. And then Jesus shows what he always intended to do. Verse 10, Jesus said, make the people sit down. Then he took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as he wanted. He did the same with the fish. So in a very controlled, very organized way, Jesus proceeds to feed a crowd of 5,000 men. You add women, you add children. This is a large crowd. Now again, some people like to try and remove the supernatural. The suggestion that some would give is, well, here's one boy, and look at his willingness to share his packed lunch. And so all of a sudden, everybody else is digging out their packed lunches, and there's this great bring and share supper going on. That's not what we're invited to see. We're invited to see another supernatural act by the Son of God, the Maker of all creation. Verse 12, when they'd all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, gather the pieces left over. So they gathered them and filled 12 baskets with the pieces left over. What's going on there? We're being reminded that when Jesus acts, everyone is satisfied, and there's enough left over for the 12. I think it's fair to say there's symbolism there.

12 tribes of Israel, 12 disciples, representative of the church. Jesus is enough, and more than enough, for you and for me. Now, how does this Jesus sign show that he's greater than Moses? How does this connect with what was going on in Moses' day? Well, if you know the story, as the people are set free from slavery, they find themselves after a while wandering in the wilderness, and they have no food, and they begin to grumble. And Moses prays, and God rains down bread from heaven, manna from heaven.

Where's Moses in this? Moses is the leader of the people. But Jesus, in verse 32, says this, very truly, I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it's my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. So there's a reminder that Moses is not the miracle worker here, it's God's provision. But here in this sign, we're being invited to see here is Jesus as God giving this bread miraculously as a signpost to the fact that he is the bread of life. He gives bread, he is the bread of life. That's what he says in verse 35, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

[11 : 50] One lockdown trend that perhaps some of us at least find ourselves involved in was the making of sourdough and sourdough bread. And for those of us who enjoy that, there's not much more satisfying than warm, freshly baked bread hot out of the oven. But we also know as good as that homemade bread is, the best of bakery bread, we will find ourselves hungry again.

Is enjoying bread bad? No. Is enjoying our families, our jobs, our money bad? Not at all. Jesus is not saying all those things are bad and I'm good.

Jesus would have us to enjoy food and friendship and family and finance and our work in the right context. That we would enjoy them as God's gift. We would enjoy them in relationship with God rather than trying to make them our God. And there's such a significant difference there.

God's love. And there's such a significant difference there. And there's such a significant difference there. Don't trust in anything other than God, the Creator and Savior. Jesus. Don't trust in bread. Don't trust in anything other than me, the bread of life, to satisfy.

This physical sign, the giving of bread, points to that spiritual, that deeper reality that Jesus and Jesus alone will satisfy our spiritual hunger.

[13 : 31] We have, as people, material needs. You know, we could go across every country, every continent and discover some shared material needs. But we could also go across every continent and discover those same deeper spiritual needs. As people, we need to love and to be loved.

We need to have that sense of security. We need to know that we have value and purpose. And we need to know, even when many don't recognize, that we need to know how to connect with the living God.

It's maybe not things that we often think or reflect on. Those deeper needs that we have. Perhaps we find ourselves so busy with just dealing with the material stuff of life. But if you have sort of thought about your quest to find those deep needs, perhaps, like me, you can recognize time that you have spent running down dead ends. Again, I was thinking about this through the week. Thinking about, as a teenager, I genuinely, I feel now that I genuinely thought that if I had the right pair of trainers on my feet, and if I was listening to the right music and the right bands, that somehow that would gain me enough security and approval that I could feel satisfied in life. And it seems so foolish, but often we find ourselves running down blind alleys looking for deep satisfaction in small places and in the wrong places. And it can feel like chasing the wind.

We'll be met with disappointment. Those things are not big enough to hold our hopes and our dreams. But Jesus, what do we discover about Jesus when we trust him? To trust him is to know God's eternal love. The perfect love. The perfect love of Father, Son, and Spirit overflowing to us is our reality.

We know welcome and adoption from God, the perfect Holy Father. We understand that God approves of us when we are in Jesus. When we are in Jesus. When he looks at us, he sees us as if we are as righteous as Jesus himself.

[16 : 12] When we are trusting in Jesus, we're built into God's kingdom. Every day we live to serve and bring glory to our God and Savior. Jesus, and Jesus alone will and does satisfy our deep hunger.

So that's how the bread shows that Jesus is the greatest. What about when it comes to the prophet?

This is in verses 14 and 15. So Jesus has just done this sign. A crowd is satisfied. There's baskets left over. What happens next? Verse 14, after the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, surely this is the prophet who's 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 the people read the sign, well Jesus must be the prophet, but they miss the significance. So I enforce him to be our king.

We had that experience. We see a sign, but we don't really get its importance. And perhaps we just walk on by and we only discover later. Made me think of trying to drive through Belgium in the days before Google Maps. And coming in the early hours into this fairly small Belgian town and seeing a right-hand turn, thinking that was the way to go, seeing a sign, not having a clue what it said, so I kept on going, seeing some confused looks, some puzzled looks. It took me about half a mile before I realized I went on a cycle path. They make them bigger in Belgium. We can see the sign and miss the significance.

And when that comes to Jesus, that is so, so costly. So back in Deuteronomy 18, the people remember Moses said, the Lord your God will raise up a prophet for you like me. Listen to him. So they see the sign. Well, this must be Jesus. He also provided the miracle of bread in the wilderness. If he's the promised prophet, well, let's make him king. And maybe he can be like Moses for us. He can lead another exodus. He can get rid of Rome and we can be free again.

[18 : 37] They wanted the kingdom of man. But Jesus, Jesus came to bring the kingdom of God. So they miss his true identity. Yes, Jesus is the prophet, but he's not come to be some kind of freedom fighter. He has come to reveal God's will for salvation, which runs much deeper than anything purely political. Jesus has come to bring freedom from sin. Freedom from that guilt we feel, that shame we feel before our God, because we know that all is not well with us, because we know that we have broken his commands. Jesus has come as prophet, bringing God's word to us as the word of God.

John chapter 1. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. This is Jesus. He is the great word. Verse 18. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son who is himself God, and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. Jesus comes to reveal God, and to reveal God's way of salvation. And they miss it, because all they want is freedom from Rome.

Moses. Moses spoke with God up a mountain, but Jesus is God speaking to them from the mountain, and he's speaking for a purpose. Remember John's reason why he recorded these signs?

John chapter 20, verse 31. These signs are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. So we need to understand the identity of Jesus, that he is God's anointed King, Messiah. He is the Son of God. We need to understand his ultimate goal in coming, that we might have life, true life, eternal life, knowing God with God, and that we would respond appropriately, that we would believe to have life in his name.

So when we think about the prophet, we recognize Jesus is the greatest prophet. Jesus is the greatest redeemer of all time. One last point of connection takes us to the sea and to the boat. Verse 16 to 21, one is Jesus rescues on the sea. So the last parallel, a sea rescue. This is going to show Jesus again, greatest redeemer, greatest savior of all time. Some of us grew up near the sea. Some of us grew up on boats and with ferry crossings, and we know how powerful the sea is. Others perhaps maybe have never had the chance to witness that, experience that. We've been watching a surfing documentary based around what's regarded as the biggest and the baddest of all the waves to surf. It's called Jaws, off the coast of Hawaii. It sometimes goes as high as a hundred feet. It's a wall of water that big wave surfers will try and conquer. And one episode of that documentary followed the safety team.

[22 : 14] It was now essential that surfers have this backup team that will be there for when the wave wipes them out, and they're held under the water sometimes for one minute, sometimes two minutes.

They can be swept a couple of hundred yards towards the rock. So it's essential there's that rescue team in that moment of intense danger. Even when you're a skilled waterman, the sea is a scary play. And that takes us to where our disciples are to snow. Look at verse 17. Here they are, they're in a boat, and they set off across the lake. By now it was dark. So we are in nighttime.

It is pitch dark. And when the sky turns black, it is pitch black. Storm picks up. A strong wind was blowing, and the waters grew rough. We understand that they're far from shore. They'd rowed about three or four miles. No matter how experienced you are in the sea, this is not an experience you want to go through. This is a hard moment. But then there comes another miracle, and then a surprise.

Verse 19. When they rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water. And they were frightened.

There's a surprise. Here's their friend, their saviour Jesus. He's come to them with the power of God as the Son of God walking on the water. They have this new awareness of the power of Jesus. And there's fear. We ask ourselves, why is there fear? We can read on in verse 20.

[24 : 10] Jesus said to them, it is I. Don't be afraid. Or it is I am. Don't be afraid.

Many commentators recognize here is Jesus using the Old Testament name of God. So what have we got here? We've got the fear that happens when sinful people are in the presence of their holy God.

Like in Isaiah 6, the vision of the holy, holy, holy God in the temple. And Isaiah falls down and says, woe is me, I'm undone. And it's the typical reaction when a sinful person finds themselves in the presence of the holy God. They're seeing something new about Jesus. And it's bringing fear and awe and wonder.

But then think about the mercy of Jesus. Jesus said, it is I. Don't be afraid. Then they were willing to take him into the boat. And immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading. Why does Jesus come near? He comes near to comfort. He comes near to be present.

He comes near to rescue. In this little scene, there's a beautiful picture of the uniqueness of Christianity.

[25 : 29] Not God at a distance, but a God who draws near. Jesus, our Emmanuel, God with us. In Jesus, we have the holy God who meets his people in grace and love.

Jesus, who comes near to be present in the chaos, in the storms of our lives.

Jesus, who draws near and invites us to trust him as the one who controls and the one who stills the storm. There is no savior like Jesus. One who walks with us, who is always for his people.

He is the one we worship. He is the one we need. This sign, as with all the other signs, is one that we need to see correctly.

And we need to respond to it correctly. As we close, we'll read together verse 27, where Jesus says to the crowd that don't get the significance, do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

[26 : 59] For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval. We know, don't we, that life is short, that life is fragile, that life is uncertain.

We know that to be true. This life is short. Eternity is infinitely long.

Therefore, what does Jesus say to us? It is essential that we choose correctly what we live for. Don't settle for crumbs when Jesus offers a feast.

Look beyond the gifts of this life to the giver of them all. Because who is Jesus? Jesus is God's approved agent.

He comes revealing God, revealing God's heart, revealing God's salvation. We can trust Jesus to deliver. So we are all called to believe in him as the great Savior that we need.

[28 : 10] That we would enjoy him forever. Let's pray together. Lord, our Lord our Lord