

John 6: Feeding the 5000

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[0:00] Yep. 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?

He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So I don't know if you've noticed, but if you're familiar with John chapter 6, you have probably noticed that there is a lot of bread going on in the chapter.

This isn't the first sermon you're going to hear from this chapter in which bread figures heavily. Don't want to get ahead of myself and focus too much on bread, but I think the reason that it's used as a metaphor in this chapter and throughout Scripture is because it's a central feature of human survival and flourishing in culture.

Preparing for this sermon, I decided to ask my daughter Mia why she likes bread, and here's what she said, I don't know, I just do.

I think that about covers it. Bread is a no-brainer, isn't it? I actually remember our dear Bishop Dave once carrying bread into the pulpit to make the point. Anyone else remember that?

[1:33] Bread is a central thing, although I do want to be careful not to offend my gluten-sensitive brothers and sisters in saying so. But let's keep bread in mind as we journey through John chapter 6 because bread's centrality in human flourishing tells us something about Jesus in light of what we read here.

So with that opening disclaimer that we should be on the lookout for bread, let's go to the text, then think on the takeaways for this morning. Please look with me at John chapter 6.

So John does a good job of giving us our setting, generally, and it's no different in this specific case. Jesus, the text tells us, is by the Sea of Galilee.

We note in verse 2 that a large crowd was following Jesus, but it's specified why that is the case. The crowd knew that he was healing the sick, and they were interested in the signs he was doing. Recurring theme in John, isn't it? We see in verses 3 and 4 that it's near the Passover, and that Jesus sat down to have some time with his disciples. The Passover connection here deserves a closer look because it's not an accident or just a minor detail.

[3:03] Remember, John's Gospel presents Jesus as the true Passover Lamb, as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world and sets his people free. And in this section, we've got a crowd about to be fed by the Lamb of God.

I don't think that's an accident. In addition, they're about to be fed by Jesus in the wilderness. You're thinking that sounds like God feeding the Israelites with manna in the wilderness, that bread from heaven after rescuing them out of slavery in Egypt.

Anyone thinking that? All right, well, I think you're right. So, with this backdrop in place, looked at those things briefly, the crowd catches up to Jesus.

Text says, 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?

He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Can't I ever think that Jesus might have said this with an amused grin on his face?

[4:19] He knew already how he was going to handle this, but the text tells us that he tested Philip. Why Philip? Well, one idea is that Jesus singled Philip out because he was from the general area where they were.

That seems to make sense to me. But we see Philip being tested. Jesus wanted to test and to teach Philip. If Philip is anything like the rest of us, he probably didn't much like being tested.

And like the rest of us, he sometimes didn't do so well at the test. He says, wait a minute. Several months' wages isn't enough for a crowd like this one to even get a little bit at each person.

How are we going to do that? How are we going to buy bread? Now Andrew chimes in in verse 9. There's a boy here who has five barley loaves, two fish, but what are they for so many?

Andrew doesn't seem to get what Jesus is doing here either, does he? Five barley loaves, which was barley loaves who are typically thought of as the bread of the poorer classes.

[5:48] So five mediocre pieces of bread, two fish, feed a crowd, thousands of people. Will that do it?

Yeah, it will. Amazingly enough. Picking up in verse 10, Jesus says, have the people sit down. Text tells us there was much grass in the place, and the men sat down, about 5,000 in number.

Verse 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.

So there were 5,000 men. Who knows what the total number of people was? As I was doing sermon preparation, I read one commentary that suggested it might have been up to 20,000 people in total.

But we don't know for sure. But what Jesus does, he gives thanks, he distributes the bread, he distributes the fish to the people.

[7:03] And what does the text say? Everyone has as much as they want. And it doesn't stop there.

When they had eaten their fill, Jesus told his disciples, gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost. Of course, the disciples are aware.

They started with 5 loaves, 2 fish. What exactly is there to gather up after thousands of people eat on 5 loaves and 2 fish?

Well, the answer is 12 baskets full of fragments. Okay. God provided extravagantly for their needs. God's abundance was extraordinary. In fact, some scholars believe that the 12 baskets are significant because they represent God's provision for the 12 tribes of Israel.

[8:14] But in any case, Jesus provides, God provides abundantly. And the people respond with astonishment.

They say, this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world. They actually mean something very specific by that.

They are referring to Deuteronomy chapter 18 where God promises that he is going to send another prophet like Moses.

This prophet like Moses that we're expecting, this must be him. That's what the crowd is thinking. And actually, they're right. Although I'm not sure that they realize how right they are.

Jesus is an even greater prophet than Moses. Jesus is, of course, bringing in a better covenant than the one that Moses mediated. Jesus, we could say, is the new and the better Moses.

[9:20] Because, after all, we remember from the prologue, the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Christ. Now, finally, we see Jesus withdraw because the crowd is of a mind to try to make Jesus king by force.

Well, why does he withdraw from that? What's going on? And the answer, of course, is that being king without the cross would have been at odds with what Jesus came to accomplish.

So, what do we take away from this morning's passage? Interesting story. I think I heard one sermon once on this passage that the preacher said that this is probably just a myth and didn't really happen, but it shows that we are supposed to feed the hungry.

I think that's utter nonsense. It really happened as the scripture records. So, what do we take away? I want us to think first about Philip being tested.

[11:06] Philip's faith in Jesus was being tested by the question that Jesus asked him in light of the circumstances that they encountered. And Philip doesn't exactly come away looking heroic in his faith from the experience, does he?

That is an example many of us will need, though. Every Christian will have the experience of having our faith tested. will all face trials, and they often expose where our faith in Christ falls short, but they always also sharpen the iron of our faith on the other side of the testing and the trial if we approach these things with a teachable and humble attitude.

Philip saw a problem without a solution that he could imagine. will all be able to do that. Well, I think we can understand that, right?

I have certainly seen problems in my life that I didn't know how to handle. What about you? Yeah? Seen situations that seem too enormous for me.

What about you? And I have felt pain that hurt so deeply, I thought that it would never end. And you know what? Every time, Jesus carried me through.

[12:32] I often say because I believe and I have experienced that one of the chief ways that we grow in our faith is by going through really difficult things and seeing, looking back in hindsight, that God was always faithful and that he carried us through.

Our problems can seem so enormous, but they are never as enormous as the grace of God and Jesus Christ our Lord. And the tested believer comes to see just how true this is.

The Christian life is one of trial and testing so that when it's all said and done, we trust in Christ and in Christ alone.

we have this amazing biblical promise from James chapter 1. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

faith. Our faith being tested is not a fun process, but we don't have it as bad as Philip did.

[13:54] If we falter and find that we have some growing to do in our faith, that's one thing, but his wavering faith has been recorded in the Bible for everyone to see forever.

We're still talking about it. But as believers, we will have tests, we will have trials.

That's the first point I want to raise this morning. My next point is that this sign that Jesus performs says something absolutely profound about how much God gives.

Think about the connections we've already talked about so far in our text. Our text points back to the Passover, when God graciously rescued his people from slavery in Egypt.

It points back to the manna in the wilderness when God graciously fed his people with bread from heaven. Our text for this morning demonstrates Jesus graciously feeding people.

[15:00] miraculously doing so. And all of this points to God's greatest gift. The true Passover lamb, the true bread from heaven, his son Jesus.

Because God graciously and freely gives eternal life to all who call on the name of his son. Now here's a question.

Here's where kind of the rubber meets the road. If God is this good, children are an amazing gift of God as well.

Praise the Lord. Wonderful illustration. If God is this good, if God is this giving, if God is this generous, do we really have any reason to worry about anything?

If Jesus can feed thousands of people with five loaves of bread and two fish, can't he provide for you as well? If he can die and rise from the dead because he loves you so much, don't you think that he can and will take care of you now and forever?

[16:18] Of course he can. And of course he will. And knowing that sets us free to live in a way that reflects God's generosity. So knowing God's generosity, we can give of our time to our neighbors and to the service of the kingdom of God.

Knowing that time belongs to Jesus and he is generous, we can give of our skills and our giftings to serve our neighbors and for the use of the kingdom of God.

Knowing that God gave us those things to glorify him. And we can give of our money and of our earthly goods for the sake of our neighbor and for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Knowing that all we have belongs to him anyway. That he gave it to us so that we could use it to glorify him. And that he will take care of us. He provides because he is generous.

And he calls us to be like him. The generosity of God to us in Jesus Christ sets us free to be generous.

[17:23] Sacrificially generous just like our God is. God gives. We are called to reflect that kind of generosity to a broken world.

That's my second point. Here's the final point I want to raise this morning. Jesus fed this crowd. He fed them miraculously.

We've seen that. They get really excited about it. But do we have anything to suggest that many of them didn't miss the point? The point, which we'll come back to later in this series, this theme comes up again, was that those who saw this sign would see their need to feed on Jesus.

Jesus is the bread that we need the most, right? He can miraculously give fish and bread to those who are hungry, for sure. But more importantly, he can give living water that will cause us never to

thirst again.

He can give him, he can give us himself so that we are never hungry again. Because Jesus is more than simply a prophet like Moses.

[18:46] He is the one who, in giving himself, gives the right to become children of God to all who receive him and believe in his name. And Jesus is more than the kind of king that the crowd was looking for.

They were looking for a king to drive away the Romans, to restore Israel's political sovereignty, all of that sort of thing. But Jesus is a king who, in giving of himself, brings in the kingdom of God. A kingdom where death shall be no more, where mourning will be no more, where crying will be no more, where pain will be no more. We don't have any indication that the bulk of the crowd really saw their need for Jesus as he is.

And this passage is really about need, isn't it? Our passage starts with great need. We have a hungry mass of people. Meeting that need seems impossible.

Feeding all of those people seems impossible. And Jesus does it. What an amazing miracle. Isn't it? But the greatest miracle, the greatest sign of all, is our Lord's gift of himself.

[20:17] This account is pertinent to us because our need is great.

We need forgiveness. We need new life. We need set free from the power of sin. We need victory over death. And we find our greatest needs met in Jesus and in Jesus alone.

If you don't take away anything else I have said this morning, please remember this as I close.

Whatever else you might think you need, you need Jesus more.

And he is enough. Seek him and seek his kingdom. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. Amen.