

"Jesus the Almighty Humble Shepherd" John 6:1–15

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 March 2026

Preacher: Matthew Usherwood

[0:00] After this, Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.

And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. 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 them, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?

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. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated.

[1:11] So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.

So they gathered them and filled the twelve baskets with fragments from the five loaves of barley left by those who had eaten. When these people saw the sign that he had done, they said, This indeed, this indeed the prophet, sorry, this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world. Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, And Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. So we have before us today a text that many, if we were to tell them about, would scoff at.

Or if we would tell them about it to other people, they might say this is absolutely ridiculous to believe in. We're looking at the famous account of Jesus feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish.

Maybe some of you, including myself, find this hard to imagine or believe in, to actually think this actually happened. I struggle with this personally sometimes. It's hard sometimes to wrap my head around this idea that Jesus sat on a mountainside and this actually happened.

[2:31] But the thing is, if we come to church and we call ourselves Christians and we believe in the resurrection, we have to believe in everything that is in the Bible. We can't pick and choose what to believe in.

But we can wrestle with these things. It's not just a blind belief. We can wrestle with them. We can look at them. We can discuss them. But what John here, the gospel writer, the apostle John, is writing about, he's not trying to sensationalize this miracle or this sign as he calls it.

What he's doing is he's trying to point us to turn our gaze to Jesus. It's not so much about the miracle. It is about who Jesus is and what he's revealing himself as he does this sign or miracle as you call it.

Now the thing is, John was the disciple of Jesus. He walked with him. He was an eyewitness of his life, of his ministry. He was an eyewitness of Jesus going before the tribunal, going before the council, going before Pilate, and being eventually crucified and then rising from the dead.

He was an eyewitness of what's going on. And he wrote this down. And you might be thinking, yeah, okay, I'll believe this when pigs fly. Or you may be nodding your head in agreement that this

happened.

[3:50] Either way, what you believe, it shows us about Jesus. And it shows us what Jesus is, who he is, and it's far more important than the miracle itself.

This sermon or this talk is going to not, it's not going to be an apologetic on miracles. An apologetic is just a fancy way of saying a defense. It's like if you like spicy food and you're with someone who doesn't, you're going to defend your belief that spicy food is really good and they should like it. So that's what apologetic means. But yes, we have to talk about it in one sense, this miracle. We have to. We have to address it. But smarter and more eloquent people have written and spoken about this way better than I could ever hope to do in a sermon.

And I would recommend, if you have a pen with you, to write this down, to read C.S. Lewis' book on miracles. It's an excellent starting point. It sets the stage and it helps you go forward and to read other things and to think about this idea of miracles.

Or we could have a, ask me out for a coffee and we can discuss it another time. So if you haven't already, open your Bibles to John 6, verses 1 to 15. And it's always helpful, I believe I say this every time and I'll continue saying this, to have a Bible in front of you.

[5:10] Because you can make sure what I'm actually reading is the text that we're talking about. It's actually in the Bible. That you can see what's before the text and then you can also see what happens after the text.

Because you can't just pop in and pop out. You have to take it all as a whole. And if you don't have a Bible, there's Bibles at the back. But I'll also be reading it. So don't worry about it if you don't have one before you.

Because we're going to go, the thing of this section is that you have to take into chapter 5. And you have to take in the rest of chapter 6. You can't just go into it.

It takes the whole thing. So we're going to be jumping around a bit. But I'll read it out so don't worry about it if you don't have it in front of you. So how are we going to address this? How are we going to look at this text?

We're going to look at this in four ways. And how it tells us about Jesus in four ways. It tells us that Jesus is the Almighty. It tells us Jesus is the sufficient gospel.

[6:07] It tells us Jesus is the shepherd. And it tells us Jesus is the humble. I'll say it again. It tells us Jesus is the Almighty. Jesus is the sufficient gospel.

Jesus is the shepherd. And Jesus is the humble. So look with me at verses 1 to 4. The location of where this happens.

The Sea of Galilee, which he calls also the Sea of Tiberias. Obviously they know this is not a sea. It's a big lake. John was a fisherman by trade. He grew up around fishermen.

He would fish on this sea his entire life. So he would know and be very familiar with what they called it. They knew it wasn't a sea. It's a very big lake. Kind of like the Great Lakes. It's big.

And it says Jesus goes up on a mountain. In Matthew's Gospel, he calls this miracle, or he says this miracle happens in a desolate place. The southwest side would have most likely have been where this happened.

[7:30] There's no towns close by, and it's the hilly side of the Sea of Galilee. And one last thing just to give more context. In chapter 5, verse 1, John writes, there is a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, which is referring to the Passover.

And then here in chapter 6, verse 4, he says again, now the Passover feast of the Jews is at hand. So a year has gone by from chapter 5 to chapter 6.

See, we call the Gospels a biography. But what these biographies are doing, it's not so much to give a whole scope of the life. These are very pointed biographies.

They're focused on a single point. And that is to show us who Jesus is and what he does on the cross. He's pointing to something, and he wants us to look at it. And what is it? Well, point 1, Jesus the Almighty, verses 5 and 7.

Lifting up his eyes then, and seeing that a crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, Where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?

[8:37] He said this to test them, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered, So what does it mean?

Jesus already knew what he would do. Well, in the previous chapter, Jesus is talking about how he does the Father's will, how he knows the Father's will, and he does it.

It's the only thing he does. In chapter 5, verse 19, it says, Jesus said to them, talking to the Pharisees and his disciples, Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.

Whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. And then in chapter 5, verse 36, he says, But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John the Baptist.

For the works of the Father has given me to accomplish the very works that I'm doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. Two things are going on here.

[9:53] Jesus is testing his disciple to see if he truly understands who Jesus is, or if he's been listening to him. The disciple has no idea. And the second thing that's happening is that Jesus is showing that he is the Son of God, that he has foreknowledge, because he knows the Father's will.

He already knows what he's going to do, and he's going to do a miracle, because he is the Son of God who does the Father's will. You may be thinking, well, this doesn't really prove anything. I've had situations where things felt very intuitive, and I already knew what I was going to do.

In sports, there's this thing called the flow state, where if you're very well in tune and you've been playing the sport for many years, sometimes, it happens like once or twice a year, you play a game, and everything is going right.

It feels almost like your body is on autopilot. And sometimes this only happens once or twice a year, and it would only happen if you're very skilled in the sport. So we might be thinking, well, maybe Jesus is in a flow state right now, because, you know, he's been doing ministry every day for two years.

And maybe that's what he's in. He's in a flow state. But that can't be it. And let's look at verses 18 to 13. And this is the miracle. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, There is a boy who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?

[11:28] 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. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated.

Sow also the fish as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost. So they gathered them up and filled their twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

See, it says Jesus feeds five thousand. But what actually is going on here, it just records the men sitting down. They would have had their families with them, their wives, their children. So in the commentaries, it's estimated there's like 20,000 people here sitting on the ground.

But it just records the men sitting down. The families are present. See, magicians do tricks with mirrors, smoke, distractions, and the sleight of hand.

Jesus just multiplied five loaves and two fish in a field, sitting in front of everyone, around 20,000 people. One commentator stated that this wouldn't have been just a sudden, all of a sudden, a huge pile of bread before Jesus' miracle.

[12:47] This is a continuous miracle. It's as the disciples went out, handed out the bread, their bags would continually be replenished as they went out.

This is what's going on here. All four Gospels record this miracle. It is the only one recorded in all four, which is interesting. This was done before so many witnesses in a field that it is impossible for it to be a magic trick or just a distraction.

Either it happens or it doesn't happen. One of the common critiques against the resurrection account is that all that the disciples were hallucinating, and anyone else who, after that, was just hallucinating, having a moment of their mind wasn't all there.

And maybe we're thinking that's what's going on with the crowd here. They're just hallucinating this bread that's happening, and they're becoming full because they're just hallucinating. But that's not

how hallucinating works.

There's a book called *The Case for Christianity*, and in that book it talks about this, that it is impossible for everyone, for a group of people, to hallucinate the same thing, that same feeling, all at one time.

[14:01] It's impossible. So it's pretty hard to believe everyone is hallucinating here in the first place, and it's hard to believe that it's all at the same time. Also, so many eyewitnesses, after they wrote this down, this could have been disproved very easily.

People could have said, well, that didn't happen, I was there. But all four Gospels have it. So there's something going on here. So what does it show us about Jesus? It shows us, as John says in the beginning of his Gospel, he says this, In the beginning was the Word, which is Jesus, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of man.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. It shows us Jesus has creative power. He is the creator.

He is the one who was with God in the beginning. It shows us he is truly the Son of God. Food is called into existence. See, when Jesus does healing, he is making something right.

[15:14] When Jesus calls his food into existence, he is creating. He is calling matter into being. Jesus is almighty. What else do we see of who Jesus is in this passage?

We see that Jesus is the sufficient gospel. In Exodus 16, the people of Israel are in the wilderness. They are walking towards Mount Sinai. They're in a wilderness, desolate area. They have just left Egypt, where they were enslaved. They have just crossed the Red Sea, and then the water comes back.

And God is leading them. And the people start to grumble towards Moses and Aaron about food.

They want food. They're hungry. And they begin to think about their time in Egypt as slaves.

And remember the food they had. It says in Exodus 16, verse 3, it says this, And the people of Israel said to Moses and Aaron, With that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by meat pots and ate bread to the full.

[16:22] For you brought us out into the wilderness to kill us, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. I know sometimes, personally, I have a tendency when I'm in a hard season of life to start looking back on the past and remembering it as a time of things, when things felt easier or lighter.

But there's always issues. We just forget about them. We only remember the good parts. And God responds. Then the Lord says to Moses, Behold, I'm about to rain bread from heaven for you.

Why do I bring this text up in the Old Testament, way at the beginning of the book of the Bible?

See, you have to remember the Passover is at hand here. The people are about to go up to Jerusalem for the Passover.

It's about to take place. And this part of Scripture would be fresh in their minds. As they approach the Passover meal, they would remember this. Because the original Passover meal happens right before the people leave Israel.

Jesus is doing something very profound here. Not only is he performing a miracle, creating bread out of nothing, but he is pointing to that he is the one who can satisfy anyone who comes to him.

[17:37] Later in John 6, he declares himself the bread of life. He is before people and he says, If anyone feeds on me, I am the bread of life. If they eat...

Oh, sorry, I'm jumping ahead. As I mentioned earlier in 5 and 6, they need to be taken together.

And we're just scraping the surface here because it is such a rich, deep passage. For Jesus points to how he is the one who provides and satisfies.

Then he points to himself as the means which it happens. See, the people would be thinking this as the food is provided, as it's given. This is the gospel. We all long and ache for something.

Whether that's certain hopes or dreams we want to achieve, or it could be a certain level of success we wish to gain. Maybe we want a family and think once I have that, life will be perfect.

Whatever it is, we all have these longings and aches. But the thing is, once you achieve it, it may fill you for a while, but it won't last. Many famous people, once achieving celebrityhood and success and status, they are left wanting and they feel depressed.

[18:47] Unfortunately, Robin Williams, the beloved children's actor and comedian, shows this clearly when he took his own life. He was on the peak of success. See, Jesus is the bread of life who is sent from heaven.

When Jesus does this miracle, he points to himself that he is the bread of life. He is the one who provides. He is the means of salvation. As it says in the service of communion later on, you will read, or it says, feed on him by faith with thanksgiving.

We read in chapter 6, verses 11 and 12, it says this. Jesus then took the loaves and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated.

Sorry, I lost my place. So also the fish and as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost.

See, Jesus fills you spiritually, long for the spiritual bread that doesn't leave you hungry. Jesus satisfies you when you're in the wilderness seasons. Jesus takes barley loaves, which are considered by Jewish tradition, they're described as only fit for horses and donkeys and performs one of the greatest miracles with it and he feeds so many.

[20:10] Jesus takes our desolate hearts and creates new ones. As the writer J.C. Ryle puts it, trust in the cross. Never think you need more than the cross.

The atoning work, his blood, his substitution, want nothing more but the true bread of life which Christ gives. See, other things we see in Jesus, we have seen so far that Jesus is the almighty. He creates, he is the creator. We see also Jesus is the sufficient gospel and now we see Jesus is the shepherd. The scene is a desolate place, but because it's the Passover feast was at hand at springtime.

So there was grass on the ground at the time before the scorching summer heat comes in. Maybe you can say I'm spiritualizing the text here, but I think, I don't think I am. But as we read the other gospels, it says Jesus had compassion on the crowds of this account.

He looked at the group of people and he had compassion on them. He had a shepherd's heart. But then he has them sit down in the grass. What does this remind you of? In Psalm 23, it says, The Lord is my shepherd.

[21:21] I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his namesake.

Not only do we see in this passage that Jesus is the bread of heaven from the Exodus 16 account, but we also see him as the shepherd of Psalm 23. And what does the shepherd do?

He cares for his flock. He defends his flock. He feeds his flock. He walks with his flock. He heals his flock. Never leaves his flock. What does the flock do?

Hears his voice and follows him. See, later in the chapter, Jesus declares himself as the bread of life. And all who eat his flesh and drink his blood will have eternal life, he says.

Many of his followers couldn't handle this saying and they walked away from him because they took it literally and they stopped following him. They didn't hear his voice. They didn't understand that he was saying, what he was saying about those things is about faith in him.

[22:30] And those who commit their lives to him will be satisfied the same way bread and wine satisfies. That's what communion is. When we come to communion, we see the bread.

We touch the bread. We taste the bread. We drink the wine. It's a visible gospel. It points to the cross where Jesus gives his body and sheds his blood for you and me.

It reminds us to put our faith and trust in his finished work of the cross. But when it's taken literal, as the disciples did and they fell away, it loses its meaning and hinders.

What else do we see about Jesus here? We see Jesus is humble. He is a humble person. Read with me at verses 14 to 16. When the people saw the sign, the miracle that he had done, they said, this indeed, this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.

Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. The crowd saw and experienced the miracle.

[23:39] And this would have reminded them of the prophet that Moses wrote about would come after him in Deuteronomy 18. But the crowd got it wrong. They expected someone who would be all-powerful, who would become king of the people of Israel, who would liberate them from Rome's oppression and would crush their enemies and subdue them.

They followed because they saw the sign, not because they thought he was the Messiah. So they come for Jesus by force to make him the powerful king that they thought he would be and start immediately uprising against Rome.

Jesus is again given the opportunity to give in to temptation of worldly power and prestige. but Jesus withdraws from it and leaves to go and commune with God as the other gospels say. It doesn't say how he does this or how he goes away from the crowd but it shows us his heart. Jesus did not come to be served but to serve. He did not come to be a worldly king but the heavenly king who sits at the Father's right hand.

Jesus does not seek honor and power but is given to him upon his finished work of the cross. We see in this passage that Jesus is almighty. We see in this passage that Jesus is the sufficient gospel.

[25:03] He provides the spiritual food that continually fills. We see in this passage that Jesus is the shepherd and we see from the text that we just read that Jesus is humble.

He is the complete opposite of all world leaders, rulers, past and present and future. He is the almighty humble shepherd. He feeds his flock.

He leads them to green pastures. He gives eternal life. As it says in Mark chapter 6 verse 34 of this when it's the same account. When Jesus went to shore he saw a great crowd and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

I stand here as a beggar who desires to show other beggars where to find the bread of life. Trust in Christ. Feed on him by faith.

Commit your life to him daily and follow him. He died. Thank you.