

**The Feeding of the 5,000**  
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**John 6:1-15**  
**January 29, 2012**

Please turn with me in your Bibles to John 6. It's a new chapter in this wonderful Gospel and it's a chapter that is so rich and deep, as all the Gospel of John seems to be. We're going to be looking this morning at the feeding of the 5,000, Verses 1-15. It's actually the only miracle that is recounted in all four Gospels. It's interesting that John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was probably writing much later, we've said about 85 AD. That's what we think about the dating of his Gospel. The other Gospels, Matthew and Mark, were probably written in the 40's or 50 AD. Jesus' death, and resurrection, and ascension were somewhere between 30 and 33 AD, scholars believe. The first Gospels came out 10 to 20 years after the ascension of Christ, when the church was in its infancy. Then Luke probably writes in the 60's, having researched from Paul, and apparently Mary. Having done great research he gives the third Gospel. Then John writes another 20 years later.

John is the last surviving apostle who dies somewhere in the 90's, most scholars think. As a very old man and nearing the end of his life, he writes down the Gospel of John. He seems to draw on the fact that the other Gospels are out there and the church has them, they've circulated. He seems to be, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, looking back at the life, the ministry, and the death and resurrection of Christ with a unique perspective. He wants to bring out and accent certain things. He tells us his purpose in John 20:31, he says: "There were so many things that Jesus did, so many miracles, so many signs, that if all of them were written down there would not be enough books to hold them. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that believing, you may have life in His name."

So he is very selective, really recounting, most scholars say, seven signs in the book, though you could say there are eight or nine miracles, if you count the cleansing of the temple as a miracle. I think it was, but it wasn't specified by John as one of those signs. He picks out seven or eight key miracles that are signs to point to Who Jesus is, and then he gives seven great discourses of Jesus in connection with those. Whereas the other Gospel-writers tend to give more of a litany of the various miracles that happened. John is much more specific. It's quite instructive, and it's something we ought to ask ourselves, "Why did he choose to include this miracle because all of the others he includes are really things that the other Gospel-writers didn't." They gave a litany of miracles, and even the

conversations, like the conversation with Nicodemus and the conversation with the woman at the well. We don't find these anywhere else. He's adding information about the glorious life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Here he recounts a miracle that is repeated, and of course the next one actually, right after this, the feeding of the 5,000, is also recounted in other Gospels. Jesus walking on water is recounted in three of the four Gospels. It's a good question: "Why this miracle?" We have the feeding of the 5,000 in Matthew 14:13-21. We have the feeding of the 5,000 in Mark 6:34-44. And we have the feeding of the 5,000 in Luke 9:12-17. What is John's purpose in giving us another glimpse at this glorious miracle? What we're going to see is that predominantly he is unique in that he gives us the miracle and he gives us Jesus' bread of life discourse, which really explains and expounds upon what this miracle meant. So he gives it to us in its wonderful richness.

As we look at this, we need to also remember John's purpose because that helps us to set our focus on what the application would be for us. We've said that we believe that John is writing in 80-85 AD, and he's writing with a wide audience, but particularly the focus of his audience is Jewish people or Jewish proselytes in the broader Mediterranean area, particularly Asia Minor. We know that his ministry in his latter years was in Asia Minor, Ephesus, and then he was exiled to Patmos. So he was preaching the Gospel and writing his letters in that area. He writes his Gospel with those people in mind because there was a problem after the early church had lived through its infancy, and that was this question on the minds of Jew and Gentile. The question was: Why are so many Jews rejecting the Jewish Messiah? How can this be that the Messiah for Whom they have longed for all of these years? When He came, they missed Him because the reality is that the converts of Pentecost are all Jews who were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. From that point onward, what you see after that initial explosion of Jewish converts is that the number of Jewish converts decreases and the number of Gentile converts explodes. Like an inverse relationship because the number of Jewish converts goes down and the number of Gentile converts goes up. Of course John is dealing with that because Jew and Gentile are struggling with that. The Jews are wondering, "Well listen, if He was really the Messiah, why did so many reject Him?"

That's one of the questions that is echoing throughout the book. He is answering that objection. Essentially, what he's saying throughout the book, in this chapter in particular, is the reason the Jews missed their Messiah was the Jews didn't want the kind of Messiah that He was. They totally misunderstood salvation. They

thought that salvation was all about God fixing all of their external problems. They were looking for a military deliverer from Rome, a political mastermind that could galvanize the people and lead an uprising. We see this even in this passage because he tells us some details that the other Gospel-writers don't. Namely the Jews' response to the miracle. What we see is they totally missed the point here as they do so often. John is going to make clear in this passage, the glory of Christ and the wonder of the salvations that He brings. It's important for us because I mentioned earlier the books that we're going to be dealing with in evangelicalism, and how is it that some of these books have become popular. It's astounding. One of the problems is that man is the same as he's always been. He's always looking for what God doesn't want to give. We think our problems are different than what God says. God says our problems are the heart, we think it's out there. So we're always asking the question, "How can I make my life work? God, help me make my life work," and God is not interested in helping you and me make our lives work. He's far too loving for that. He knows that the only thing that matters is you and me knowing and loving Him. That's what we see in this glorious word picture that's painted in the real-life miracle, this astounding miracle of Jesus in which He multiplies bread and fish and feeds a multitude. Let's read John 6:1-15.

*John 6:1-14 ~ After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). 2 A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. 5 Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, \*said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?" 6 This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. 7 Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." 8 One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, \*said to Him, 9 "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" 10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11 Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. 12 When they were filled, He \*said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost." 13 So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. 14 Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the*

***Prophet who is to come into the world.” 15 So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.***

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, as we come to Your Word, we know again we always come empty needing to be filled. We come with desperate need of Your grace to enlighten our eyes, to open our hearts that we might see, understand, and believe Your precious truth. Help us, we pray, for the glory of Christ, Amen.*

Now I want to look at this miracle and sometimes we'll do this and when we come to a new chapter particularly, I like to use the W's and an H, which are the five W's and an H: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? We do this to help observe the text. I think that's helpful in looking at this miracle, so I'd like to use that as our outline.

#### 1) Where?

We're going to start with 'where?', then 'who?', then 'when?', and then we'll go to 'what?', 'how?', and 'why?' So let's start with 'where?' because the text starts with 'where?' The first words we read in the first chapter: ***After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias).*** Apparently this miracle is taking place on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. The latter half of Chapter 6 is going to happen on the other side of the sea because what's going to happen in the intervening verses, Verses 16-21. Jesus is going to walk on the water as His disciples travel across the sea back to the side where Capernaum is. So here they're on the northeast side of Galilee. Again, always asking ourselves, "Why does John bother to tell us where they are?" He wants us to know where they are. He's careful to note where, what's going, and when things are. Where is important. He wants us to realize that they are again in Galilee. Scholars note that John is unique. I mentioned that John's Gospel is unique in the miracles that it brings before us and the discourses that the Spirit calls him to remember and record for us of the Lord, Jesus Christ. It's also unique in the sense that Matthew, Mark, and Luke are the synoptic Gospels, which are basically a synopsis of Jesus' life, a recounting of the big flow of His life. John is more thematic in his approach in remembering, giving us the details exactly as they were but selectively to present a more clear picture, although all the Gospel-writers present a picture, and a unique picture.

Another thing that John does that is also unique is he recounts for us how Jesus went repeatedly from Galilee to Judea. When you read Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they don't tell us about the trips down for the feasts very much. They recount most of everything Jesus is doing in Galilee. Remember Galilee is the northern part of Israel, separated from Judea by Samaria. It's kind of like Israel North, and Judea is Israel South. The large populations of Jews in the world at that time were in Galilee in the north and in Judea in the south. What you have in the other Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is the focus on Jesus' Galilean ministry. In John, you have this movement back and forth. Think back with me over what we've read already. The first miracle of Jesus happened where? In Cana of Galilee, John 2:1-12. In Chapter 2:13, where is Jesus? He's in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. He's in Jerusalem. He does miracles there. He did His miracle in Cana and then He's in Jerusalem. There were other miracles that happened up there but what John wants us to see is the miracle in Cana, and the miracles in Jerusalem around the Passover. Then, John 3 is still in Judea, talking to Nicodemus. In John 4, He's on the way back to Galilee and He stops in Samaria. He ministers there. In John 4:48-56, the miracle that John records as the second sign is the one that happens in Cana of Galilee when He heals the royal official's son. So, Galilee—Judea—Galilee. In John 5, what happens? Right after Chapter 4 ends, in Chapter 5 He's back in Jerusalem for a feast. He heals the man at the Pool of Bethesda in this discourse after that that we've been looking at for the last few weeks. Then John 6, He's back in Galilee. A lot of months have gone by because now the Passover is near. It is at least six or seven months since the last feast, but there is no other intervening data. He doesn't want to tell us anything more about what He did. He wants to see this back and forth movement. What's going on there? Why is that? Well, those are the two main Jewish territories, and what he's trying to show us, and we see this when we look at Verse 2:

***John 6:2 ~ A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.***

Here we're seeing a multiplication of Jesus' signs. John is telling us there were many signs He was performing on those who were sick, and all these people in Galilee are following Him. It's a large multitude who are following Him because of the signs. Remember back in John 2:23, when Jesus is at the Passover in Judea. It said that many believed on Him because they saw the many signs which He was performing at the Passover. John is saying, "Look, you people who do not believe. You're wondering, 'Did Jesus not do enough? Why did the Jews reject Him? Was His ministry off in a corner somewhere? Why didn't He make Himself known to the Jewish people? He must have been some obscure person.'" A lot of time has

passed since Jesus' ministry. They didn't have the Internet. They didn't have Fox News where they could watch video of what has happened. They're hearing about it over time and information is filtering out. The Jews who have not believed are wondering, "Surely, He could have done more." One of the things that John is trying to show is, "Look, Jesus, all throughout Galilee, displayed His glory. Jesus, all throughout Judea, displayed His glory." The problem wasn't a lack of God revealing Himself, the problem was an astonishing blindness on the part of God's people. There is this movement and he wants us to see that. Both regions have received ample witness to His signs, to His person, to Who He is.

## 2) Who?

Now that brings us to the second question: Who? We'll look at three things under this second point. There are three answers or three 'who's' that we're looking at.

### A) The Large Crowd:

Verse 2 says: *A large crowd followed Him...* The same phrase is repeated in Verse 5: *Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd...* Now it wasn't a small number of people who experienced this miracle. It is a large crowd. The King James says 'a great multitude'. I like that better because when you find out how many it is I think it's a more descriptive term actually, in English. I mean, we have a crowd. You can have a crowd when you've got 20 people, right? If you're noisy, it's a crowd. But this is a multitude because we find out later who this large crowd is. In fact, the largeness of the group is emphasized again in Verses 22 and 24 of the latter material where the crowd follows Jesus and the disciples around the Sea of Galilee. It's really a large lake there in Northern Israel. But in Verse 10, we're told that Jesus has this crowd sit down and now we're told just how big this crowd, this multitude is. *...So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.* All the Gospels record the number as 5,000 and they're careful to specify men, the way that it would have been rendered in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. The number of men that sat down was 5,000 and there weren't just men there. Most scholars think there were upwards of 20,000 people there when you add in women and children. 20,000 people were coming to Jesus as He's on the gentle, sloping plain there outside the Sea of Galilee. 20,000 people! Again, the ministry of Christ and this miracle that is about to be done, this sign which will be performed is done in the presence of 20,000 Jews. They all experienced it. His ministry is out in the open.

People always want to act like God hasn't spoken. I've had conversations with unbelievers where they act like, "You know, if God would just make it more clear. Why doesn't He make Himself more clear?" You know, that is the way of sinful people because of the darkness of sin and the way it's affected our minds. We see things completely, 180 degrees out of phase. The message of Scripture is: God has been abundantly, infinitely clear and continual in His communication to man. It's astonishing, not that God hasn't spoken enough, that man is able to shut his ears and close his eyes. That's what they're doing. "Why would God not speak louder? Why would God not make Himself known?" John is pulling that part of their defense out of the way. "No, this ministry was done out in the open. 20,000 people saw this."

### B) The Disciples:

The disciples are also key players in this story. In Verse 3, the crowd is following Him and He goes up on the hill and sits down with His disciples. The disciples are referred to six times in the first 22 verses. In fact, four are called by name in this passage. Three actually, in this first recounting of the story of the feeding of the 5,000.

### C) Jesus:

The most important 'Who?' is Jesus. The issue is His identity. "Who is Jesus?" is the question for the whole Gospel and this passage in particular. "Who is this man?" John is setting out to prove, by bringing as it were, evidence before the minds of his readers. "Will you examine the evidence?" You want to ask and answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" "Look at the evidence, and this is a sign that Jesus is going to perform." That word 'sign' in Greek is a very important word. It means something that authenticates, something that certifies something, and something that validates an assertion. Miracles are not just for the entertainment or just the blessing or benefit to the individual. John sees them rightly, that all of His miracles were signs, pointing to Who He was. God could just do miracles and just bless people, but that would not be that helpful because the signs are miracles done to draw them not to the miracle itself, but to the One Who did the miracle. What we see is that these signs are to show us that He is the Messiah, even though the people are going to completely misunderstand what that means. Even they see it, the 20,000 people. The miracle is so stunning that they conclude immediately, "This must be the prophet," Verse 14. The Messianic hope of Deuteronomy 18, that "God will raise up for you," Moses said, "a prophet like me from among your brothers." "The prophet is here. The One we've been waiting for." Then they rush

to make Him king. They see Him as prophet, priest, and king. He's the One that was to come, but they don't understand the nature of His salvation.

### 3) When?

So we've looked at 'where?' and 'who?', now let's look at 'when?' One other point to make out here too is that John is no doubt making an interesting point. I've shared this before, but it's good to continue to remember it. I said He goes back and forth from Galilee to Judea, and what we're seeing is growing opposition in both places. They are receiving more revelation of Who He is and they are closing their eyes more tightly against it and hating Him more fiercely. The basic populations of the Jews in both centers are doing that. What stands out in stark contrast is what happened on the way in Samaria. That is a continued thing that the Jew reading this in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century would have remembered because when the Samaritans do anything good that is startling. Remember that Jesus was received in Samaria in an astonishing way.

He tells us right here in the first four verses when this happened. Now the Passover, the Feast of the Jews, was near in Verse 4. The Passover, the Feast of the Jews. Again, we ask ourselves, "Why this detail?" When you read the Gospel of John carefully, you note that he often tells us about feasts. He tells us about one unnamed feast in John 5, when Jesus is in Jerusalem making His way to the temple when He stops by the Pool of Bethesda to heal the man that was lame. He tells us about the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles in John 7. Three different times he tells us about the Passover. There are three Passovers recorded in the Gospel of John. The first in John 2:13, and each time, it's interesting, John always refers to them, he himself a Jew, refers to it as the Passover of the Jews. That's what he said in John 4: *Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews...* It'll come again the third time in John 11:55 when the Passover, the Feast of the Jews is at hand and that's in the middle of John's recounting of the last week of Jesus' life. Remember John's selectivity. Why did he choose to tell us these three events, these three miracles, all associated with three Passover feasts? The first, of course, the cleansing of the temple, happens at Passover. Now we have the feeding of the 5,000 that happens at Passover. The final Passover is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We're going to continue to keep that question open. Keep pondering that as you read. It's kind of like a three-panel background. You've seen a display that somebody sets up. Passover, Passover, Passover—to call your attention to what's in front of the Passover, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world, Jesus Christ.

Elements of the glory of His ministry are made known in each one. Here, that's what he's setting up for us. In fact, I think when you look at the 'when?' you also



think about the fact that John could have included intervening material between Chapters 5 and 6. Lots of other things happened. He said there was so much that the world wouldn't hold the books. Why didn't he tell us? I think one of the reasons was he wanted the reader to have this ringing in his ears. The end of Chapter 5: ***For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?***" He wanted them to have the issue of Moses and his writings ringing in their ears as they then turned over to hear about what happened when the Passover was near. Moses—Passover. Now the table is set for the glory of what God is about to do. Now the Passover, remember, is the celebration of the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt, from the bondage and the darkness. Where God's mighty hand was exercised in ten great plagues upon Egypt, culminating in the Plague of the Firstborn, where all of the firstborn, man and beast, in Egypt, die in a single night. But Israel is delivered from the death angel, the angel of God's wrath. How? By the blood of the Lamb, the Passover Lamb that is spread over the door. It's the time of the Passover, that's the backdrop. What is Passover? That is the one event in the Old Testament, the ultimate expression of what redemption is all about—salvation. They're delivered from the domain of darkness, slavery, translated to the Kingdom of light, God's Son, like Colossians 1:9 says. That's what happened in a small way in Egypt, the Passover.

To help us understand this and to get the significance of how important it was to a First Century Jew, even for Jews even today that are faithful Jews who are looking to the Old Testament, though they don't believe in the Messiah, Passover is kind of like Christmas, Easter, and the 4th of July rolled into one. The 4th of July is our Independence. It's our national birth. When we did what? We threw off the tyranny of King George. We became our own country. It's not that popular now to think back on that. It's kind of like we're really sorry for how bad a country we are now. That's how it feels in America. But those of us who are a little older, we remember what it was like to be proud. I'm proud to be an American. I'm not going to sing. The 4th of July rolled into this sense of the ultimate, redemptive, religious moment in their history at that point, the deliverance by God of them from slavery to Himself, where His presence comes to dwell among them, where He brings them, and carries them on eagle's wings out of Egypt and to Himself, and then into the land of Canaan. All of that is captured when the Passover of the Jews is at hand. And it wasn't by accident, of course. There are no accidents, but Jesus has carefully planned this event for this time. So we've looked at 'Where?', 'Who', 'When', and now we want to look at 'What?'

#### 4) What?

I'm going to look at 4 sub-points under what:

- A) What does Jesus see?
- B) What does Jesus say?
- C) What does Jesus do?
- D) What is Jesus' purpose?

##### A) What Does Jesus See?

In Verse 5, we see that He lifts up His eyes and sees that a large crowd is coming to Him. What He sees is more than just a crowd of people. He sees need. He sees great need. He actually sees a great sea of human need – 20,000 people who are in desperate need. The disciples see need also. When you look at the other Gospel accounts, they're the ones that apparently first bring it up in this providence of God, because we know here that Jesus knew what He was intending to do from the very beginning, because He asked the question. In one of the Gospels it says that the disciples say, "Hey, we need to send these people home. They need to go eat. 20,000 people? They need to go eat. We don't have anything for them. Let's send them home." And then we see Jesus ask Philip a question in Verse 5. So Jesus sees great need. He doesn't see just physical need. He sees Spiritual need, and He's going to use physical hunger. They are hungry, and He's going to use their physical hunger to teach them about their Spiritual hunger. And isn't it just like John 4? Remember there? The woman comes to the well. Jesus is thirsty. The woman is thirsty. He says, "Give me a drink." She says, "Why do you ask me for a drink? You're a Jew and I'm a Samaritan." He says, "If you knew who was talking, you'd ask Him for a drink." It's not about physical water. It's about living water. The thirst of your body is just a dim reflection of the gaping thirst of your soul, and what He's doing is the same thing here. The hunger seems to dominate. It's amazing how when you're hungry, it's hard to think about anything else. There's a hunger that can consume you when you're really hungry. Thankfully, most of us don't know what real hunger is. But when you are really hungry, the desire for food is overwhelming, and Jesus says that is just a dim reflection of the hunger of the soul. So He sees need.

##### B) What Does Jesus Say?

He asks Philip a question:

***John 6:5 ~ Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, \*said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?” 6 This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.***

Here John is reminding us that Jesus is omniscient. He doesn't ask a question because He lacks an answer. He's not sitting there thinking, "I didn't plan for this very well. There are a lot of people. Where are we going to buy food for 20,000 people?" There's no place to buy food for 20,000 people around there. They're out in the country, outside Bethsaida, off the Sea of Galilee. That's why the disciples are like, "Just send them home. We just don't want them around here." He asked the question to test Philip. The verb translated 'test', comes from a word which, in its natural form, means 'to pierce', to test the strength by piercing something. He's probing. He's piercing. He's getting below the surface of Philip to his heart. He's probing his heart, piercing down to the depth of what he believes. He's not looking for food, but He's looking for faith. This is something to think about. There's a sea of human need out there. There are 20,000 people. The Bible tells us Jesus looks over at Philip and says, "I want to meet your need. I'm going to meet theirs too." He doesn't forget us. We so easily forget what's important. We get busy and we forget. God never does. And so He's going to do something in Philip's life. He's testing Philip, and He's also testing the disciples, because immediately, Philip is joined by others. Andrew comes. We're reminded that he's Simon Peter's brother. So the disciples are involved. He's testing Philip, He's testing the disciples, but more than that, He's testing the crowd. Every bit as important is that He's piercing through their apparent surface belief, their shallow faith, for the sake of their souls. So He asked a question. That's what He says.

### C) What Does Jesus Do?

In Verse 10, He has them sit down. "***Have the people sit down,***" He tells His disciples.

***John 6:10 ~ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.***

He had them recline. That's what the verb really means. They sat down and they leaned back. It was customary when you're about to eat a meal. They leaned back and rested. It's a picture of rest. And John includes, "Hey, there was much grass in that place." It's not only the perfect time, but it's the perfect place for this miracle. It's not a craggy hillside with lots of rocks. The Lord wants to teach them, "I am

the one who will lead you to the still waters, to green pastures.” So they lie down. They recline. There are 20,000 people, and there’s room for all of them to lie down in this perfectly carpeted place. Behold the sovereignty of God. He knew what He was intending to do. So the first thing He did was had them sit down. We’re still under “What does Jesus do?” Then it tells us in Verse 11 that He took the loaves. The loaves were not really loaves the way we think of loaves. There’s just not a better word in our vernacular. It’s almost like pieces, or more like pita bread. It’s not exactly that, but scholars say it’s a thin, pancake-like loaf. It’s not like five loaves of bread. That still wouldn’t have been much for 20,000 people (5,000 men), but it’s five loaves. He takes the five loaves in His hand, and then having given thanks, He then distributes them. He gives thanks. He praises God for the provision of the five loaves, and for the opportunity, now, to reveal His glory. After He gives thanks, He distributes the bread.

It’s interesting to compare this account with the account in Matthew, Mark and Luke. I mentioned they also recount feeding the 5,000. In each of those Gospel accounts, we’re told that Jesus blesses the bread, takes it in His hand, and then He gives it to His disciples who give it to the people. So what happened? He gave it to His disciples who gave it to the people. But John is telling us in essence that who gave it to the people? The disciples? No, the disciples didn’t feed the people. Jesus did. Jesus is distributing it to the disciples, and they’re distributing it to the people.

Reading Spurgeon’s sermon on this, I think there’s something to this. If you think about 20,000 people eating in a short period of time, you’ve got 12 disciples handing out food. Spurgeon writes that it must have been that Jesus hands Peter some bread and a fish. There are only two fish, and He hands all the other disciples some bread and a fish. And they go out and they start handing out bread. They start handing out fish, and they look and still have bread and still have fish. They still have bread, and they still have fish... They still have bread and they still have fish... They keep giving it out. What’s happening? Jesus is distributing the food through His disciples, multiplying it miraculously. What an astounding miracle. This is a new creation, but it’s a transformation, which is really the work of Christ. It’s not like He creates *ex nihilo* though. He had the five loaves and the two fish. There was that little boy who was appointed by God to be there with apparently maybe his lunch. Or maybe he had picked up some food to take back. The text says he had two *little* fish and five loaves. But the Lord takes that and multiplies it, and feeds 20,000 people. And then, I think it’s a point of stewardship so that nothing can be lost, but it’s also bigger than that, a point of glory. They pick up 12 baskets full. The word for basket here in the feeding of the 5,000 in all the Gospel accounts is a big, stout, wicker basket. So it’s like all 12 disciples go around... We had five

loaves and two fish. We're looking at this little meagre thing right here. He prays, thanks God, and He starts giving it out, and we start going out and giving it out, and now we go back and we're collecting. These aren't pieces that have been eaten on. These are the pieces they gave out that no one got to. They're leftovers. We have leftovers.

I don't know about you, but I like leftovers. With a caveat: If I liked the meal in the first place, then I like the leftovers. With leftovers, sometimes it's like, "Oh no..." Never happens in my house, though. It may happen in your house. But they had 12 baskets full of leftovers. There were 12 apostles but also 12 tribes of Israel. God is doing something glorious here. Look at Israel. Look at this provision for Israel. One greater than Moses is here. With the backdrop of the Passover, look at what He does! He feeds the people. Look at His glory.

#### D) What is Jesus' Purpose?

We really see His purpose unfold throughout the rest of this chapter, but here He knows that bread is essential to life. God made it so that bread is essential to life. It's something found in every society. Bread, grain, is essential to life. You have to have water and you have to have bread to live. It's a basic necessity. In the same way that the living water of Chapter 4 only comes in the presence of Christ, where He makes you a true worshiper of God, and that's what satisfies your soul, He's saying that the only way your soul can be satisfied is to come and partake of Me, to connect yourself to Me in a real, living way. In the same way, when you eat bread, it is a real experience. It's tactile. It's something you taste. It's something you smell. It's something you enjoy, you chew, you swallow. It comes into you. It nourishes you. Your whole body benefits from it. That is what Jesus has come to do for the soul. People who are starving to death and don't realize it. This 20,000 person mob, this large crowd, is starving and they don't realize it. Jesus says, "I want to feed you. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it." That's what the Lord wants us to know. We so often want all the wrong things, and that's what they wanted. They wanted all the wrong things. God wants to give them what they need. God is so good. He doesn't give you what you want. He gives you what you need. What we need is Christ. What we need is life. How do you have life? You know the living God, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He sent. That's life. Everything else is death.

## 5) How?

How did the people respond? This amazing miracle has happened in their midst. They have seen evidence of the deity of Christ right before them. 20,000 have not just seen it, but they have tasted it. The text emphasizes they all ate until they were filled. They're satisfied. There could not be a clearer revelation of glory than they have experienced. What's the intent? God wants them to see: *Look to Me and be saved*. But how do they respond?

***John 6:14 ~ Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."***

At first glance, it seems that things are good. They're convinced that He's the Messiah, that He's the Christ. There's no other explanation. He's the one who is to come. But what do they do? It's not good news is it?

***John 6:15 ~ So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.***

They want to take God's salvation and use it for their own selfish, fleshly ends. They want to take the One who is robed in glory, who's unveiled His glory right in their presence, the One who hung the stars in the sky, the One who created them and holds their very life breath in His hand – they want to take Him and force Him to be king. They're going to take Him by force. J. I. Packer wrote a book some years back, He was talking about charismatic excesses, the Word of Faith Movement, and he said: *When you really know God and you're really in the presence of God, when you are in the presence of God, it is unbecoming to demand anything*. When you're in the presence of God, there is no demanding. There is falling on your face and worshiping and surrendering. But they see exactly the opposite. They don't realize they're in the presence of God. Somehow they've seen the hand of God unveiled right before their eyes, but they're just too much like their ancestors. The sea opens up, they walk through, and then, "We've got no bread, why did you bring us out here, Moses?" He gives them bread, and then, "Why did you bring us out here? We don't have any water, Moses." It's astonishing. It's not that God hasn't spoken enough. It's that man is so blinded. Man is so wilfully blinded. We will not see apart from the grace of God. Be appalled at that. That's why the Scripture says, "Be appalled, O heavens..." Have you ever seen anything like this? They respond completely wrongly.

## 6) Why?

Why did they respond like this? What's their motivation? How could they possibly do this? It's clear when we read the rest of the Gospel in the rest of the New Testament, that the Jews weren't worse than us. They're just like us. We're still the same today. Everybody apart from the grace of God would take God and use Him for your own means. It is the most wicked blasphemy that we would think that we could demand anything, but we would. The height of sin is to tell God, "You're to do my bidding." The question is: How do you see your need? What is your need for a Savior? Why do you need a Savior? Why do you need a Christ? Why do you need a Messiah? Why do you need God to work in your life? What is your need? We have to ask ourselves.

What we see when we look at this text is that the Jews of that day were looking for external salvation. They saw all of their problems as external, and "We need a Savior to save us from all the problems out there." Think about it. They saw their needs as political. It's Passover, which is the Jewish 4th of July. The fervour of nationalism is at its peak, and so they were ready to take Him. There are 5,000 soldiers there – 5,000 men – and they're ready to take Him and march on into Jerusalem, because, "He can meet our needs - our physical needs, our political needs." Lest we look at them with pride and condemnation, how often do we get caught up in worrying about our own political problems? Not to say that it's totally unimportant, but if we could see like God sees, our biggest problem is not what's going to happen in the election in November. We have concerns, right? But is it 2%? Is it 4%? What should it be? It should not take up 60% to 80% of our thought process. I confess there are times that I listen to Rush Limbaugh, or I turn on Fox News, but I was talking to somebody the other day and they were talking about politics. I forget who it was. I said to them, "Isn't it wonderful to know that God is on the throne no matter what happens?" I wonder how political Conservatives who do not know Christ get up in the morning. We may become a Communist country, but the Kingdom of Jesus Christ will still continue to grow and expand. Nothing is going to stop Him from reigning. And the beauty of it is it just makes it more clear. It doesn't matter. Praise God for what He's done in America. I'm thankful for it, but countries rise and countries fall, and the Kingdom of Christ continues on.

So political problems are not what it's about. My problems aren't out there. It's not social or societal. We don't need just better laws or better education. Those things can help, but they're like band-aids. You've got to treat the cancer. We think our problems are circumstantial. "If only I had a better job. If only I had better circumstances. If only I had a better place to live. If only I didn't have these people

giving me such a hard time. God, save me from this! Change that. Change them.” We think our problems are relational. It’s, “Fix him. Fix her. I’ve got some problems and I really want You to work on the other person.” Jesus didn’t come to save people in that way. He’s able to work on relationships. He’s able to change society. He will one day change the political system and wipe out all opposition, but He came to do something much more wonderful than that. He came to change us from the inside out. Our problems are not out there. The biggest problem every moment of every day for me is right here in my heart. It’s so much bigger than everything else around me. That’s why God uses that image.

The Bible tells you if you love your brother, you’re going to reprove him. If you love your neighbor in the context of Leviticus 19:18, you’re going to reprove him. It doesn’t teach like people do these days, where you never tell somebody they’re wrong. No. You do. (Matthew 7:1-5) Take the log out before you get the speck out. Get the speck out. That’s something you should do. If you love somebody, you’re going to get the speck out. But isn’t it a beautiful picture? Get the log out first. I don’t think that necessarily the log’s always that much bigger than the speck. “My problem is this huge problem and I want to help you with this little one.” Well what God is saying is that you ought to see it that way, that the biggest problem in the room right now is my wicked heart. Between me and God, that’s the biggest problem. Now the Lord wants me to deal with that. Man it’s a huge problem. And then I can help you. But I’ve got to deal with it so I can help you, and so that you can help me.

We need to see that our biggest needs aren’t external: political, societal, circumstantial, relational. Our biggest problems are internal, and really personal and perpetual. The problems that God is dealing with are the problems of the heart we saw in Deuteronomy 30. ***In that day, I will circumcise your hearts.*** Ezekiel 37 tells us that the salvation that God is going to send, the man that He is going to send to save, the God-Man, is going to come and He’s going to be able to speak to a valley of dry bones and make it alive. But Chapter 36 told us that how He’s going to do that is He’s going to take out the heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh. That’s the only hope. If the Jews had been listening carefully – and there were those who were. All along, God had His remnant just like He does today, thankfully. In all nations, He’s got His remnant: people who are looking on the heart. By His grace, their eyes have been opened to see the biggest problem I have is me. My heart.

Jeremiah 17:9 says that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? That’s what Jesus came to save us from. Our needs are



perpetual. How often do you need to eat? “Would you like something to eat?” “No, I ate last week.” When you’re fasting, you might be able to say that, but that’s not normal though is it? I don’t know about you, but I have to confess that there are times I have to work on this in my heart. I will be eating a meal and think, “What are we going to have for dinner?” Do you ever think like that? Well part of it is the Lord has wired us to enjoy food, and we’re going to eat in Heaven. That’s something to ponder. We’re going to feast. He’s made us to need food. He’s made us to need daily bread. We hunger for it regularly. Our bodies tell us, “I’m hungry.” What He’s saying is, “You need Me all the time.” When do you need a Savior? “Just when I was born again. Just when I repented and believed. That’s when I needed a Savior.” No, you need a Savior all the time. You don’t need just a Savior who can save you from the penalty of sin, which is sort of the past tense of salvation. When you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, when you place your faith in Him, in the fact that He died on the cross in your place, that His blood is a sufficient offering for those who would ever believe, and you place your faith in Christ, you’re saved from the penalty of sin forever.

In the future tense of salvation, Jesus is going to save us from the presence of sin. We’re already saved from the penalty of sin, but to be saved from the presence of sin, oh what a day that will be. It’ll be like the most wonderful shower that you’ve ever had, multiplied a billion times. You’re dirty and nasty and you get to clean up. Oh, it’s going to be so much greater than that. We lay aside this body of flesh. But the glory of it is that there’s not just a past tense and a future tense to salvation. No, Jesus is the Savior who doesn’t just save you in the past tense, and doesn’t just save you in the future tense, but He is your Savior today, right now in the present tense. He saves us today from the power of sin, and we have to learn to abide with Christ, to love Christ, to look to Christ. “Lord, I need you right now. I’m so glad You saved me, and I’m so glad You’re going to save me, but I need You to save me even right now.” From what? Not from what’s going on out there, but from what’s going on in here in my heart. Because even when God gives you a new heart, what does Paul say in Romans 7? “I see now even as a born again believer, that I have evil within me.”

***Galatians 5:16 ~ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.***

The flesh is there lusting against the Spirit so that you are not able to do the things that you want to do. It’s a perpetual salvation, moment by moment, every day, looking to Christ. As I need to eat, that’s a reminder that I need You, Jesus. I need You right now. I need You so much.

*I need Thee every hour, most gracious Lord;  
No tender voice like Thine can peace afford.  
I need Thee, oh, I need Thee;  
Every hour I need Thee;  
Oh, bless me now, my Savior,  
I come to Thee.*

That needs to be the heart of every true follower of Jesus Christ. Every moment. And when that's the heart of a person who loves and has come to know Christ, then the power of Christ and the glorious provision of Christ in our great need, no matter how great your need, no matter how hopeless your situation, sin is so strong, the circumstances and the pressures are so great, you have a God who can multiply five pancakes and feed 20,000 people. His arm's not too short. He is mighty to save right now. Cling to Christ, and walk in the victory of Christ, and know the satisfaction of Christ, because He longs to be glorified in your life by filling you and me today. We have a wonderful Savior.

Let's go to Him in prayer right now...

*Our Father, we praise and honor You for the glory of Your salvation, the glorious sufficiency of Jesus Christ, the one who brings to us Living Water, who is the Bread of Life, who is our very life's breath. Everything that we need, He is. He is the great I AM. Father, we come asking that You would work in all of our hearts and every heart in this room to manifest the sufficiency of Jesus, and to call people to Yourself. To those who are unbelievers, that they would come to You today to receive salvation, that they would repent, and be granted by your grace: repentance and faith, and they would taste and see that the Lord is good, and Father, for those of us who know Christ, that we would keep drinking from the fountain, and keep partaking of our glorious Savior who feeds us, and who nurtures us every moment of every day if our eyes are on Him. Help us to look from everything else, and help us to say with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."*

*We pray in His Name, Amen.*

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