

## JOHN 6

## JESUS, THE BREAD OF LIFE

At first glance, the transition between this chapter and the last seems to be quite abrupt. In the last chapter, we were in Jerusalem; and in the next, we shall be back in that holy city again; but here we find ourselves in Galilee, by the Sea of Tiberias (another name for the Sea of Galilee). There is, however, a real continuity of thought between all these passages. In the last scene, we saw the hatred that was aroused against Jesus because He had healed a man on the Sabbath Day; and so it was not safe for Him to remain in Jerusalem. Therefore, He withdraws to the region of Galilee; and now He is tarrying there, even though the time for the celebration of the Feast of Passover was drawing near. This is when Jesus' prolonged Galilean ministry transpired, which is described in detail in the other Gospels. But why does John select – out of all the many miracles which our Lord did in Galilee – the feeding of the five thousand and the walking upon the sea? It is because these miracles, with their related discourses, led to a crisis among the professing followers of Christ; and this resulted in a marked division and an open confession of unbelief and faith. This sixth chapter, therefore, is indeed a proper sequence and parallel to chapter 5.

The first of these two miracles is a true act of creation (verses 1-15). Five barley loaves and two small fishes are so multiplied by the power of Christ that they satisfy the hunger of an entire fainting multitude! Yet the miracle is not only a proof of Divine power, but also of Divine grace, compassion, and love! Jesus has withdrawn across the sea for rest, but the multitude follows Him and throngs Him. Nevertheless, He feels no resentment, but only pity for them. With a small supply of food from a lad, He supernaturally feeds the whole crowd; and even the fragments that are left over from the great feast are sufficient for the needs of Jesus' disciples for days to come.

The effect upon the multitude was so great that they were ready to immediately crown the Savior as a king! Faith in Jesus here seems to have reached its climax, but this was not genuine faith; it was only a belief in Him as a Worker of miracles. The multitude was mistakenly expecting Jesus to go on to work a series of prodigies, which would relieve their physical and social distress, and secure for them political independence. But this faith was to be tested the following day; and sadly, it was to be found untrue. Nevertheless, Jesus is not deceived. He quiets and dismisses the excited crowds; He sends His disciples across the sea, away from their dangerous influence; and then, when He is all alone, He departs to the mountain-solitude to pray to His Father.

**Outline of the chapter:**

- ❖ *The Savior miraculously feeds five thousand – verses 1-14*
- ❖ *He walks to His disciples on the Sea of Galilee – verses 15-21*
- ❖ *He speaks to the multitudes about the Bread of Life – verses 22-59*
- ❖ *Many of His disciples cease to follow Him – verses 60-71*



Jesus' walking on the water (verses 16-21) is a miracle which offers a striking contrast to the mistaken idea of the Messiah which the multitudes had shown. It does not reveal a political leader, with power in a restricted earthly sphere; but rather, it portrays for us the Divine Creator, Who has supreme authority in the entire universe. The disciples were still rowing across the Sea of Galilee, when suddenly – in the darkness and the windy weather – Jesus appears, walking on the waves! He does not hereby suspend the natural laws of gravitation, but He does clearly show Himself to be absolutely superior to and independent of all natural forces. After calming the terrified disciples with His reassuring voice, He got into their boat; and then it instantly reached their desired haven!

Christ is always with His followers, even in the midnight and storms that they may encounter on the rough sea of this life; and in all their difficult circumstances, He alone can cheer and save them. This incident teaches us that those who truly trust Christ will sometimes find themselves in the midst of loneliness, opposition, and tempests; but we are also assured here that He will come to us in a special way when we are experiencing such times, and He will comfort us with the safety and gladness of His Divine fellowship. Just as the Savior was praying alone upon the mountain and then appeared to rescue His disciples, we know that He Who is now interceding for us on high will one day reappear to bring blessedness and peace to His distressed and storm-tossed followers!

Jesus' discourse that is recorded in verses 22-59 was delivered the next day in the synagogue at Capernaum, and it gives the true interpretation of the miracle that He had done for the relief of the multitudes. These lessons which Christ gives remind us that all of His miracles were, in reality, acted-out parables; for in addition to their immediate purpose of grace and love, they also contained Divine messages of spiritual truth.

The very essence of this discourse is contained in the words of verse 35: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." It is to be remembered that while the miracle gave the occasion and the background of the discourse, its immediate reference is to the request of the people for a "sign" – such as the miraculous manna, which was rained down from heaven when Moses and the Israelites were in the wilderness. The reply of Jesus is that He Himself is the true Bread from heaven! He has come down from God; and He is the true Manna, which has been given for the life of the world. His body was to be broken, and His blood would be shed; yet He would also ascend into heaven again. To all who put their trust in Him, He will give present satisfaction, future resurrection, and eternal life.

Throughout this discourse, as in the previous chapter, testimony is given to the Divine Person of the Lord Jesus; yet, by way of contrast, the stress is here laid upon the necessity for faith in Him, and the results of true belief and trust.

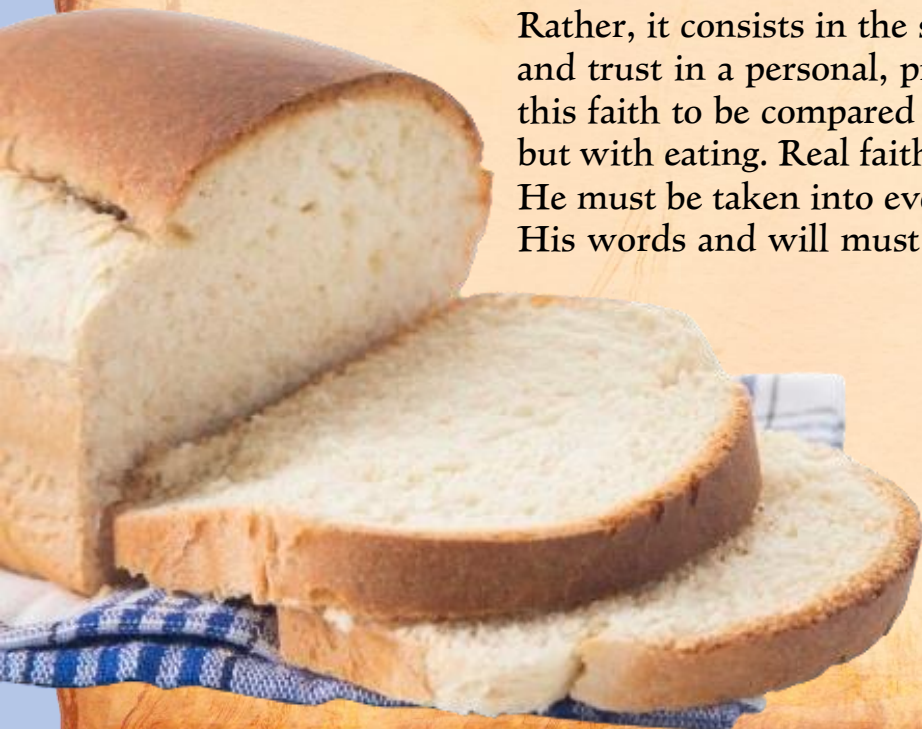


The character of this faith in Christ is expressed in the strongest imaginable terms. It is described, in a spiritual sense, as being a true eating of His flesh and drinking of His blood – which is a representation of a complete identification with Him; and an absolute dependence upon Him as the crucified, risen, living, and Divine Lord!

Among the many lessons which are commonly drawn from Jesus' discourse, a few particular ones may be mentioned; and the first of these is that our Lord regarded the spiritual needs of men as being more important than their physical necessities. Yes, He graciously and miraculously fed a whole multitude by the seaside; but His real mission was to give His own life for the salvation of the world. When referring to the miracle, He did not preach on the need for better jobs or increased wages or improved living conditions (although a concern for these things certainly has its place); but rather, He spoke on mankind's ultimate need of spiritual life. But this is all that we may learn here; for the second important lesson of this discourse is that faith in Christ is not merely promised to secure healing, but also nourishment. In the miracle that is recorded in chapter 5, Jesus had given health to a helpless man; but here He is seen as sustaining the strong. It is not only the moral outcasts and lepers who need Christ, but also those who are counted as the purest and noblest and best among mankind. Third, we are here shown that faith in Christ is not an optional luxury, but an absolute necessity! On the previous day, the people had been given the simplest food; but they would have fainted without it. Similarly, the Christian experience is not something which may or may not be added to the other blessings of life. Without Christ, there is no real life – either here or hereafter. Another important lesson from this discourse is that true faith centers in a Person; it is not the acceptance of a creed, or the performance of a ritual or ceremony.

Rather, it consists in the surrender of self and in devotion and trust in a personal, present, and loving Savior. Nor is this faith to be compared with a mere tasting or admiring, but with eating. Real faith is an identification with Christ; He must be taken into every sphere and experience of life. His words and will must be assimilated into our life, and

become a part of our very being. Furthermore, true faith results in service; it is sharing, not keeping. Our knowledge of Christ is intended to be communicated with the world; just as during the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, the disciples were given food – not to hoard among





themselves, but to give to the multitude. Our talents may be few, and our contributions may be painfully inadequate; but if the Master only blesses them, their multiplied possibilities will serve thousands! Finally, we are here taught that true faith brings lasting satisfaction – not mere temporary relief. Christ’s disciples are not only supplied with a single meal, but also with the “twelve baskets full” that are left over. Faith brings abiding, abounding, and eternal life to the Lord’s sons and daughters; their hungering and dissatisfied souls will never turn to Christ in vain!

The crisis of unbelief (verses 60-71) arose from that last truth which Jesus stated – namely, that real faith in Christ results in an abiding satisfaction. There were multitudes in whom the miracle of the miraculous feeding had awakened wonder; but these people had not trusted in Him for salvation, nor had they found in Him that lasting satisfaction for their souls. He had spoken to them of the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, but this was difficult for them to understand. They were apparently incapable of comprehending spiritual truth. Our Lord declares that their bewilderment will only be increased when He has withdrawn into the sphere of the unseen and spiritual; however, those who accept His words will find them to be the channel of new spiritual life.

Jesus is not surprised at the unbelief that is manifested among those multitudes of persons who profess to be His followers; He knew there was a traitor even in the circle of His closest friends. “Upon this, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” They were disappointed that He was not a political leader, and they were unable to appreciate His spiritual teachings. There were some, however, who still trusted Him. “Jesus said therefore unto the twelve, Would ye also go away? Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God.” There are still many people today who are troubled by the truths concerning the Divine Person and atoning death of Christ, and the need of faith in Him. When these truths are pressed upon them, they are ready to turn away. But there are also many like Peter, however, who do believe the words of Christ; and they have found in Him such satisfaction of soul, that they feel that there is none other to whom they can go, and none other whom they desire. The claims of Jesus are still tests of faith. They are still producing crises in the lives of those who claim to follow Him. They are still dividing the false from the true. As a result, many who have merely been nominal Christians end up turning back from Him. But Jesus’ precious words and teachings give occasion for true believers to joyfully confess their satisfaction and their triumphant faith in Him!

*Thank You, Jesus, for being our Bread of Life, which is so much better than the Israelites’ physical manna in the wilderness; for You promise that if we spiritually partake of Your body and blood, we are possessors of everlasting life! Amen.*