

Having been away from John's gospel for some months—I thought it necessary to remind you, that within the first 12 chapters, John selects 7 miracles, that not only manifest Christ's divine power, but also illustrate spiritual and gospel realities—thus, John refers to them as "signs" which are intended to point to something greater than itself...

John 20:30-31—"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name"—that is—sign miracles were intended to point sinners to Christ as God-Man Savior from sin...

Thus—within chapter 6, we have the 4th and 5th sign miracles—the feeding of the 5 thousand (vv1-14) and His walking on water (vv15-21)...

Now—chapter 6 is similar to chapter 5, in that, they both contain a miracle and a message, and both the miracle and message are obviously related—in vv1-14 our Savior feeds the multitudes bread and fish, then beginning with v26 our Savior gives His famous discourse on the living bread that's come down from heaven to give life to the world...

- I. The Miracle Briefly Explained
- II. The Miracle Practically Applied

I. The Miracle Briefly Explained

A. A Multitude—vv1-6

1. The chapter begins with the words—"After these things"—which refers to "things" NOT recorded by John...
2. From Matthew and Mark we learn—that between the events of chapters 5 and 6—there was almost a full year...
3. During this time—two important events took place—[a] our Savior sent out His disciples on a preaching tour...
4. Mk.6:30-31—"Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. And He said to them, Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while..."
5. [b] News of John the Baptist's death reached Christ, Matt.14:13—"When Jesus heard it (John's death), He departed from there by Himself..."
6. Thus—from Matthew and Mark we learn, these two events were reasons why our Savior left for the other side of the Sea...
7. Furthermore, from v4 we learn that—"the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near"—John wrote this for his Gentile readers...
8. John mentions three distinct Passovers (2:13; 11:55), which is one reason His ministry is understood as three years...
9. F.F. Bruce—"John's purpose in mentioning the Passover may be not only to fix the time of year at which the following incident took place; he probably thought the Passover season particularly appropriate both for the incident and for the discourse which arose out of it..."
10. Now—the Sea of Galilee (or the Sea of Tiberias)—was really more the size of average lake than an actual Sea...
11. It's approximately 13 miles long and 8 miles wide—our Savior travelled from the NW to the NE side of the lake...
12. Thus—He didn't travel across the widest part but the Northern part, from Capernaum to Bethsaida, about 2 miles...

13. V1—"Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias"—that is—He travelled by way of boat...
14. From v2 we learn that—"a great multitude followed Him"—as Matthew tells us—"they travelled around the lake on foot" (Matt.14:13)..."
15. The reason they followed is provided, v2b—"because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased..."
16. Twice in the passage, John refers to them as—"a great multitude"—we learn in v10b—there were 5000 men...
17. Matthew tells us—"Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children (14:21)..."
18. Thus—while there were 5000 men, with woman and children—it's likely there were well over 10,000 people...
19. According to v3—our Savior went up on a mountain and there He taught the people, and healed the diseased...
20. Matt.14:14—"And when Jesus went out he saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick..."
21. Mk.6:34—"And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things..."
22. Thus—throughout the day—our Savior both healed their bodies and taught their souls—both out of compassion...
23. As the day came to an end—"He said to Philip, Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat"—that is—the multitude...
24. V6—"But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do"—this added by way of commentary by John...
25. In other words—the entire miracle was intended to test His disciples, or to teach them important spiritual truth...

B. A Miracle—vv7-13

1. From v7 we learn that Philip, and the other disciples, were in need of testing and learning certain basic truths...
2. V7—"Philip answered Him, Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little..."
3. A "denarii" was approximately payment for a day's labor—thus 200 denarii was roughly equivalent to 8 months of wages...
4. According to Philip—Two hundred denarii would not even be sufficient, for each person to have a little food, let alone to satisfy their hunger...
5. Andrew answers in a similar fashion, v9—"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many..."
6. In other words—both Philip and Andrew (and no doubt the other disciples as well)—were filled with unbelief...
7. We are not told anything further about this boy—the amount of food that he had would be intended for one person...
8. And even then—it wasn't a large meal—the term "loaf" is better rendered "cake" and refers to a flat piece of bread...
9. Thus—the lad did not have 5 loaves of bread, as we understand it, but 5 small bread cakes intended for himself...
10. Barley loaves, were very modest, and were usually eaten by the poor—with that he had two small (dried) fish...
11. The primary point is obvious—this was a very modest amount of food—hardly sufficient for the young boy...
12. V10—"Then Jesus said, Make the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand..."

13. V11—"And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted..."
14. In other words—our Savior distributed the bread and fish, through His disciples, to the multitude sitting down...
15. As our Savior broke the bread and fish, they multiplied in His hands, so that a supernatural miracle occurred...
16. J.C. Ryle—"As fast as He broke the loaves and the disciples carried them away to distribute them, so fast did the loaves multiply under His hands. It was in the act of breaking and distributing to the disciples that the miraculous multiplication took place. In fact there was a continual act of creating going on. Bread was continually called into existence which did not exist before..."
17. There's an important and beautiful phrase at the end of v11 that I intend to return to—"as much as they wanted..."
18. That is—there was plenty of bread and fish to go around, and not just to satisfy the hunger, but as much as they desired...
19. V12—"So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost..."
20. V13—"Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten..."
21. The Holy Spirit has join record this in order to underscore the abundance of bread and fish that was provided...

C. A Response—vv14-15

1. John describes this miracle as a "sign"—which again is intended to point us beyond the event to spiritual truth...
2. From the sign miracle we read, the Jews understood Christ as the Prophet who is to come into the world—likely a reference to Duet 18, where God promises a Prophet similar to Moses...
3. From v15 we learn that Jews' knowledge of Christ remained largely political, rather than spiritual and moral...
4. Thus—from their response we learn—they understood that Christ was sent from God, but they failed to understand why...
5. That is—they failed to understand their deepest need was not food, nor was it liberation from Rome, but salvation from sin...
6. This of course was largely true of the first century Jews as a whole—they looked for political instead of a spiritual salvation...
7. V26—"Jesus answered them and said, Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled..."
8. That is—they failed to rightly understand the signs—which were intended to point the people to spiritual truth...

II. The Miracle Practically Applied

A. A display of divine power and compassion

1. Here—I want to suggest three broad and major lessons behind this miracle, or, three reasons this miracle occurred...
2. Of all the sign miracles found in the gospels—only this one is found in all four—underscoring its uniqueness...
3. Furthermore—unlike some of His miracles—this one is very public—done in front of thousands of people...
4. Of the many lessons we could learn from this miracle—I want to merely suggest three, that I trust are rather obvious...
5. The first being—we behold within this miracle—two things about our Savior's character—His power and compassion...

6. Now—before I briefly consider these—let me remind you that our Savior's miracles have two basic purposes...
7. First—they are intended to show His divine glory, and secondly—they are intended to illustrate spiritual truth...
8. Miracles are signs and wonders—a sign points to something else (spiritual truth), and a wonder evokes wonder or awe...
9. It's this second word that I'm here after—miracles were "wonders"—they intend to create wonder and awe in us...
10. My friends—I fear some of us read through our Bibles and take for granted these awesome acts and works of God...
11. Miracles are mighty works of God—that go against the normal and natural order of things—they are supernatural...
12. Thus—within miracles—we behold the mighty attributes of God—within miracles—we behold the glory of God...
13. Jn.2:11—"This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him..."
14. Thus—here's my point—within this 4th miracle—our Savior manifests His divine glory—or divine perfections...
15. Now—some of you will remember last week's SS lesson, wherein we learned miracles were a form of special revelation...
16. That is—within miracles, we learn truth about God, and about God's redemption—miracles teach us about God...
17. [1] His power—there is a sense in which this miracle is unique to the others—for in it He creates from nothing...
18. J.C. Ryle—"In healing the sick, and raising the dead, something was amended or restored that had already existed. In feeding five thousand men with five loaves, something must have been created which before had no existence..."
19. [2] His compassion—from the other gospels we learn, that our Savior looked upon the multitude with compassion...
20. Matt.14:14—"And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick..."
21. Mk.6:34—"And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them...So He began to teach them many things..."
22. Thus—He felt compassion for them, because of their physical and spiritual needs—He healed and taught them...
23. Now—this is also seen in that He—gave them bread for their bodies, which pointed to Bread for their souls...
24. Thus—we behold in this miracle—the powerful compassion of God in Christ—oh what a beautiful reminder...
25. Our Savior is not merely powerful, nor is He merely compassionate—He has power and compassion combined...
26. [a] Trust Him—that is—Christians should trust Christ—as the One who can and does meet ALL their needs...
27. Jn.2:11—"This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him..."
28. Martin Luther—"This miracle of the feeding of the five thousand men...is recorded in Scripture for our sakes, so that people in the church might hear it again and again, and learn from it that we must trust that God will provide for us. For in this world, faith is under constant siege either by Mammon and wealth on the one hand, or by poverty on the other..."
29. John Calvin—"Let us now sum up the meaning of the whole miracle. It has this in common with the other miracles, that Christ displayed in it his Divine power in union with beneficence. It is also a confirmation to us of that statement by which he exhorts us to *seek the kingdom of God*, promising that *all other things shall be added to us* (Matt.6:33). For if he took care of those who were led to him only by a sudden impulse, how would he desert us, if we seek him with a firm and steady purpose..."

30. [b] Adore Him—that is—we must worship Him—what a privilege brethren—to call Him our Savior and Lord...
31. Let us never forget—that in Christ Jesus, we are confronted with a Divine Person, worthy of our trust and adoration...

B. A lesson for all disciples and gospel ministers

1. Here we come—to what I suggest—are the more intended lessons from this miracle—to teach spiritual truth...
2. And—I want to submit—our Savior in the very first place—intended to teach His disciples some important lessons...
3. [1] Ministers have and are nothing in themselves, v5—"He said to Philip, Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat..."
4. That is—our Savior wanted Philip, and the rest of the disciples, to know that they themselves possessed no bread...
5. That is—in and of themselves—they lacked any bread for the multitude, and they lacked all means to get any...
6. This my friend—is the grand lesson of this miracle, with regards to the disciples—He wanted to teach them their poverty...
7. Our Savior wanted His disciples to look to Him for recourse—He wanted them to trust Him for the results...
8. Now—surely, this is a necessary lesson that all ministers of the gospel must learn—all increase comes from God...
9. Now—what is here true of pastors, I suggest is equally true of parents, and all Christians without exception...
10. That is—this miracle is NOT intended to teach, that if we simply give Jesus what we have He'll do the rest...
11. Sometimes this is how this account is explained—just as the boy gave Jesus his lunch, so we must give Him what we have...
12. NO—that is NOT the point—here's the point—we are and have, in and of ourselves, nothing—we are poor beggars...
13. This is what our Savior wants His disciples to know, and brethren, this is what He wants us to know as well...
14. Perhaps I can make my point by reminding you—that the disciples were no doubt hungry themselves, just as the multitude...
15. And furthermore—while we are not expressly told—it seems obvious that the disciples ate the bread and fish as well...
16. In other words—the disciples needed strengthening from the food—just as much as the great multitude did...
17. 2Cor.3:4-6—"And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life..."
18. 2Cor.4:7—"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us..."
19. [2] Ministers are stewards of the mysteries of God—that is—Christ uses the disciples to distribute His bread...
20. Thus—here I want to offset what I've just said—while we have nothing in ourselves, God uses us to share the truth...
21. That is—God has chosen to use frail and weak people—as a means through which—to share the gospel with others...
22. V11—"And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down..."

23. That is—He passed bread and fish to the disciples, for the express purpose, that the disciples would give it to others...
24. Now—obviously brethren—God could have chosen other means to distribute the gospel throughout the world...
25. He could have chosen to make known the gospel simply by writing it on the clouds, in big and bold letters...
26. But instead, He has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and the weak things to put to shame the mighty...
27. A.W. Pink—"God is pleased to use human instruments in accomplishing the counsels of His grace, and thus give us the inestimable honor and privilege of being 'laborers together with God' (1Cor.3:9). Christ fed the hungry multitude through His disciples. It was their work as truly as it was His. His was the increase, but theirs was the distribution..."
28. Mk.6:41—"And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all..."
29. Gal.3:1—"O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified..."
30. 1Cor.4:1-2—"Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful..."
31. J.C. Ryle—"Here is a lively emblem of the work which a true minister of the NT is meant to do. he is not a mediator between God and man. He has no power to put away sin, or impart grace. His whole business is to receive the bread of life which his Master provides, and to distribute it among the souls among whom he labors. He cannot make men value the bread, or receive it. He cannot make it soul-saving, or life-giving, to any one. this is not his work. For this he is not responsible. His whole business is to be a faithful distributor of the good which his Divine Master has provided; and that done, his office is discharged..."

C. An illustration of the gospel feast for all nations

1. This I believe—is the most intended of all lessons—to teach poor sinners that in Christ there is a gospel feast...
2. This becomes rather evident if we keep in mind, the connection between this miracle and the message that follows...
3. Thus—I want to suggest that within this 4th miracle—we learn five important things about the gospel feast...
4. [1] The NEED for the gospel—the multitude represented the entire mass of fallen, and spiritual starved humanity...
5. Mk.6:35—"This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late"—that is—the place provided no food for them...
6. J.C. Ryle—"Nothing else can do good in this sinful world. No other teaching can fill hungry consciences, and give them peace. We are all in a wilderness. We must feed on Christ crucified, and the atonement made by His death, or we shall die in our sins..."
7. [2] The PROVISION of the gospel—that is—the multitude needed bread to be provided from someone else...
8. Jn.6:32-33—"Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world..."
9. [3] The NATURE of the gospel, Mk.6:41—"when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves..."
10. As we shall see later in John 6—the breaking of the bread illustrated the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross...
11. In other words—in order for the bread to be eaten it must first be broken—it's first broken and then it's eaten...
12. [4] The PARTAKING of the gospel—that is—though bread has been given, it must be eaten if it's to benefit us...

13. Jn.6:47-51—"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world..."
14. [5] The ABUNDANCE of the gospel, v22—"as much as they wanted. So when they were filled (Mk.6:42-43)..."