

Five Thousand, Five Loaves, and...Leftovers?

John 6:1-15

Reading: Psalm 32

Bethany Baptist Church

July 19, 2020

...pray...

There was **good news** and there was **bad news...**

Jesus had sent the **Twelve**, *two by two*, on a **preaching** and **healing** mission.

Mark 6:12 – *And they went out and preached that men should repent.*

Mark 6:30 – *And the apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught.*

That was **good news**.

But at the same time, **John the Baptist** had been **incarcerated** in the palace of the *moral weakling*, **Herod Antipas**.

John had publicly condemned **King Herod's immoral relationship** with his **sister-in-law, Herodias**.

Despite the rebuke, **Herod Antipas** was *fascinated* with **John the Baptist**.

But **Herodias** was *not*. She **outmaneuvered** the king and demanded the **Baptizer's head on a platter**.

Matt 14:9-10 – *And although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given [John's head] because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. And he sent and had John beheaded in the prison.*

Matt 14:12 – *And [John's] disciples came and took away the body and buried it; and they [John's disciples] went and reported to **Jesus**.*

That was **bad news**.

Good news and **bad news**. Jesus said it is time to **get away...let's go...**

Mark 6:31 – *And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while."*

Let's pick up the NT timeline in the Gospel of John 6:1-15 (read).

Chapter six is built a lot like **chap five**. A **miracle** followed by a **long message**. And an audience that **just doesn't get it!**

The Gospel of John documents a series of **Jesus' signs** (miracles) to help you **believe** that Jesus is the **Savior of the World**.

Feeding the multitude (John 6) is Jesus' **fifth** faith-building sign.

This sign demonstrates that Jesus is the **Bread of Life** as He miraculously feeds a **big crowd** with a **little meal**.

John 6:35 (*we'll soon hear Jesus say*) – *"I am the Bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst."*

All of this *begins* as....

Jesus feeds a hungry crowd with a happy meal.

- 1. The crowd (vv.1-4).**
- 2. The test (vv.5-9).**
- 3. The meal (vv.10-13).**
- 4. The mob (vv.14-15).**

The crowd was *coming* and crowd was *curious*.

1. When Jesus announced that He was leading the Twelve to a **lonely place**, He meant the **east side** of the **Sea of Galilee**.
 - a. Or as it was becoming known in the **late 1st century**, the **Sea of Tiberius**, after the second Roman Emperor, **Tiberius Claudius Nero**.
 - b. The **west** side of the sea *bustled* with Jewish life – *villages & cities, farmers & fisherman*; the **east** side was *quiet*.

2. But this day there was a **crowd** headed **east!**
 - a. Jesus had been on the **west** side, *healing the sick*.
 - b. When His **friends** returned from *preaching*, and **John's friends** returned after *burying* the Baptizer, Jesus made plans to **take a break**.
 - c. *But the crowd wanted more...*

3. Jesus and the Twelve got into some **boats** and crossed the **sea**.
 - a. As Jesus' boats sailed **east**, the **miracle-hungry crowd** *hurried* around the **north** end of the Sea of Galilee, *on foot*.
 - b. As they went, they undoubtedly **picked-up numbers** from every *village* and *farm* they passed!
 - c. They all arrived near a community named **Bethsaida Julius**, in an area marked by a **small plain**, backed up by the **Golan Heights**.
 - d. Jesus **went up** into the hilly area and **sat down** with His followers, undoubtedly to **teach** and consider all that was happening.

4. John likes **details**, but John also seems to **assume** you have a pretty good handle on the **other Gospels** (M, M, L; *Synoptic*), which had been in *circulation* for upwards of **30+** years when the **Gospel of John** was penned.

a. The **first detail** (1) introduces the **timing** of chapter six by **looking back** – “*after these things.*”

i. We’ve mentioned that **just before Jesus crossed the sea**, He’d received the **return** of the *Twelve* and the **bad news** about *John the Baptist*.

ii. But the **entire white space** between **chapters five & six** was anywhere from **six – twelve** months, perhaps even *more*.

b. The **second detail** (4) places the **timing** of chapter six by **looking forward**: “*Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near.*”

i. This is the **second** of **three Passovers** that help mark Jesus’ public ministry.

ii. The **first** one (chap 2) saw Jesus’ **cleansing the temple** of the moneychanger and merchants, then performing many **miracles** that grabbed the attention of Jerusalem’s Passover pilgrims.

iii. But **here** (ch.6) we are near Jesus’ **second Passover**, the only one in which He will **stay** in Galilee, **away** from Jerusalem.

iv. Jesus’ **third Passover**, now a **year away**, will witness our Lord’s **betrayal** and **suffering** and **sin-bearing death** and **death-defeating crucifixion**.

c. The **Passover** is an **important detail** in our story.

i. For us, the **Fourth of July** invokes memories of our *national heritage* and **revitalizes** our *patriotism*.

ii. For these **1st Century Jews**, **Passover** under the oppressive rule of Rome was a reminder of **Israel’s storied past**, its **oppressed present**, and the **promise** of a Messiah – a *Davidic Conqueror!*

... **A David Conqueror, that’s what this crowd really wanted!**

The arrival of the crowd *posed a problem* and *provided an opportunity to test the faith* of Jesus' disciples (read vv.5-9).

1. The crowd was **large** (5); v.10 indicates that just the **men** numbered **about five thousand** - so by the time you factor in the **woman & children** that number **scales up** to as many as **20K people** gathering in that grassy plain!
2. By the time Jesus finishes **teaching** them, there are going to be **20K hungry people**, the *day* will be late, and the nearest *drive-through* will be **miles away!**
3. This really **isn't** a problem for Jesus, but it **does** offer a **teaching moment** for the **disciples** – an opportunity (6) for Jesus to **test their faith**.
 - a. Our Lord turns to **Philip** – “*Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?*” It was a **test** of their *emergency faith system!*
 - b. **Philip** scanned the **crowd** and *whipped out* his **calculator** with a *frown*. “*Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.*”
 - i. A **denarii** was one day's **pay** for the typical **laborer**. *Do that math!* **Two hundred denarii** was about **8 months wages!** *Eight months* – that's a **lot of bread!**
 - c. **Andrew**, another of the Twelve, had been *scouting around*. (Now if you **don't know** who Andrew is, you'll surely recognize his *brother*, Peter! Everyone knows who Peter was!) Andrew found a **boy** (v.9 “*lad*”) who had brought his meal with him.
 - i. **Five barley loaves** – *Loaves* in 1st century Palestine were baked **round** and **flat** ...like a *frisbee*.
 1. The **two** common grains were **wheat** and **barley**.
 2. **Wheat** was the more desirable of the **two**, in terms of *taste* and *nutritional value*; it also **cost 2-3X** as much as **barley**.
 - ii. **Five barley loaves** and **two fish** – *pickled* or *dried*.

4. The **meal** was *small* and the **crowd** was *large*. That was the **test** (6)!
- a. And they **failed!** *All twelve of them.*
 - b. **Andrew** had run a *spread-sheet*, **Philip** had *scoured the crowd*.
 - c. All the while, the **Answer** was *standing right in front of them*, the way He **always is!**
 - i. **Jesus**, who had turned *water to wine* (and they were there)!
 - ii. **Jesus**, who had healed *little boy and aging invalid*.
 - iii. **Jesus**, who performed *so many miracles*, John writes that you could **never** *catalog them all*.
 - d. The **test** was this: *when you have a **problem**, do you see that Jesus is the **answer**, and that He's right here?* **2X** It was a test of **faith**.

5. Let's think about this a little before we move on...

- a. There is a lesson about **Jesus' compassion** here.
 - i. Jesus had planned a **retreat** for Twelve, but instead **preached** a message, **healed** the sick, and **provided** a meal for **20thousand**.
 - ii. Jesus did this all out of **compassion – love**. **Mark 6:34** – *He felt **compassion** for them, because they were like **sheep w/o a shepherd**.*
 - b. There is clearly a **lesson about faith** here. When you have a problem, do you *go to Jesus* – do you *pray*? Do you believe Jesus *still solves* His peoples' *problems*?
 - i. **Psa 116:1** - *I love the LORD, because He hears My voice and my **supplications** (= **plead/prayer for help**).*
 - ii. **Phil 4:19** – *And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.* (Paul wrote from prison.)
- Jesus tested the disciples' faith...obviously they still had a long ways to go.**

But for now, there was a meal to prepare. Nothing fancy, but more than enough (read vv.10-13).

1. “*Have the people sit down.*” So the disciples *went to work*, preparing the crowd in groups of **50 – 100** (Mark 6, Luke 9).
 - a. The **spring grass** (Passover = March, April) would be *comfortable*...
 - b. And the **smaller groups** would make it *easier* to feed everyone.
 - c. **OBTW**, did you notice that instead of **scolding** His friends for their *lack of faith*, Jesus just gives them another **opportunity to serve**...?
2. And then Jesus **worked a miracle**. Starting with that humble meal of **five flat loaves** and **two dried fish**...(read v.11).
 - a. Our Lord **thanked** our Heavenly Father for His goodness. A **typical Hebrew blessing** might sound like this: *Blessed are you, O LORD, our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.*
 - b. Then Jesus **picked up** a loaf, **pulled** it into pieces, and **passed them out**. The same with the **fish**.
 - c. He kept **reaching** back into the **lunch basket** for **one loaf**...and there was always **one more loaf!**
 - d. **Enough food for one**, enough for **50**, enough for **100**, enough for **20K**, ...*enough* for **everyone!**

3. In fact, *more than enough* for everyone. Jesus commanded the disciples to *gather* the **leftover fragments** into *baskets*.
 - a. Using *leftovers* was as common in *Jesus' day*, just as it is in *ours*.
 - b. There's some **theological discussion** around **why** there were **12** baskets of leftovers.
 - i. Some say it symbolized the **12 tribes of Israel**. I suspect they are focused on Jesus' comment (12b) – "*so that nothing will be lost.*" Seeing in that God's **eschatological plan** for **Israel**.
 - ii. But Bible teacher **John MacArthur** comments that it was simply **one basket** gathered by each of the **twelve disciples!**
4. Before we **leave** this **miraculous meal**, let's make observations...
 - a. If you've read the Gospels carefully, perhaps you know that Jesus did this miracle on **two occasions**.
 - i. **This** powerful meal (found in all four Gospels) was provided to a **Jewish crowd**.
 - ii. Jesus **later** performed the same miracle (Matt 15, Mk 8) for a **Gentile crowd**.
 - b. The obvious lesson is the **deity of Jesus** – He *is* God's Son!
 - i. Jesus has the **power** to miraculously **meet our needs**, in ways that **only God can**.
 - ii. **Eph 3:20** – *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.*

Friend, it started out with a small, simple meal, but Jesus turned it into an overflowing demonstration of His compassionate, practical power.

Then the *crowd* morphed into a *mob*, they wanted to use Jesus' *power* to their own *end* (read 14-15).

1. When the **crowd figured out** what Jesus had just done (v.14 – “*therefore*”) that made a **connection** between **Jesus** and **Moses**, then **Jesus** and **David**.
 - a. Maybe it was the **barley loaves...** **Moses** had *called on God* for **food**, and God had *responded* with **manna**.
 - i. Years later **Moses prophesied** (Deut 18:15), “*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen; you shall listen to him.*”
 - ii. Now everyone was saying (14), “*This is truly the Prophet (i.e. Deut 18) who is to come into the world.*”
 - b. And **that** suggested to them **everything they expected** the promised **Messiah** to be – **Moses** and **King David** *blended together and amped up*.
 - c. Do you recall what I said about **Passover** and **Jewish nationalism**? Add to that the fact that **Galilee** was a *hot bed* for 1st Century Jewish resistance - groups like the **Zealots** who wanted to *rise up* and *drive Rome* out of **Israel**.
 - i. In fact, the **NT** indicates that one of Jesus' twelve disciples was a **Zealot** – **Simon** the Zealot.
 - d. My point is that Jesus' “**barley loaf miracle**” and Moses' well-known “**Prophet prophecy**” and a **Galilean crowd** and the approach of **Passover** and popular, misguided **messianic expectations**, created the **perfect storm** for what happened next!
 - i. **V.15** - Jesus perceived that the **crowd** was turning into a **mob**, “*that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king.*” A messianic king, as in a **Super David!**
 - ii. **MacArthur** writes, “*With [Jesus] as their provider, they would never want for food, and would have the potential to be healed of every illness. They could march to Jerusalem, overthrow the Romans, and establish the ultimate social welfare state.*”

2. But that was **never** the plan! Jesus would later say to **Pilate**, “*My kingdom is **not** of this world.*”
 - a. So Jesus **dispersed** the crowd, sending them home. The **day** was over, but not the **story** (we’ll *continue to follow it* through **chapter six**).
 - b. And then He *left*, back to the *heights*, this time *alone*.

The crowd had come, the disciples had been tested, a small meal had fed a big crowd, and a zealous mob had been defused and dispersed.

This story is *not* over. Soon we'll witness another **miracle**, another **word to the crowds**, followed by another **confrontation w/Jews**.

But it's **not too early** to strengthen your **understanding** of Jesus. There is so much to **see** in Jesus' feeding of the crowds...

1. **Jesus is compassionate.** He **cared** for the crowds even though they were **confused** about Him. And He was **patient** with His friends, even when they were **slow on the uptake**.
2. **Jesus is omniscient** ("*all knowing*"). In **v.6** He **knew all along** the miracle was coming. In **v.15** He **perceived** exactly what was going on with the **zealous crowd**.
3. **Jesus is omnipotent** ("*all powerful*"). He turned **one meal** into **20,000 meals** (plus *leftovers*) with simply **His touch**. Add to that, He **calmed down** and **turned around** the restless mob (**20,000!**) by the power of His **word** and His **will**.

Which Jesus do you serve?

1. The one of your own **fabrication** and **convenience**? The one who **feeds you when you're hungry**, but *leaves you alone* when you're **not**?
2. The **Jesus** of the Bible **does** claim to be the ***Bread of Life*** – *eternal life*, but then says that to *follow Him* requires such a faith as can only be described as *eating His flesh* and *drinking His blood*. To make Jesus **your life!**

Which Jesus do you serve?

...pray...