

## THE GOSPEL OF

## JOHN

Jesus Is God's  
Answer to  
Our Desires

## INTRODUCTION

John 6:1-15

Over 36 years ago when I began as a pastor (at age 30), I was extremely unsure about whether I could do the job. I didn't know whether I could come up with new sermons week after week without running dry. I wasn't sure about whether I could adequately shepherd God's flock or fulfill the other demands of the position. So I told the Lord, "I'll try it for three years and see where I'm at."

Although many weeks have passed, I still feel so overwhelmed with inadequacy that I think about quitting. By God's grace alone, I'm still serving as a pastor. No text in the New Testament has helped me do what I do as much as the story of Jesus' feeding of the 5,000. It might better be called the feeding of the 20,000, because there were 5,000 men, plus women and children. It's not just a literal miracle witnessed by thousands of people. It's also a parable with many lessons about the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ to meet the vast needs of the world through His inadequate disciples. Although they were completely inadequate to meet the needs of this hungry crowd, they gave the little that they had to the Lord, who blessed it and multiplied it so that they could distribute it to the people. That's been my experience for 36 years now.

This is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels, which shows its significance. C. H. Spurgeon (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit [Pilgrim Publications], 37:419) says that it's in all four gospels so that we won't forget how much the Lord can do with little things that are yielded to Him. The feeding of the 5,000 precedes Jesus' discourse on being the living Bread that comes down out of heaven to give His life for the world (6:32-58). So it's also a miracle that points to salvation. John wrote this sign "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:31).

John begins the story (6:1): "After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias)." The last time note in John (5:1) mentioned an unnamed "feast of the Jews." If it was the Feast of Tabernacles, five to six months have passed. The other gospels inform us that Jesus has sent out the twelve on a ministry tour. They have come back and reported their experiences to Him. Meanwhile, they got word that Herod had beheaded John the Baptist. Jesus and the disciples were so busy with all the needy people that they didn't even have time to eat. So Jesus invited them to get away to a desolate place for some much needed rest.

So they took a boat across the northern end of the Sea of Galilee to a spot in the country north of Bethsaida (home of Philip, Andrew, and Peter). The problem was, the crowds saw them go, ran around the lake on foot, and greeted them as they disembarked (Mark 6:33). The disciples must have thought, "Oh no! We can't get away from these needy people!" But Jesus felt compassion for them, taught them, and healed their sick (Mark 6:34; Matt. 14:14).

John (6:2) notes, "A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick." These people weren't following Jesus because they recognized Him as the Son of God who could save them from their sins. Some were fascinated just seeing the miracles. Others needed miraculous healing for themselves or their loved ones. But overall their reasons for following Jesus were misguided and superficial.

John adds (6:3-4): “Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near.” I’m not sure why John reports the detail of Jesus going up on the mountain. But coupled with the mention of the Passover, he may want us to draw a parallel with Moses, who led the people out of Egypt after the Passover. Later, he went up on the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments. God also used Moses to give manna to the people in the wilderness. So the mention of the Passover being near is probably more than just a time notice. John wants us to see Jesus as the new and better Moses. He fulfilled what the Passover lamb typified. He gave Himself as the permanent manna or bread of life. He is the Prophet of whom Moses wrote (Deut. 18:15; John 6:14).

But in this case, although Jesus could have called for manna to float down from heaven, He didn’t do that. Why not? Jesus used this miracle and those that follow to train the twelve. John shows this by Jesus asking Philip (6:5), “Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?” The other gospels report that the disciples had asked Jesus to dismiss the multitude so that they could go buy their own food. But Jesus pointedly told the disciples (Mark 6:37), “You give them something to eat!” Here, John adds (6:6), “This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.” Jesus was showing Philip and the other disciples their woeful inadequacy to meet this need, along with His all-sufficiency. So this miracle teaches us that ...

**Christ uses inadequate people who surrender what they have to Him to meet the overwhelming needs of others.<sup>1</sup>**

## OPEN IT

1. If you were hosting a dinner event at your home, what food would you prepare for your guests? Why this choice?

## READ IT

**John 6:1-15**

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon excerpt by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-31-how-christ-meets-needs-john-61-15>

## EXPLORE IT

2. Why were large crowds following Jesus?
3. Who does Jesus seek to address the hunger of the crowd?
4. What different solutions are given and by whom?
5. How much was left over after people had their fill?
6. What did the people want to do with Jesus and what did Jesus do in response?

## APPLY IT

### “Disappointment”

Life is filled with all kinds of ups and downs. While this is a normal part of our lives, there are times that stop us in our tracks. Let's be honest, these last days haven't been easy for many. In times like this it is easy to give up and just believe that our situation is impossible. Yet as we are learning in this series that our faith in God is a faith that believes nothing is impossible or too difficult for our Heavenly Father.

Our text describes a scene that is absolutely impossible in the eyes of you and me, but to God, it is an opportunity to display His power and to showcase His ability to overcome any and all circumstances!!!

7. During this time of disappointment and challenge, what things do you see as impossible? How do these signs from John's gospel encourage you as you face the impossible moments of life?

Aside from the resurrection, the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. Obviously, the Gospel writers considered this a significant miracle. When Christ fed the masses that day, He began with only “five barley loaves and two fish,” borrowed from a boy’s lunch (John 6:9). To feed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish is indeed miraculous, but the Greek term used in Matthew 14:21 specifies males, and Matthew further emphasizes the point by adding, “Besides women and children.” Many Bible scholars believe the actual number fed that day could have been 15,000—20,000 people.<sup>2</sup>

**8. Read the other three gospel accounts. How are the accounts similar? Are there any differences?**

- **Matthew 14:13-21**

- **Mark 6:32-44**

- **Luke 9:10-17**

**9. What is it about this particular miracle that would cause each of the gospel writers to include it in their testimony of Jesus?**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/feeding-the-5000.html>

## **“Ridiculous Thoughts”**

The problem, of course, was how to meet the needs of such a vast crowd of people. Three solutions were proposed by the disciples.

First, the disciples suggested that Jesus send the people away (Mark 6:35–36). Get rid of the problem (see Matt. 15:23). But Jesus knew that the hungry people would faint on the way if somebody did not feed them. It was evening (Matt. 14:15), and that was no time for travel.<sup>3</sup>

**10. Why are we so prone to run away from or push away our problems? Does this approach work? Why or why not?**

The second solution came from Philip in response to our Lord’s “test question” (John 6:5): Raise enough money to buy food for the people. Philip “counted the cost” and decided they would need the equivalent of two hundred days’ wages! And even that would not provide bread enough to satisfy the hunger of all the men, women, and children (Matt. 14:21). Too often, we think that money is the answer to every need. Of course, Jesus was simply testing the strength of Philip’s faith.

**11. What problems can money solve and what problems can’t be fixed with it? How can using money to solve our problems keep us from seeing God at work?**

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<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.. The BE Series Bundle: The Gospels: Be Loyal, Be Diligent, Be Compassionate, Be Courageous, Be Alive, and Be Transformed (The BE Series Commentary) . David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

The third solution came from Andrew, but he was not quite sure how the problem would be solved. He found a little boy who had a small lunch: two little fish and five barley cakes. Once again, Andrew is busy bringing somebody to Jesus (see John 1:40–42; 12:20–22). We do not know how Andrew met this lad, but we are glad he did! Though Andrew does not have a prominent place in the Gospels, he was apparently a “people person” who helped solve problems.<sup>4</sup>

**12. Andrew seems to be an early proponent of the #StrongerTogether movement. How can pooling our thinking and resources as a society be beneficial? Are there any drawbacks to this approach?**

**13. Andrew found something to work with when he introduced the boy who had packed a lunch? What miracle had Andrew been a part of earlier that might have given him this idea? How does this response show both great faith and a lack of faith all at once?**

**14. Our text shows three attempts at addressing problems in our lives. Which one of the attempts above is your go to? How can each of these fall short of letting God address our problems in his way?**

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<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.. The BE Series Bundle: The Gospels: Be Loyal, Be Diligent, Be Compassionate, Be Courageous, Be Alive, and Be Transformed (The BE Series Commentary) . David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

## **“Show Me”**

And then with no fanfare, no voice from heaven, no lightning, no thunder, He distributed to those who were seated. He just kept passing out crackers and fish. He was creating it. These were crackers that never came from grain, that never grew, that never were in the dirt. Those were fish that never swam. He created them, those are the best crackers anybody ever ate, those were unfallen crackers. Those are uncursed crackers. Look, I like cursed crackers actually, so I don't know what uncursed crackers would be like. Maybe this is like manna, right? Came from heaven. And this is fish with no mama fish, this is...what kind of fish would God create if He created a perfect fish, never touched by the fallen world. This would tend to cause everyone to overeat, right? If not to be stuffing things in the folds of their clothes.<sup>5</sup>

**15. How do you think you would respond if you were one of the five thousand? How might it have grown your faith had you been one in the crowd?**

John draws a contrast between Philip's "for everyone to receive a little" (6:7), Andrew's "but what are these for so many people?" (6:9), and Jesus' distributing to the people "as much as they wanted" (6:11). It reminds us of when God sent manna to the Israelites in the desert and we read (Exod. 16:18), "Every man gathered as much as he should eat." To emphasize the sufficiency of the manna, the text repeats (16:21), "They gathered it morning by morning, every man as much as he should eat." Nobody went hungry. When Jesus fed the 20,000, everyone was satisfied and there were 12 baskets full of leftovers. Paul wrote (Phil. 4:19), "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

**16. When have you seen God not only supply your needs but give you way more than was needed? What does God desire for us to do with the leftovers?**

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<sup>5</sup> Sermon excerpt by John MacArthur found @ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/43-32/jesus-feeds-the-multitudes> Copyright 2020, Grace to You. All rights reserved. Used by permission."

### **“Linger”?..No Way!!!**

Why leave? Because Jesus wasn't worried about victory over Rome. He was after a greater victory. Jesus came to wage war against sin and suffering. He came to duel with death. They wanted to make Jesus king, but before he would wear the crown of gold, he chose to wear a crown of thorns. Before he would sit on the throne, he would hang on a cross. The crucifixion would come before the coronation. Moses won a great victory, but it pales in comparison to the victory Jesus won when he rose from the grave, triumphant over death and hell.<sup>6</sup>

- 17. In verse 14, the crowd begins to recognize Jesus as more than a teacher but a prophet in the line of Moses. What things did Jesus do in the text that would cause them to think of Moses? How does Jesus show he is infinitely greater than Moses?**

### **“You & Me”**

C. H. Spurgeon speaking about John 6 says that this miracle is written so that we won't forget how much the Lord can do with little things that are yielded to Him.<sup>7</sup>

- 18. Our study reminds us that the little we have can be used by God to do great things through His multiplying power. What little are you willing to put into the hands of Jesus to multiply? What does this look like practically?”**

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<sup>6</sup> Carter, Matt. Exalting Jesus in John (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) . B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>7</sup> Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit [Pilgrim Publications], 37:419

This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal (Sugar Grove Campus)—[www.villagebible.church/smallgroup](http://www.villagebible.church/smallgroup)