

EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #27

John 6:1-15

Christ's miracles never wounded anyone, but His message did. His supernatural powers amazed people, but it was His preaching that angered many and caused them to hate Him. His miracles were phenomenal, but His teaching incited people to want Him dead, because **He did these miracles to show that He was God and that He was the only way people could be saved from their sins.**

Every miracle that John records in this gospel is for the purpose of bringing people to faith in Jesus Christ so that they might have eternal life (John 20:30-31). To the Apostle John, miracles were sign credentials that established that Jesus Christ is God and Jesus Christ is the only one who can save a sinner from his sins.

Now this particular passage features the feeding of the 5000. **This miracle is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).** It is obviously a very important miracle. If you read every account of this miracle, you will notice that each one contains interesting data that the others do not contain. This really proves that the Bible is inspired by God because had they wanted to pretend that it was inspired, they would have copied the information verbatim.

The point John wants to make is this:

THE MIRACLE PERFORMED BY JESUS CHRIST IN PROVIDING PHYSICAL FOOD FOR THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WAS TO PROVE THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN PROVIDE SPIRITUAL LIFE FOR ALL PEOPLE.

No human could have, in any way, met this physical need. Only God could meet this need. So it is with everlasting life. No human can meet the need of taking away the sins of humans. Only God can meet that need and God did meet that need in the God/man Person of Jesus Christ and any who believe on Him will have life.

As near as I can determine there are three key component parts that are connected to the story of this miracle. For alliteration purposes, we may analyze the key point with a word that begins with the letter "s."

COMPONENT PART #1 – The setting of the miracle. 6:1-4

There are at least three facts stated which set the stage for this miracle:

(Fact #1) - The time of the miracle is specifically stated. 6:1, 4

The time of the miracle is said to be "after these things" (6:1), when the Passover feast was "at hand" (6:4). "After these things" refers to the things He did in Jerusalem. There are three Passover feasts in John: 1) Jesus in Jerusalem (2:13); 2) Jesus in Galilee (6:4); 3) Jesus in Jerusalem to be eventually crucified (12:12). **This is Passover feast #2, which means Jesus is about one year away from dying on the cross.** As we will see in a moment, it is time for

some of these disciples to get their faith straightened out. They had been goofing around long enough. It is now time for people to really come to terms with Jesus Christ.

(Fact #2) - The place of the miracle is specifically stated. 6:1, 3

After Christ left Jerusalem, He must have crossed the Jordan River and moved north when He came to the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is about 13 miles long and 7 miles wide. In the Bible this Sea is known by several names - 1) Sea of Gennesaret - fertile plain; 2) Sea of Chinnereth; 3) Sea of Tiberias. Jesus crossed the sea to the west, a four to five mile boat ride and came to the city known as Tiberias.

According to Josephus, Tiberias was a city built by Herod Antipas in honor of the Emperor Tiberius. Tiberius was the Emperor who replaced Augustus and reigned during the life of Jesus Christ (A.D. 14-37). According to Gary Burge, the city was built around A.D. 26, making Tiberias a new city (*John*, p. 191). Tiberias is only named in the Bible in Luke 3:1, where it says that John began his ministry in the 15th year of his reign. Tiberias was a city located on the western shore of the Sea. According to Dr. Fausset, it was one of nine towns around the Sea, which had more than 15,000 people. It was such a worldly city that some of the strict Jews refused to even enter and that is exactly the place Christ performed this miracle.

Godless, worldly people become great candidates for miraculous transformations. Even though religious Pharisees tend to shy away from these kinds of people because they are not “good” by their standards, you and I need to realize God delights in saving sinners and the greater the sinner, the greater the demonstration of grace.

Now we may also note that Christ, according to **verse 3**, is up on the mountain. There were times He needed to get away from the continual public strain. There were times He needed to rest. This would be a place where He could be alone with His disciples and it would be a high perch from which all could look down.

According to Stephen Ambrose, when the transcontinental railroad was being constructed from 1863-1869, a scouting crew would travel to high perches to look for the flattest land. Jesus could look down from this perch and see the biggest sinners.

(Fact #3) - The crowd of the miracle is specifically stated. 6:2

There was a “great multitude” of people following Christ. To walk around this Lake to where Jesus was is approximately a nine mile walk. We know there were 5,000 men (6:10), plus women and children (Matthew 14:21). If we include women and children we agree with many Bible scholars who believe this crowd could have potentially been 10,000-20,000 people. They were all tired and they were all hungry. Long walks in fresh air tend to build a tremendous appetite.

These people had been following Jesus Christ, not because they had accepted Him as Personal Savior, but because of the amazing miracles. In fact, by the end of this chapter, many will stop following Him (6:66).

We need to see an important principle here - enormous crowds, emotional crowds, enthusiastic crowds in a religious setting do not equal real salvation or real spirituality .

The verb tenses of verse 2 indicate that this group continually followed Jesus Christ because of the signs and miracles. But I will say this about this crowd - they did do something very smart - they went to where they could potentially experience the power of God. On this day, every person in attendance would personally experience the power of God; had they stayed home, they would have missed this remarkable miracle. I am convinced there are things you will experience at church that you will not ever experience anywhere else. If you aren't there, you'll miss things.

COMPONENT PART #2 – The sense of the miracle. 6:5-9

There is sense or purpose to this miracle - namely **to discover where these disciples specifically were in their own faith**. In fact, it will be this miracle that causes Peter to say that Jesus is “the Christ of God” (Luke 9:20). Now Philip was a good man. He immediately followed Jesus Christ (1:43-44) and he was responsible for Nathanael coming to Christ (1:45-47). In **verse 5**, Jesus asks Philip where they could get some food. Philip was from Bethsaida (1:44), which was about nine miles away. If anyone knew the country and where to get food, it would be Philip.

Now according to **verse 6**, Christ wanted to test the faith of Philip, so he put him in a situation that was humanly impossible for him to resolve. Before moving on, a couple of observations: 1) God only puts His faithful people to the test; 2) When God does test us, He will put us in a difficult circumstance, with seemingly no solutions or answers, to prove our faith so our faith may grow stronger.

He asked Philip (**v. 5**) where they could buy enough bread to feed this many people. By the way, there is no indication that any apostle was thinking about the hunger needs of a bunch of people who are not even dedicated to Jesus Christ. In fact, they wanted to send them away (Matt. 14:15; Mark 6:35-36). God is a wonderful God and He cares about food for people who don't even know Him or love Him. Jesus never made food for Himself when He was hungry, but He did for this crowd because He cared about them. You trust Jesus Christ as Savior and watch the provisions of God that come your way. If you are faithful to God and find yourself in a situation with seemingly no solution, then get ready to see God work.

Philip naturally started to think about the money (**v. 7**) they had 200 denarii. One denarius was worth about a day's work, which was about 16 cents (Matt. 20:2). A denarius was a silver coin about two thirds size of a quarter. In our economy it would be worth an average day's wage. One thing to observe here is that Jesus and His disciples did have money to operate. They had enough money with them to potentially operate some six to eight months.

Philip said to Jesus (**v. 7**) we don't even have enough money to buy enough bread for people to receive even a little. Two hundred loaves of bread will not feed 20,000 people. What Philip should have said - is Lord you can easily provide the food. We have seen you turn water into wine, we have seen you heal people, and providing food is nothing for you to do because you are God. Tell me what you want to do. But Philip flunked this test.

I am convinced that God will put us to the test to see what we really believe about Him. **The test is this - do you really think I am God and I can meet your need?** Do you really believe that God is the One who is taking care of you, or do you believe you are the one taking care of yourself? **Moments of human inadequacy are always moments of great opportunity for developing trust in God and for seeing the power of God. “IMPOSSIBLE” is not a word found in God’s vocabulary.** We may limit what God does by making the assumption that it is impossible, but that is not faith, that is lack of faith.

Meanwhile, Andrew, Peter’s brother, had been out conducting a little survey among the people. Truth is, when it comes to the true work of God, conducting surveys rarely accomplishes much of anything. **What is needed are people who believe God, not people who conduct surveys.** Andrew had spotted a boy in the crowd who had a lunch of five barley loaves and two fish (6:9). The Greek word “lad” (παιδαριον) is one that refers to a relatively young boy, still being instructed and taught (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 333). Barley was the cheapest kind of bread, the bread of poor people. In fact, according to Revelation 6:6, one quart of wheat is worth three quarts of barley. This boy’s bread was not bread made with wheat, but barley. The fish were no bigger than sardines. This was a pickled fish, almost a jerky-type fish, which was known all over the Roman Empire. Fresh fish was a luxury. God loves to use small weak things to accomplish great things: 1) He used the cry of a baby to move the heart of Pharaoh’s daughter; 2) He used the staff of Moses to work many miracles in Egypt; 3) He used the sling and stone of David to drop Goliath; 4) He used a poor widow to sustain His prophet; 5) He took a poor virgin from the Roman Empire and had her give birth to His own Son. **God loves to use small things to accomplish big things.**

Andrew should have been excited at the potential of God. In fact, the first miracle that he should have sensed was this hungry boy hadn’t eaten his lunch yet. This would set the stage for something great. But Andrew forgot who he was traveling with and, according to the end of verse 9, he also flunked the test. These disciples are physically traveling with God, but they just haven’t figured this out yet.

What is the test for these disciples - do you really believe that Jesus Christ is God and is capable of miraculously meeting any need - physical or spiritual? Keep in mind that at this point, Jesus is only about one year away from Calvary, and these disciples are still flunking faith tests.

COMPONENT PART #3 – The specifics of the miracle. 6:9-14

There are five main facts of this miracle:

(Fact #1) - Jesus asked His disciples to have the people sit down. 6:10

There were so many people that he had the men sit down and they could take enough food for their families. They sat down in rows of hundreds and fifties (**Mark 6:39-40**). You have 5,000 men organized for this food distribution program. John brings out that there was a lot of grass (v. 10), which means it was a grassy meadow. This would have been at springtime, when the grass is plush. The thing I want you to see here is that God’s power is NEVER out of control and it is NEVER unorganized.

(Fact #2) - Jesus Christ took the boy's lunch and gave thanks to God. 6:11a

When we bow our heads and thank God for food, we are actually following the pattern of Jesus Christ. A critical key to getting more of God's blessings is to thank God for what you have. I personally know of a woman (I know the woman and have verified the story with two of her children) who had five children, who sat them down at a table one evening and all they had to eat was a piece of bread each and water and the mother said, we are going to thank God for this food that He has provided and before her prayer was over, there was a knock at the door and a neighbor had invited people for dinner, who had canceled at the last minute and they had so much food prepared that they didn't want it to go to waste, so they took it next door to this woman who was actually praying when they knocked on her door. Giving thanks for what we have is a key to seeing God do much more. (i.e. Thank God for your wife, your children, your home, your provisions. Don't covet someone else's.)

(Fact #3) - Jesus Christ had His disciples distribute as much as they wanted to every man. 6:11b

God is not a Person who provides in a stingy way, He provides in an abundant way. God is not some stingy miser who hoards; He gives and gives much more than we actually need. Dr. Walvoord used to say, "Always be generous with God's people and God will be generous with you."

(Fact #4) - Jesus Christ had His disciples gather up the leftovers. 6:12-13

There are people who think if they follow Jesus Christ they won't have anything. Truth is they will have plenty. There are some who say, I just can't afford to give regularly to the Lord, the truth is you can't afford not to. The closer you get to Jesus Christ the more you will realize you have an abundant life. There were twelve baskets of leftovers after every person had stuffed themselves. Whatever you decide to give to God, will be abundantly multiplied. Personal sacrifices precede great work and blessing.

(Fact #5) - Jesus Christ was viewed as "the Prophet" of God. 6:14

Some thought Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah or some other O.T. prophet raised from the dead (Luke 9:19). Remember, also, not too long before this happened, Jesus said that Moses wrote about Him (John 5:46). Many viewed Christ as the prophet Moses had predicted (Deut. 18:15-18). They had not trusted Him as Savior, but they did see Him as a special agent of God who needed to be made their King (**6:15**). They were ready to make Him their political leader because He would take care of them physically. What they didn't know is that before He would do this, He had to take care of them spiritually. They had a sin problem.

I want you to think for a moment about that boy who gave his lunch. You do not ever know what God will do by bringing a boy or girl to Jesus Christ or by turning over what you have to God. Andrew brought a boy to Christ and look at the miracle Christ performed. You as parents need to train your children in the ways they should go because you never know what God might do with them. You as a Sunday school teacher need to reach out and point that child to Jesus Christ for that child may influence many. In history, there was a story of a German schoolmaster who, when he entered the class of his boys in the morning, would take off his hat and bow in a very polite

way. He was asked one time, why do you bow before these boys? He said because you never know what they may become someday. One boy in that class was Martin Luther. You just never know who you are touching when you bring a boy or girl to Jesus Christ.

Three Applications:

- 1) Jesus Christ can meet every one of your needs, if you'll trust Him and go to Him. Do you really believe that? If you do, you will never be disappointed.**
- 2) You do not ever know what God may do when you bring some one or some thing to Him. God may do amazing things.**
- 3) You may not have much to offer to God, but offer to Him what you have. He can take who you are and what you have and do wonderful things.**