

A Banquet in the Wilderness

John 6:1-15

B.I: Jesus did not come to offer problem free living, feed our bellies, or bring peace on earth, but to give life abundantly to souls who hunger for God.

Introduction:

This week we turn another page on our study of the Gospel of John. Chapter six is a spectacular example both of Jesus' teaching and His power over creation. It begins with the feeding of the 5,000 immediately followed by Jesus walking on the stormy waves. Then he enters a synagogue and offers his "bread of life" discourse after which many of his disciples take offence and abandon Him and the apostle Peter makes one the most important confessions of faith we find anywhere in the gospel records. With this as kind of preview of coming attractions, please turn with me to John chapter 6, and we will read verses 1-15.

Read 6:1-15

This narrative takes place at the highpoint of Jesus' popularity. There will never again be so many people who profess to be followers (or disciples) of Jesus. John tells us there were 5,000 men. Matthew tells us that there were also women and children with them (probably pilgrims heading to Jerusalem for Passover) then there were likely more like 20,000 people who came to the countryside to hear Jesus teach that day.

It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of this miracle. This is Jesus' fourth sign as recorded for us in John, and it is the only miracle all four gospels record. Apparently all of the gospel writers wanted us to know what happened that day.

As we begin thinking about this passage it's important that we are very careful about how we interpret it. Narratives (stories) are different that doctrinal passage where Jesus is teaching. In a narrative you have to be careful to discern the purpose the original author had for including it and guard yourself from allegorizing or moralizing its meaning. For example, it's not uncommon to read a children's version of this event and be told in the end that the moral of the story is that children need to be encouraged to share with one another as the boy in the story shared his lunch with Jesus. Let me assure you, however, that the meaning of the story is something greater than "share your lunch."

Once again, here is a story that begs us to ask first *NOT* what does this story mean to me but what does this story tell us about Jesus? What does the apostle John want us to learn about Jesus? And again, we need to remind ourselves that the interpretive key to this gospel is found on John 20:31 "These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

The whole point of this entire gospel is *NOT* to teach us moral principles to live by but to help us come to believe that Jesus is actually the promised Christ so that by believing in Him we

might have eternal life. This is what John is aiming at. He is introducing us to the Messiah. So as we approach this text the first thing we observe is....

I. The Messiah Retreats to the Mountains: (1-4)

1. To set the stage, we need to remember that by now Jesus had become a well known figure in Israel and people are trying to figure out “is He is a prophet or might He be the very Christ, the Messiah of God?” They have seen many of his miracles. They’ve heard his teaching, and they want more.

2. We also need to understand at this point that (as the other gospel writers reveal) the disciples have just returned from their first assignments out alone where they taught and cast out demons and healed people away from Jesus (Luke 9:10-11). It seems clear that Jesus wanted time to hear about all that happened. Additionally, John The Baptist whom Jesus dearly loved, has just been beheaded by Herod (Matt. 14), so Jesus would have been experiencing all the emotions of joy mixed with grief that these events would have stirred. All of this explains why Jesus wanted to get away to a lonely place with his disciples (Matt. 14:13). So they got into boats and went to the North Eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee for a little R&R.

3. Verse 2 Apparently, however, it didn’t take long for people to discover that Jesus was in the area and they came to Him as a great crowd. And this is where we can begin making observations about the Messiah. Here Jesus was tired and probably emotionally drained, but when He sees the crowd coming Matthew tells us He had compassion on them and healed their sick (Matt. 14:14), and Luke tells us He also taught them (LK. 9:11).

4. Here, beloved, is an example of the approachability and availability of Jesus the Messiah. When you need Him you will never find Him preoccupied and unavailable. He is never too tired to meet with you or reticent to meet your needs. If you ask, He will give. If you seek Him, you will find. If you knock on His door, it will be opened to you. He is tender and full of compassion lovingkindness and if you are His child, He is always approachable and always welcomes us into His presence.

5. On the other hand, the Messiah is not to be thought of as a passive responder. He is also One who is determined to teach for the purpose of strengthening our faith in Him. So when we get to verse 5, John reveals that....

II. The Messiah Instigates a Problem: (5-8)

1. Read v. 5

2. What I want you to see here is that apart from the mysterious purposes of Christ, this was not a necessary problem. What I mean is that the crowd that showed up was not asking for food. No one was starving. In fact, we know that some of them had thought to bring their own food because we have the example of the boy who had the five loaves and two fish. It would have

been perfectly acceptable for Jesus to simply wrap up the event for the evening and send the people back home. But Jesus had something else planned.

3. Now, clearly Jesus could have just performed the miracle without dragging Philip into it but intended to do more than simply feed the people. He had something for Philip and the other disciples to learn as well. So he says to Philip “Where are we to buy bread, so that they may eat?” Why did he ask that question? He knew perfectly well what He was going to do. But read v. 6, “This He was saying to test Him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.”

4. In Matthew’s account Jesus simply says, “You give them something to eat” (Matt. 14:16). Do you see what Jesus is doing? He is instigating a problem for Philip. Why? Did the crowd need Philip’s involvement? Was Jesus just being unreasonable? No. He gave Philip the problem because He wanted to teach him something. John says he was “testing” Philip. That is, he was examining Philip’s faith with a view toward strengthening it.

5. Notice Philip’s answer (Read v. 7)

6. Andrew’s response isn’t much better (Read v. 9)

7. Constable notes that, “Two hundred denarii represented about eight months’ wages for a working man. Such a large sum might be the minimum they could scrape by with, but it would “not” provide enough “bread” to satisfy the people – even “a little.” Phillip, as an accountant, put his mental calculator to work and concluded that the situation was hopeless. (Constable p. 108).

8. And let me suggest to you that this is exactly where Jesus wanted him. He wanted Philip and the other disciples to view their assignment as hopeless. There is no possible way they can handle this! Jesus is commanding them to do something that they don’t have the capacity to do! Why? Let me suggest that the reason Jesus did it was to train His men (and us!) to trust Him when our assigned circumstances appear hopeless. He wants us to feel our dependence. He wants us to understand how powerless we are so that we will run to Him in faith.

9. Instead of concluding that the situation was hopeless, Philip should have said something like, “Jesus, the only way we are going to feed these people is if YOU take over and provide what none of us has. You who provided when the wine failed at Cana can surely provide food here.”

10. Jesus wanted the disciples to feel their hopeless inability so that they could more clearly see His majesty and glory when He provided bread for the multitude.

11. So first the Messiah retreats to the mountain. Then, the Messiah instigates a problem. Now...

III. The Messiah Satisfies the Multitude: (10-13)

1. Read 10-13

2. We could take the time to work through this verse by verse, but the point is obvious, isn’t it? Jesus created a problem in order to make His disciples feel their absolute inability and then He provided in magnificent abundance far more than anyone could have hoped for or imagined.

3. The helplessness of the disciples and the inadequacy of their means became the very platform upon which Jesus set His glory on display. His goal was not to humiliate his disciples but to teach them the joy of trusting in Him in the midst of circumstances that seem daunting and impossible to handle. And just to make sure none of them missed the point, he sent them each (all twelve of them) out with baskets after the meal to pick up the left-over fragment. Not the crumbs, but the pieces that were big enough to eat.

4. Nobody went away hungry that day. Verse 11 says they all got “as much as they wanted.” And verse 12 tells us they were “filled.” You see, Philip did the calculation and concluded if they had the equivalent of 8 months pay to buy bread there would not be enough for each person to get the equivalent of a sample from the Sam’s lady’s kiosk. But when Jesus takes over, the supply cannot be exhausted by the need. Everyone enjoys a feast that fully satisfies. And when no one can eat anymore, there are still twelve baskets full left over.

5. Behold the glory of your Messiah, Calvary Bible Church! He is no stingy Savior. To the contrary, He is greatly glorified by being the Supplier of all that we need. We know this is what He wants us to learn because of what He explains in the Synagogue later in this chapter.

A. (33) “The bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

B. (35) “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

C. (48) “I am the bread of life...”

D. (51) “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eat this bread, he will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

6. So what does God want us to learn from all of this?

IV. Application:

1. The primary message I believe God wants us to take away from this chapter is that Jesus is the Giver of eternal life. Creating bread for 20,000 was simply a physical picture of a profound spiritual reality; namely, that Jesus is the Giver of life – eternal life.

2. As the body cannot live on earth without food, so the soul cannot live in heaven without Christ. If you don’t know Christ, if you have not humbly received the forgiving grace that He purchased through his death and resurrection, your days are numbered. Even if you are a religious person like those whom Jesus walked among His whole life, if refuse to receive Him as your only Savior you are like a starving man who refuses bread. Unless you repent, you will die in your sin.

3. But oh my friend, this does not have to be your story. Jesus offers Himself freely to you. He has set before you a spiritual banquet of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. He offers you living water and the bread of life. Take Him. Receive Him, and you will find life for your soul.

4. We know that the crowd was not interested in coming to Jesus to be their Savior from sin and reconciler to God. They saw Jesus' power and concluded that what they could get from Him was an unlimited supply of bread, healing from every disease, and political utopia. (Read v. 14-15).

5. You see, they didn't really want Jesus. They didn't want a Savior from sin. They didn't want to be reconciled to God through Him. What they really wanted was the free stuff He could provide. But Jesus did not come to be that kind of King. He came to take away their sin and provide eternal life to all who will run to Him like a starving man would run to a table full of hot fresh bread.

3. A second application that goes along with the first is for believers. If you know Christ then answer me this; are you satisfied with Him? Jesus is not just the Giver of eternal life He is the great Satisfier of your soul. When He created bread for the multitude, they ate until they were full. They ate until they were completely satisfied. Beloved, Jesus is not about giving us just enough to survive. He wants our souls to be healthy and satisfied in Him.

4. Have you noticed that Jesus never pictures Himself as a cup of water or a crumb of bread. No! He offers Himself as a spring of living water and as bread that exceeds our capacity to fully consume. Here is the secret to the blessed, faithful, healthy, fruitful, and growing Christian life. We seek satisfaction in Him every day. Like king David (Psalm. 36) we understand that every day God prepares for us to feast on the abundance of His house; And He gives us to drink of the river of river of His delights. ⁹ "For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light."

5. Christian, know this: that Satan's goal in this life is to distract you and turn your heart away from Christ by any means possible. He will tempt you with every delicacies so that you will fall in love with God's gifts rather than the Giver himself. He will divert your heart with all kinds of good, exciting, and productive things that will use up your time and makes you feel a thrill inside. And the world is passionate about communicating His message.

6. I was in the internet a couple weeks ago and I saw an amazing video produced by Google. It was about the heart – both physical and spiritual. It was full of beauty and creativity and frankly it was captivating both to see and to hear. I thoroughly enjoyed seeing what they had produced. But then at the end it became obvious that the whole thing was a promotion for something called "Google Play," and the slogan that popped up on the screen at the end read simply and profoundly: "Play Your Heart Out." And I thought to myself, "That is exactly what the world, the flesh, and the devil wants me to do!" It couldn't be any clearer.

7. The enemy of your soul wants you to fritter the days of your life away snacking on the delights of the world so that He can keep you from being satisfied in Christ. But Jesus is a superior satisfaction! He is the bread of life, the living water, the treasure in field, the pearl of great price, man's everlasting joy! And the only way to successfully battle the world the flesh and the devil each day is to come to His table, dine at his feast, and fellowship with Him.

8. His message to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3 is His same message to us, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and dine with Him and He with me" (Rev. 3:20). That is where true satisfaction in Christ comes from. To

feast on Christ is to meet with Him daily: to read His word, worship as His feet, meditate on His truth, seek His wisdom and singing His praise.

9. Beloved, Jesus has prepared for you a feast. Will you dine with Him? Will you feed on all that God has provided for you in Him? He is the bread of life and He is daily nourishment for your soul.

10. Then there is a final application of this passage: If you are a child of God (a true disciple) then every difficult, tragedy, or disappointment you face comes to you through the gracious hands of a sovereign Savior. That difficult trial you are facing right now has been given for a purpose.

11. Read 6:5-6.

12. When we face difficult, even devastating trials, they often seem so random and disconnected from the plan that God seemed to have for our lives up until that moment. But the reality is it isn't any more random than Jesus turning to Philip and asking "Where are we to buy bread so this multitude may eat?" Today He is asking you, "What should be done about this bit of bad news, or frightening diagnosis, or broken relationship, or financial hardship, or some deep disappointment? You may honestly answer, "Lord, I don't know what to do! I can't do anything about it! I lack wisdom, I have insufficient resources, and the whole thing seems hopeless."

13. But know this. Jesus is a Savior with infinite resources. He has planned this trial for you from before the foundation of the world and it will be for your good. **Do not lean on your own understanding.** Trust Him with all your heart and see if His resources do not infinitely exceed your need. He is in control of your trial and in the end you will discover that He planned it so that He might be glorified in doing you good.

7. Spurgeon helps us here. He writes:

"Tried brother, Jesus knows all about your case and how he is going to bring you through. Do not think that you can inform him as to anything. 'Your heavenly Father knows what you have need of before you ask him.' Prayer is not meant for the Lord's information. The question is not put to you that you may instruct him, but that he may instruct you. He made the heavens and the earth without you. With whom took he counsel? Who instructed Him? And He will bring you through this present trial of yours without needing to add our poor wisdom to his infinite knowledge. He knows! [and His plan is perfect.]" (*Miracles and Parables of our Lord* (1998), Baker Book House Co (574).

8. Beloved, Jesus is the Bread of Life. There is much more to learn from this chapter in the weeks that lie ahead, but here is enough to meditate on until we meet again.