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## John 6:1-14 “The Feeding of the 5000”

Intro. From chapter 5 to chapter 6 there is a lengthy time gap of at least 6 months. As we saw in our last message, the hostility toward Jesus was growing among the leaders of Jerusalem, for they considered Jesus to be a threat to their own leadership. So Jesus spent most of the next year in Galilee. There, large crowds followed Him as He ministered among the people. So Jesus tried to get away from the crowds for a time of rest (Mk. 6:31) by going to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, as v.1 says.<sup>1</sup> But v.2 tells us that the crowds still followed Him. In fact, in our story today, over 5,000 men followed Jesus there. Since that number did not include women & children (Mt. 14:21), there could have easily been at least 10,000. What a crowd! To me this is proof that Jesus had indeed performed many miracles, as v.2 indicates. How else can you explain such a large crowd? Yet this also shows that they were following Him for the wrong reasons. They enjoyed the excitement and wonder of seeing Jesus perform miracles. Like too many churchgoers today, they were more interested in being entertained than in having their souls fed with the Word of God.

So Jesus arrived at the other side of the Sea of Galilee and retreated to a nearby mountain<sup>2</sup> and sat with His disciples. However, it wasn't long before a large multitude arrived, as indicated in v.2. Mk. 6:34 tells us that when Jesus saw the people coming to Him, He was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd. Even though an unworthy motive had drawn this crowd after Christ, He was not indifferent to their need. Instead of being upset that His quiet retreat with His disciples was about to be spoiled, Luke 9:11 says that He welcomed the multitude! He proceeded to heal the sick that were brought to Him. We know from Mark 6:34 that Jesus was also teaching the people “many things.” I would not be surprised to learn that Jesus taught the people for at least a couple of hours that day!

Well, the sun was beginning to set and v.5 implies that Jesus became concerned about the hunger of the multitude. He was setting the stage for one of His greatest miracles. Of all the wonderful works that our Savior did, none was performed before so many witnesses. It is the only miracle besides the resurrection that was recorded in all four gospels. You may have noticed so far in John's gospel that he usually refers to miracles as “signs,” as he did in v.2. Now a sign is a miracle that contains a message. Even so, every miracle Jesus did had a message, pointing to some great truth about Himself. Now before we look at the miracle itself, notice first of all:

### I. THE PREPARATION FOR THE SIGN

Jesus wanted His disciples to learn something from the miracle He was about to do that by asking a Philip a question in the last of v.5,<sup>3</sup> not really to gain information, but as v.6 says, to test him. As we shall see, Philip flunked the test. Let us learn from his mistake, so that we respond the right way the next time *we* are tested. Now in vv. 5-10, Jesus will teach us through this incident 3 requirements for experiencing His power and blessing in our lives. First of all:

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 6:31 says, “And He said to them, ‘Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.’ For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.”

<sup>2</sup> There are mountains all around most of the Sea of Galilee, from 2,000 – 4,000 feet high!

<sup>3</sup> This question echoes that of Moses in Num. 11:13, “Where can I get meat for all these people?”

A. We Must Acknowledge Our Own Insufficiency - Philip's answer is very significant. He casts his eye over the multitude, he makes a rough, rapid calculation, and responds in v.7, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little."<sup>4</sup> I'm quite sure that Jesus & His disciples did not have two hundred denarii in their possession. A denarius was a silver coin commonly used in the time of Jesus. It was usually equivalent to a full day's work. That would be over \$10,000 in today's currency. As Philip said, even that would only be enough to provide everyone with a little to eat. So Philip looked at the situation, looked at their limited resources, and said, "Mission Impossible."

Don't we do the same? If an unanticipated demand is suddenly made upon us, do we, like Philip and Andrew did, only look at *our own* resources? Do we either say to ourselves, "I can handle it"? Or do we say, "It can't be done," without a moment's thought of God? We need to learn what Paul did. He said in 2 Cor. 12:10, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (see also v.9). You must be emptied of your own self-sufficiency before you can be filled by God. That's the first step in seeing God work on your behalf.

B. We Must Trust in the Provision of Christ – In Him you will find that the power and resources will be available to meet the needs and obligations in your life. For after all, what is your feebleness in comparison with His power! What is your emptiness in comparison with His ocean of fullness? This miracle, perhaps more than any miracle Jesus ever performed, illustrates the truth that Jesus is all you need.

Apparently, Philip was an intensely practical person who seems to have had little faith in anything that he could not get hold of by his senses.<sup>5</sup> I believe that all the disciples were convinced this was "mission impossible"—and it would have been except for Jesus. He was very sure of what could *not* be done, but had no vision for what could be done. Like a great many other people of his sort, he left out one element in his calculation, and that was Jesus Christ. Philip could have said, "Master, you are equal to any occasion. I believe You can feed them!" Andrew did not do any better. After pointing out the lad with the loaves & the fish, he said in v.9, "...but what are they among so many?" What mattered the "many" when the Son of God was there! As we shall see, if you have the five loaves plus the two fishes plus Jesus, then you've got something.

One would have supposed that after all the disciples had already witnessed of the Lord's wonder-working power, they would have learned by this time that all fullness dwelt in Him. They had seen Jesus turn water into wine. They had seen Jesus heal the nobleman's son. They had seen Jesus heal a paralyzed man. They still didn't get it. I am convinced that Jesus was far more grieved over the lack of faith than He was over the lack of food.

Could it not be true that the Lord allows problems to confront us, so that He might also test our faith? How do you handle an unexpected expense, or news of a tragedy in the family? How often our faith is tested! You see, every problem you have is an opportunity for you to trust God and for God to bless you.

C. We Must Obey Christ – As the hymn writer said, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus..." We read in v.10, "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."<sup>6</sup> We see

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<sup>4</sup> The book, *Decisive Meals: Table Politics in Biblical Literature*, says that 200 denarii would purchase over 1,000 lbs. of barley bread.

<sup>5</sup> In John 1:46 Nathanael replied to Philip's claim that he had found the Messiah saying, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said in response, "Come and see." Later in John 14:8 Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."

<sup>6</sup> According to Mark, the multitude sat in groups of 50's and 100's. He described the scene as like that of garden beds

here that the disciples obeyed the orders of Christ. Likewise, even though some in the crowd may have scoffed or smiled with incredulity at the purpose for sitting, they obeyed. Their faith had failed, but their obedience did not.

Let us learn from this, that when Christ commands, it is for us to obey, not to reason and argue. And in v.11 John says according to our best Greek manuscripts: “And *therefore* Jesus took the loaves....” Sit down where He commands you, and your mouths will not be empty for long. Our business is to obey and to wait, and His business is to open His hand and let the mercy drop. Obedience and blessing are inseparably connected in God's Word.

If you're struggling with problems that seem to overwhelm you, and God seems to be absent, then you need to ask yourself if you are following the three preparatory steps that led to this miracle: acknowledge your insufficiency, trust in the sufficiency of Christ, and obey whatever He is telling you to do.

Now let us see secondly:

## II. THE PERFORMING OF THE SIGN

In spite of the weak faith of the disciples, Jesus proceeded to work the miracle. How thankful we should be that God's blessing are dispensed according to the riches of His grace, and not always according to the poverty of our faith. Christ never fails, though there is often failure in us. There was no harsh rebuke for either Philip or Andrew. The Lord knows our frame and remembers that we are dust.

Now let's see how this miracle came about:

A. He Uses Means - It is true that God is not limited to means, but frequently He employs them. When healing the bitter waters of Marah God used a tree (Ex. 15:23-25). Even so, in this story:

1. He Used a Boy – In v.9 Andrew said, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?” Even though all four gospel writers include this miracle, only John records that a boy<sup>7</sup> was involved in offering his food. I say that because I have an idea that the boy heard what Jesus said in v.5 and then offered to share his food. Why else would *his* food be mentioned? Surely they wouldn't take food from a boy while the disciples surely would have had at least that much food available! This boy obviously came from a poor family because barley was the bread of poor people.<sup>8</sup> He could hardly afford to give what he had. He could have said, “Look, it's every man for himself. I'm a poor little boy and I rarely get a lunch like this to begin with.” Perhaps he had more faith than the disciples. The little boy had enough faith to believe Jesus for a miracle.

This boy learned the inestimable honor and privilege of being “laborers together with God” (I Cor. 3:9). God used a Jewish servant girl to bring the mighty Naaman to Elisha. He used a poor widow with a handful of meal to sustain His prophet. And my friend, God wants to use you, though

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(6:40). The crowd looked like rectangular oblongs in a garden in which pot-herbs are grown, on the green grass, below the blue sky, by the side of the quiet lake. God is a God of order (I Cor. 14:40). Disorder and confusion is not of Him. I believe that sitting down was an important preparation for being fed. There is a spiritual application. The activities of the flesh must come to an end if the Bread of life is to be received by us. How much all of us need to ask God to teach us to be quiet and sit still. Psa. 23:2 says, “He makes me to lie down in green pastures.”

<sup>7</sup> In Mt. 11:16 the term (*paidarion*) refers to children playing in the marketplace. However, in the LXX it describes Isaac at age 12? (Gen. 22:5), Joseph at age seventeen (Gen. 37:30). In Judges 8:14 it is translated “a young man,” and in Judges 8:20 it is translated “a youth.”

<sup>8</sup> Only John mentions that the bread is barley.

you are young or old or weak and insignificant.

One area in which we ought to all remain just like a child is in the area of faith. Do you know what's wrong with many Christians? When it comes to faith many of us have gotten too big for our britches.

2. Christ Used the Boy's Bread and Fish - The bread spoken of was more nearly comparable to pancakes or pita bread for size and shape. The fish were probably small. Jesus did not scorn the loaves because they were few in number, nor the fish either because they were small. He can take our very little and make it very much.

He used David's sling and stone to overthrow the Philistine giant. It does not take much to accomplish big things when what little we have is surrendered to Jesus.

What you have to give to God may seem small & insignificant, but God can take it and do something great with it.

B. He Teaches Us to Give Thanks – We read in v.11, “And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples....” Note that the thanksgiving comes first, then the miracle. He teaches us to acknowledge God as the giver of every good gift.

Oh, let us follow the example of Jesus, and give thanks to God often. Yet how many times have we received blessings from God and failed to give thanks?

C. He Will Use Us to Distribute Blessings – We see this in v.11. They had the privilege of distributing the blessing of food to the hungry multitudes. So between the unsearchable riches of Christ and the hungry multitudes there is room for consecrated service and ministry. It is the happy duty of every child of God to pass on to others that which the Lord in His grace has first given to them. We must remember that it is God that gives the increase!

God could send an angel to preach far better than I, but He chooses to use me to give out the blessing of the Word of God. He could give food directly to the poor, but he uses us to distribute food to the needy in our community and around even around the world through our World Hunger offering.

Are you involved in serving the Lord, ministering His blessings to others? If not, you are missing out on a great blessing in life.

We can only imagine how the miracle took place. The word translated “distributed” (*diadidomai*) means to distribute by dividing (see Luke 11:22; 18:22; Acts 4:35). I have the idea that as Jesus broke off a piece of bread, the remaining bread may have grown back to the original size! But the means was not the focus of the miracle. Instead, He just very quietly and simply kept on multiplying the food.

There is a lesson here for us. If you think that people will be saved mainly through spectacular occurrences, then you need to learn something about God. He is not going to drop balls of fire from heaven to scare you into getting saved. As Elijah learned, God prefers to speak in a still small voice (1 Kings 19:12). He works through common, ordinary disciples to get the Bread of Life, the Word of God out to people.

Nevertheless, infinite resources are no excuse for waste, as we see in v.12. Jesus commanded, “Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.” John is the only gospel writer that records this command of Jesus. It is a sin to waste the good things God affords for us, whether it is money, time, health, or opportunity. We are taught by Christ to be good stewards of all the blessings that God gives to us.

However, it's interesting how many baskets of leftovers they gathered. There were twelve baskets of leftovers gathered—one for each disciple, all of whom couldn't imagine how the multitude could be fed. Don't you imagine that Jesus let that little boy take a basket home to his family! You

cannot out-give God.

So we have seen from our text the preparation of the sign, the performing of the sign, and now let us see:

### III. THE PERSON MAGNIFIED BY THE SIGN

Jesus did not perform this miracle only to satisfy their physical hunger. It was also to teach us some truths about Himself. That is the reason John records this miracle. So notice what this miracle teaches us about Jesus. First of all, this sign shows that:

A. Christ Is the Great Prophet Who Was to Come – After this miracle, the people confessed in v.14, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.” In Dt. 18:15 & 18 we read a prophecy of Moses concerning a coming great prophet. Moses said he would be “like me.” Notice that in v.4 John mentions that the Passover was near. At that time they were reminded that God used Moses to bring about a great deliverance, and God responded to the intercession of Moses, and provided bread from heaven for a multitude in the wilderness (Ex. 16:35; Ps. 78:24). Surely this miracle reminded the people of the work of Moses in their nation’s past. Therefore, the people concluded that Jesus was that Prophet since He fed the people bread in a miraculous way.

Certainly Jesus was the greatest of prophets. But He was more than that. It is tragic that they were willing to accept Jesus as the great prophet predicted by Moses, and many Jews interpreted that prophecy as a prediction of the coming Messiah. In fact, we see in v.15 that they wanted to take Jesus by force to make Him king, the Messiah. However, there is no confession that Jesus is the Son of God.

Men today are willing to accept Him as a great teacher, a great person, but no small number today deny that He was virgin-born & God Incarnate. Yet to acknowledge that Jesus was truly the greatest of the prophets of God is certainly a good starting place. That is why God commanded us to “hear Him” at His transfiguration (Mt. 17:5). Are you paying attention to what Jesus said?

So what else can we say about Jesus based on this miracle?

B. Christ Is the True Bread of Life – This is made clear in the last half of this chapter. He says v.35, “I am the Bread of Life.” We must have food to live, and bread was a staple of life in that day. Yet Jesus not only sustains physical life, but He also gives eternal life to all who trust in Him. How would He give eternal life? In v.51 He says, “...the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” Of course, He was referring to His death on the cross, which was essential for us receiving eternal life.

How do we receive the eternal life that He offers? He says in v.53, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.”

So we must personally receive Christ into our hearts. John 1:12 says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”

C. Christ Fully Satisfies – This truth is illustrated by the miracle. V.12 tells us, “So when they were filled<sup>9</sup>....” Unlike Philip, who was concerned that even 200 denarii would only provide “a little” for the people to eat (v.9), here we see that the people were filled. They ate all they wanted. The three other gospel accounts report that they ate and were satisfied. Perhaps now we

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<sup>9</sup> The Greek word translated “filled” is also found in Luke 1:53, “He has filled the hungry with good things....” Acts 14:17 says of God, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”

don't have to feel so guilty when we go to one of those all you can eat buffets! Jesus Himself served an all you can eat fish & bread dinner!

Yet the physical satisfaction of our hunger is not the main point. Who was it that filled them and completely satisfied their hunger? It was Jesus, and He alone can satisfy the deepest longings of our soul. How this sheds light on v.35, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." Surely He is not talking about an ongoing satisfaction of physical hunger and thirst. He is talking about spiritual satisfaction. He said later in 10:10, "...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." He is willing to fill us with His Holy Spirit, and all the fruit of the Spirit (cf. v.35). So there is not a hunger He cannot satisfy. There is not a hurt He cannot heal. There is not a question He cannot answer. There is not a problem He cannot solve. Jesus, the Bread of Life, is all you need. If you want true satisfaction, look to Jesus Christ. He alone satisfies. All fullness dwells in Christ, and you cannot exhaust His fullness.

D. Christ Is the Provider of His People - It encourages my heart and refreshes my soul to know that the same Jesus who looked out over 5000 hungry people and had compassion because of their need, also looks down today upon a crowded world and His great heart is still touched with compassion for the poor, hungry multitudes of earth. He is still concerned about bread for the body, and "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psa. 84:11). He feeds the sparrows, and He will surely feed us. Yet His provision is not limited to food. He provides all that we need physically, spiritually, and in every other way.

Conclusion: To the hungry He is the Bread of Life.  
To the thirsty He is the Fountain of Living Waters.  
To the sick He is the Balm of Gilead.  
To the darkened He is the Light of the World.  
To the outcast He is the Friend of Sinners.  
To the dying He is the Resurrection and the Life.  
Come to Jesus today!

Sources: Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2016; Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to John, Vol. 1* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1966); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955); Herschel H. Hobbs *John: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Dr. James Merritt (notes from his sermon on this text dated 12/13/92); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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