



## First Baptist Church At The Villages

Jesus: Seeing & Believing • Feeding the 5000 • John 6:1-21 •

For Use by Groups 3/15 through 3/21/2020

### MAIN POINT

In His generosity, God gives us everything we need for physical and spiritual nourishment.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Share an experience you've had telling a non-Christian friend, neighbor, or co-worker about Jesus. What objections did they have?**

**What questions have others had about your faith that you have struggled to answer?**

Many of us have faced challenges at one time or another when sharing the gospel with friends and neighbors. The gospel is considered offensive to many people because it's at odds with the ways of the world. But when we read about the signs and wonders that Jesus performed, the Bible allows for only one type of positive response: belief. These miracles and signs are recorded so that we believe Jesus is the Son of God.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read John 6:1-10.

**Who were these people who were coming to see Jesus?**

John wrote that this great crowd of people were following Jesus because of the signs He was performing. They were amazed at all Jesus had done, and seemed to believe in Him, or at least they believed in His power.

**How is believing in a sign and believing in a person different?**

**How did Philip respond to Jesus' question about feeding the multitude?**

**How much would it have cost to buy enough food for these people? What do you think that would look like today?**

**What does His answer tell us about His understanding of Jesus? How did Andrew respond to the same question?**

**Why are his words "but what are they to so many" important? What does it show about his attitude?**

The crowd was large—with women and children, it was probably as many as 20,000 people. It would have cost nearly eight months' wages to buy enough food to feed all of those people. Philip was only thinking in terms of finances, and Andrew was only thinking about what was in front of him—a tiny bunch of barley loaves and two fish. It was hardly a banquet. But the issue wasn't money, nor was it a matter of supply. For Jesus, this was an opportunity to display His power as the provider of all things. Those witnessing this miracle would have a choice to make, too.

| Have another volunteer read John 6:11-15.

**How much food was provided for the multitude?**

**Read 2 Kings 4:42-44. How does Elisha's miracle parallel Jesus'?**

**What can we infer about God's character from this sign?**

Jesus didn't just provide for the people; He provided extravagantly. Every person ate until full. This is just another reminder of the lavish generosity of God. He doesn't skimp and provide the bare minimum. Jesus took a poor boy's lunch and multiplied it exponentially. And God was not only generous in the past; He is generous today as well. God has blessed us so richly, giving all things to us—including His Son to die for us.

**Read verse 14-15. How do the people respond to Jesus' miracle?**

These people responded in a way most of us would be positively amazed by—they rejoiced! They recognized Jesus as the promised Prophet from Deuteronomy 18:15, the One who would come who was greater than Moses. You would think this would be something pleasing to Jesus, but His reaction wasn't so positive.

**How did Jesus respond to their actions? Why do you think He did this?**

| Have another volunteer read John 6:16-21.

**Imagine you saw a man walking on water. How would you react?**

**What is important about Jesus' greeting to His disciples in the boat?**

Jesus' walking on the water isn't explicitly called a "sign" in John's Gospel, but it's still one of the signs of His identity. This wasn't a party trick that Jesus was performing, or some sort of illusion. Jesus was giving His disciples a sign of His divine nature and sovereignty over all of creation. He was telling them that He was "I am who I am," the One who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, the One who redeemed the Israelites from slavery. And just as He had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt, He would soon redeem them from their slavery to a greater enemy: sin.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Do you struggle to see God as generous? Why?**

**Compare the reaction of the multitudes to your own experience of Jesus. How are they similar? What needs to change?**

**How can this group encourage you to focus on and respond to Jesus as He has revealed Himself?**

## PRAYER

Close in prayer, thanking God for the signs Jesus performed during His ministry. Thank God for revealing His generosity, and that He continues to be generous with us today, not simply providing our "daily bread," but giving us the Bread of Life—His Son. Pray for grateful and generous hearts among your group members, so that many others might hear the good news of Jesus and that by believing in Him would receive everlasting life.

## COMMENTARY

| John 6:1-21

6:1-4. The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels. Jesus had crossed to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee at a time when the Jewish Passover

feast was near. If we accept John 5:1 as a Passover, the reference in 6:4 would be the third Passover observance recorded in this Gospel.

This is one of those several examples in John where we see the miracle-message method of Jesus' ministry. Paul told the Corinthians that Jews required a sign, and John reminded us that a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick (6:2). Some scholars estimate there may have been as many as seven thousand to ten thousand people, since verse 10 talks about five thousand men. As we shall see, this chapter is about faith, but these people wanted food. Jesus talked about spiritual relationship, but the crowds were interested in physical showmanship. They focused on the lunch, not the love; on their bellies, not their beliefs.

Our passage first centers on people in need. As we have already seen, starvation is a stark and unpleasant reality in our modern world. Ten percent of the world's babies die before their first birthday, and one of every four children suffers from malnutrition. Yet the problem of spiritual hunger is even more severe. Like the people gathering on the mountainside in Galilee, millions today need the living bread that only Jesus can provide.

The introduction of the Passover is always significant in the chronological pattern of John's Gospel. He contrasted the rejection in Jerusalem at the end of chapter 5 with the magnificent scene of thousands coming to hear Jesus speak on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. This body of water actually has four names in Scripture: The Sea of Galilee and the Sea of Tiberias both identified here in our text; the Lake of Gennesaret in Luke 5:1; and the Sea of Kinnereth (Num. 34:11). Today it is generally called Lake Kinneret, but students of the Bible have difficulty calling it anything other than the Sea of Galilee.

6:5-9. Remember that Jesus had been doing more miracles than the three John has recorded for us so far. Many people followed him because of their interest in his power and his teaching. This crowd would have been greatly enlarged because of the number of visitors to Palestine for the Passover. Jesus had led his disciples out to this solitary place to have some private teaching time with them, but the crowds followed. Mark tells us in his account that Jesus had compassion on them and taught them late into the day—and he also saw their need for food.

From a picture of people in need we move to a picture of the disciples in confusion. Philip's reply is so typical of what we might say. He looked strictly at the human dilemma, considering only his own resources, and pronounced that the situation was hopeless. This whole inquiry was instigated by Jesus' question: Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? It is typical of John to remind his readers that Jesus already knew what would happen next (v. 6). At first we wonder why Philip was singled out, but then we remember he was a native of Bethsaida,

possibly the closest town. If a local convenience store had been open at that hour, Philip would have known about it. Nevertheless, Philip did a quick assessment of what it would cost for each one to have a bite!

But Andrew had a plan; this fellow-citizen of Bethsaida found a boy carrying a lunch consisting of barley loaves and fish. Like Philip, Andrew had no idea what use that pittance would be. John's record offers so many interesting observations, not the least of which is that the two fish Andrew found were definitely small. The word *opsarion* is used only by John, and it emphasizes the insignificance of these tiny sardines.

Two things surface in this portion of our text. First, we see that Jesus Christ was all-sufficient for any need even when his disciples were in confusion. Second, the purpose of the miracle seems clear: to instruct the disciples, to lay a foundation for the sermon on the bread of life, and to feed hungry people.

6:10-13. Like Moses' ancient rod, Samson's donkey jawbone, and David's sling, this simple lunch shows again that seemingly useless things can become important in Jesus' hands. He alone is all-sufficient. Everyone was satisfied, and each disciple had his own personal basket of leftovers as a reminder of the Master's power. The identification of the number of men appears in all four Gospels. We can only guess what the total number of people might have been. Some estimates reach as high as twenty thousand people. What a wonderful picture John paints of Jesus holding those five small barley loaves in his hands as he gave thanks. The verb is the word from which we get our word *eucharist*, though this was a simple mealtime blessing, not a religious ceremony.

But why the command to gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted? Obviously the ample provision is important (Jer. 31:14), and surely a special focus on the role of the disciples. All of them probably doubted that anything could be done to feed this vast number of people. Philip and Andrew just happened to be on the spot to respond publicly.

6:14–15. No one could deny the miracle, especially those who had enjoyed lunch. Many people were drawn back again to questions posed to John the Baptist in 1:21, particularly the reference to "that prophet" promised by Moses. But Jesus would have none of their political pressure brought on by full stomachs. He slipped again into the hills for rest and worship. Mark told us that he "dismissed the crowd" (Mark 6:45), and John told us that he withdrew again to a mountain by himself. He would be no political messiah hustled into battle with the Romans to regain Palestine for Israel.

This passage marks one of the high points of Jesus' popular favor. Since the promise of Deuteronomy 18, the Jews had looked for another Moses, for the great Prophet sent from God. And who better to fulfill that prophecy than this Jesus who gave them a new kind of manna? But the crowd's limited view of the prophet's message and ministry seemed to exclude his spiritual mission. They had no understanding of suffering for sinners and death for forgiveness.

No. Jesus could not accept the popular movement to make him king. The people were ready to offer him worship, but it was false worship. This was one of the things Satan had promised during the temptation in the wilderness—Jesus' own people wanting to make him king.

6:16–18. The Sea of Galilee lies six hundred feet below sea level, and the prevailing winds still blow from the west. According to John, his disciples went down to the lake. But both Matthew and Mark specify that Jesus sent his disciples away. We see here a lesson in authority for the disciples. Several of them were fishermen, and this east-west route across the lake toward the town of Capernaum would not have been unfamiliar. But it was dark and the waters were treacherous. This miracle also appears in Matthew 14:22–33 and Mark 6:45–52. Presumably, Jesus had set a time and perhaps even a place where he would meet them on the west coast of the lake.

6:19–21. The distance across the northern end of the Sea of Galilee is about five miles, so they were more than half way across when they saw Jesus walking on the water. He knew their problems with faith and fear; Mark tells us he had been watching them (Mark 6:48). This was no ghost, no mystical apparition brought about by their terrified emotions. His words are so like the Lord: It is I; don't be afraid.

This miracle revealed Jesus' authority to the disciples and his purpose of ministry to the crowds. The requirements for help in their distress were simple enough—recognize their own need and take Jesus into the boat. That has not changed much in our day. But just seeing Jesus and recognizing him were not enough; they had to take him into the boat. As we shall see in our continuing study of this chapter, intellectual assent must be accompanied by spiritual appropriation and personal commitment to gain eternal life, or—as in this case—to gain physical safety.