

## In His Hands – John 6:1-14

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Read Text

#### B. The Feeding of the 5,000

1. Only 1 of the miracles of Jesus is recorded in all 4 gospels – the feeding of the 5,000.
2. In our previous studies in John we've seen how John wrote last, after Matthew, Mark's and Luke's stories were already in circulation.
3. John says he intended his account of the life of Christ to fill in some of the things the others left out.
4. His plan in writing wasn't so much to give a timeline of the events of Christ's life so much as to highlight certain things He did & said that would lead the reader to faith.
5. That's why John includes the feeding of the 5,000; because it was an important sign pointing out just who Jesus was.
6. In fact, as we saw last Wednesday, the miracle set the scene for one of the most important teachings Jesus gave.

### II. TEXT

#### A. Vs. 1-2

**<sup>1</sup>After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. <sup>2</sup>Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased.**

1. This was the point at which Jesus was *most popular* with the common people.
2. His fame had spread throughout the entire region and people were coming from far & wide to hear & see Him.
3. His words were like a breath of fresh air, bringing much needed reform to the lifeless rules & regulation of the scribes & Pharisees.
  - a. Jesus spoke with an authority unlike the other rabbis of the day.
  - b. As they listened to Him, they heard the heart & spirit *behind* the Law & Prophets.
  - c. But it wasn't just His fellow Jews who were drawn to His teaching.
  - d. Many Gentiles heard about a God who loved them & yearned to be in close, warm fellowship with them.
    - 1) This was completely unlike the pagan idols they worshipped;
    - 2) Capricious deities driven by petty jealousies and the lust for power.
    - 3) So even some of the Romans & Greeks who lived in Decapolis, the region bordering Galilee, were coming to hear Him.
4. Coupled with Jesus' incredible teaching was the awesome power of the miracles He performed so effortlessly.
  - a. Everywhere He went people were healed of all kinds of diseases.
  - b. Those possessed by demons were delivered by a word.
5. After spending a day with Him, people ran home to tell others, returning with others.

6. And soon, the numbers coming to see Him were vast, in the thousands.
7. Of course, this was in a time before PA systems.
  - a. It's not by chance that Jesus centered this phase of His public ministry in Galilee.
  - b. For you see, the environment is perfect for the human voice to be heard at great distance there.
  - c. Galilee lies below sea level. The added air density & topography carry sound farther.
  - d. In our recent trip to Israel we stood at the top of a little valley next to the Hill of the Beatitudes where an American University did tests and discovered that a person talking at normal volume can be heard several hundred feet away.
8. Now, here's the point – when God created the Earth & shaped its features, He molded Galilee as a natural theater for the Messiah.
  - a. He knew the day would arrive when thousands would come to hear the Son of God, and prepared the scene so His words could be clearly heard.
  - b. That same God Who was so careful to set things up for people to hear Jesus 2000 years ago is no less concerned that YOU hear too.
  - c. He's been at work molding and shaping the events of your life to bring you here today and to bring you face to face with Jesus.

#### **B. Vs. 3-4**

**3** And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. **4** Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near.

1. The lake is surrounded by rolling hills.
2. Jesus led the disciples onto one of these hillsides and sat down; the position a teacher took when He was about to begin a lesson.
3. John tells us this took place at the Season of Passover, which was the most festive season of the Jewish year, so we can picture it kind of like the season we're in right now.
4. They were supposed to observe the holiday in Jerusalem, a 3 to 4-day journey to the South.
  - a. Whole villages traveled in groups & made a joyous celebration of it.
  - b. The men would travel together while the women & children formed their own contingent.
  - c. As they went along the road they swapped stories, sang songs, & had a grand time.
5. We know that Galilee was a densely populated area with thousands of small towns and villages.
6. So as the Passover pilgrimage *began*, many of them passed through the place where Jesus was & stopped to check out the One they'd been hearing so much about.
7. They found Jesus sitting on the hillside with the disciples.

#### **C. Vs. 5-6**

**5** Then Jesus lifted up *His* eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, **“Where shall we buy bread, that these**

may eat?” **6But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.**

1. Jesus looked out, saw the multitude, turned to one of the disciples & asked *where* they could get enough bread to feed everyone.
2. Note that: Jesus asked Philip “*where*” they could find enough bread.
  - a. He didn’t ask *how* they could get bread or even *if* they *ought* to.
  - b. The question was “*where*?”
3. Jesus already had a plan for feeding the multitude but in *training the disciples*, there was an important lesson to learn.
4. The *first step* was to *see the need*.
5. The *second* was to realize that the need went *beyond their ability*.

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6. Before we move on to consider that, don’t miss what these verses teach us about Jesus.
  - a. He went up that hillside to spend some time with His disciples.
  - b. But when the multitude approached, He didn’t say, “Oh no, here they come again. Why can’t they leave Me alone for a while? Let’s get out of here,” and run away.
  - c. He didn’t see the multitude as a *bother*, a problem to ditch.
  - d. Rather, He was concerned about their need for food.
  - e. The other gospels tell us it was getting late, too late to find provisions in that secluded place.
7. Jesus knew they were hungry and determined to meet their need.
8. Jesus will go on to *use* the miracle of feeding as a way to teach them about *the even greater importance* of their *spiritual* need.
9. Now, that part of the lesson many modern Christians have down cold. I mean, we’ve nailed that part.
10. What *we* need to remember is that God *does care* about such things as hunger.
  - a. He does know when we’re hungry.
  - b. He knows when the pantry is bear because we’re out of work.
  - c. He knows when the bills are due and there’s no money in the checking account.
  - d. He knows about these things and He cares!
11. Jesus didn’t just see a “multitude” that day on that hillside; He saw *people*.
  - a. Hungry men, women, & children who’d been traveling all day along dusty roads.
  - b. Their need for food was real. They were weak & faint & needed sustenance.
  - c. Jesus was moved BY their need, and moved to meet it.
12. Listen—God *knows* about your needs & He *IS* concerned about them!
  - a. While it’s true that our greatest need IS spiritual, that doesn’t negate the reality of the physical.
  - b. God wants to prove He’s sufficient to meet our *spiritual need* by taking care of our physical needs.
  - c. That’s one of the primary lessons we glean from this story.
  - d. But Christian, don’t miss out on the fact that Jesus was *moved with compassion* by the physical hunger of the multitude.

13. We can draw immense comfort from the fact that Jesus sees our need & wants to meet it.
- But not just ours – He sees the needs of others as well.
  - And just as He used the disciples to feed the multitude of hungry that day on that hillside 2000 years ago,
  - He wants to use his followers today to meet the needs of the hungry,
    - the thirsty,
    - the naked,
    - the sick,
    - the imprisoned,
    - the at risk,
    - the endangered,
    - the abused & neglected.
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14. Jesus asked Philip, one of the disciples, *where* they could buy enough bread to feed the whole crowd.
- That word “buy” in v. 5 is the Greek word ‘agorazo’.
  - It comes from the word ‘agora’ = marketplace.
  - Maybe you’ve heard of agoraphobia – it’s a fear of people, or being out in public.
  - The emphasis in this word isn’t on *purchasing* so much as on *shopping*; of being out in the public marketplace.
  - When Jesus asked Philip *where* they were going to get bread, the emphasis wasn’t on *how they could afford it* but simply what bakery had sufficient supplies.
  - Philip knew the area they were in real well.
  - So Jesus asked him where they could go to get some food.
15. Look at Philip’s reply . . .

#### **D. V. 7**

**<sup>7</sup> Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.”**

- Philip’s mind immediately ran to the *cost* of feeding the multitude.
- A denarius was a day’s wage and could buy a lot of bread.
  - But even 200 denarii wouldn’t be enough to properly feed *this* group.
  - In v. 10 we’re told that the *men* numbered about 5,000.
  - Since only men were counted, & these were entire families headed to Jerusalem, many scholars conclude that the multitude probably numbered between 10,000 & 12,000!
  - So Philip was right; 200 denarii wouldn’t be near enough to purchase bread for this size a crowd.
  - Unlike our modern dinner table, bread was a *staple* of the ancient middle eastern diet.
    - Meat was eaten only rarely, on special occasions such as the religious feasts.
    - They ate dried fish, cheese, vegetables, dried fruit, olives, nuts & lots of fresh, whole-grain bread.

3. Though Judas was the treasurer among the disciples, Philip knew they didn't have the cash on hand to buy enough bread for that many people.
4. I love this response of Philip because it shows the reaction of many when a need arises. Their answer is to ***throw money at it***.
  - a. That seems to be the government's answer to most problems; throw money at it.
  - b. If the problem persists, throw **MORE** money at it.
  - c. It's been fascinating watching news reports about how much money the Federal government has given to the Katrina Relief.
    - 1) There was a lot of criticism at first that more money wasn't authorized.
    - 2) Then Congress pledged more money; after that ***even more***.
    - 3) Criticism eased as the numbers went up, as though allocating more money was the answer.
    - 4) Now we know that while there's a lot of money available, there's no real plan for what to do ***with it!!!!***
    - 5) That's why we're sending teams there every couple months, because there's still a huge number of people in trouble & in need of assistance.
    - 6) The money isn't getting to them!
5. Jesus asked Phil where they could get bread. He replied they couldn't ***afford*** it.
6. But the people didn't need money. They didn't even really need bread as we'll see.
  - a. They needed Jesus!
  - b. His question was meant to reveal that very thing to Philip.

#### **E. Vs. 8-9**

**<sup>8</sup>One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, <sup>9</sup>"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"**

1. Every time we encounter Andrew, he's bringing people to Jesus.
2. Here he brings a young boy with 5 rolls & 2 smoked fish.
  - a. Barley bread was coarse & cheap; the bread of the poor.
  - b. It was so dense & hard to eat it was made into little buns, like dinner rolls.
  - c. The fish were probably tilapia caught on the lake there.
  - d. They would be dried & smoked, and we're told these were little, probably about the size of fat sardines.
3. How Andrew discovered this little boy isn't said, but it's not hard to imagine that as Jesus issued this challenge to the disciples, he tugged on Andrew's robe & showed him what he had.
4. Touched by the boy's generosity, Andrew pointed him out to Jesus, knowing He too would be pleased.
5. But Andrew didn't really think anything would come of it, as evidenced by the remark – "What good is such a meager offering in the face of such need?"
6. Well, it was precisely this ***kind of offering*** Jesus was looking for . . .

#### **F. Vs. 10-14**

**<sup>10</sup>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.**

1. The hillsides of that area are gently rolling & covered with grass, making a perfect setting for Jesus to fulfill a prophetic picture given in Psalm 23.
2. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me besides the still waters.”
3. The other gospels tell us when Jesus had the people sit down, He had the disciples group them in bunches of 50. Can you guess why?
  - a. How many sheep would you guess comprised the average flock? Yep—about 50.
  - b. That hillside would have looked from a distance like it was covered with dozens of flocks, lying in green pastures, by the still waters of the lake.
  - c. And who is their shepherd? **Jesus!** Who is Jesus? **The Lord!**
  - d. When David wrote Psalm 23, **WHO** did he mean when He said, “The Lord is my shepherd”? **God!**
  - e. Jesus wanted the people to realize Psalm 23 spoke of Him; He is the Lord their God.
  - g. And as they look to Him, He will provide for them – they shall not want.

**11 And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed *them* to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.**

4. Jesus took the 5 barley rolls & fish, said the prayer of thanks giving over it, broke them and handed them to the disciples.
5. As the disciples went out to distribute what He’d given them a miracle happened; it multiplied in their hands.
6. As they broke off a piece of bread and handed out the fish, more appeared. The supply wasn’t exhausted till everyone was satisfied.
7. And I have to believe that just as the wine Jesus made at the wedding in Cana was the best,
  - a. As the disciples passed out this bread it was transformed from yucky barley bread into fresh, flaky butter croissants.
  - b. The dried, smoked tilapia morphed into succulent Andria’s battered fish.
8. I’m not going to waste any time this morning on the silly nay-saying of the skeptics who explain away this miracle.
9. The text is clear; everyone ate till they will *stuffed*. In fact, there was food left over!

**12 So when they were filled, [stuffed, gluttoned] He said to His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.”**

**13 Therefore they gathered *them* up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.**

10. John uses precise words to make sure we understand that the leftovers were from the 5 barley loaves – not from the food the people had brought out of hiding, as the modern critics contend.
11. So much of the foolishness of the skeptics would be cleared up if they would just **READ** the Bible instead of what each other are saying *about* it.
12. Jesus told the disciples to collect the leftovers *so that nothing would be lost*.

13. God is never wasteful & He never loses anything.
14. We could wonder why there *were* leftovers; why didn't the miracle stop as soon as all were filled?
  - a. The answer lies in how many baskets of leftovers were collected – 12.
  - b. Remember, the multitude was made up of Jews.
  - c. The number 12 was identified with one thing in their minds – the *Tribes of Israel*.
  - d. Jesus wanted them all to understand that He was indeed the Lord, The Shepherd of Israel.
  - e. And just as He'd taken care of their need that day on the hillside in Galilee, He could take care of the entire Nation.
  - f. 12 baskets of miracle-bread, one for each of the 12 tribes.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. *The Lesson for the Disciples*

1. But there was a specific lesson for the *disciples* in all this; *they* were the ones who collected the leftovers.
2. Each returned with a basket full of bread, and as they stood there in front of Jesus, they realized *He'd used them* in bringing the miracle to pass.
3. When all was said and done, with the thousands now full, they each stood there with a basket full of bread, ready to feed any others who came along hungry.
4. Jesus was training them, preparing them for the time when He would return to the Father and *turn over* the work to them.
  - a. He knew there would be many *more* times when the need around them was immense and went beyond their meager resources.
  - b. He wanted them to know that they would meet that need, not by what they had, but by His power working through them.
  - c. He would take the little they offered & make it much; enough to complete the job.
5. Those first disciples learned that lesson & passed it on to the next generation of disciples, who passed it on to the generation *after them* & so on, until here we are today.
6. It's a lesson *we* must learn and in turn pass on to those who come after us.
7. As we face a world of unending need, we must remember that the answer is Jesus.
  - a. The solution to world hunger is Jesus.
  - b. The answer to the AIDS pandemic is Jesus.
  - c. The solution to environmental problems is Jesus.
  - d. The answer to terrorism is Jesus.
8. No matter what the problem, whatever the crisis – the answer is Jesus.
9. As it says in Matthew 6, if above all things we'll seek God's rule & righteousness, He'll take care of *all the rest*.
  - a. This is the way He designed it all; this is the way life works.
  - b. If we do what we were created for which is know & enjoy God, He'll take care of the details of everything else.

#### B. *He Left us Here to Make That Known*

1. We look at the problems in the world today & feel so small & powerless in the face of them. What can one person do?
2. And so, feeling defeated, most often we do *nothing*.
3. Some see a need & get angry that *others* aren't doing something about it!
  - a. They criticize because the need hasn't *already* been taken care of it.
  - b. There rarely stop to consider what they could do themselves.
  - c. It's always someone else's job.
4. Let's set all of that aside for a moment; all the feeling overwhelmed or being critical.
5. Let's simply play the part Jesus wants us to play – to meet the needs around us He opens our eyes to.
  - a. I can't solve the problem of *world* hunger but I can feed one lone child in India through GFA or Compassion International or Samaritan's Purse.
  - b. I can't find a family for all the orphans in Mexico, but I can provide a home for one of them at *El Reino de los Ninos* in Maneadero.
  - c. I can't put down the LRA rebels in Uganda, but I can protect some of the kids they want to abduct tonight.
  - d. I can't end the abortion of 1½ million unborn babies, but I can reduce that total by 1 or more in volunteering at the local CPC.
  - e. I can't end gang violence, but I can work with kids at the local rec center and offer them an alternative to being on the street.
6. Here's what happens when we simply step out with the little we have to offer, the little which seems like not much – God will take it when we simply step out in faith in Him, and He will turn it into much.
7. History is filled with the stories of simple men & women who simply reached out to those in need around them, and ended up changing the world.
  - a. Mother Teresa,
  - b. Martin Luther King
  - c. William Wilberforce
  - d. Wes Bentley
8. Some years ago, Amy Mount, now Cappan, went to Uganda on the first trip Pastor Charley led to the New Hope Orphanage CCO supports.
  - a. She became close to some of the staff & orphans there.
  - b. After marrying Matt & moving from her home & family in Camarillo further South, she started a small child-sponsorship organization to help with the needs of the New Hope orphans.
  - c. When the terror of the LRA flared up, Amy began working with some of the staff of New Hope who felt led to provide shelter for the countless children who were coming from the villages every night to find refuge in the cities.
  - d. Her lone efforts have now led to a ministry of many who are providing help for dozens of kids.
  - e. Many lives have been saved, because one, normal, average follower of Jesus saw a need and instead of making excuses and turning away, did what she could.
9. God wants to use you.
  - a. When you see a need, the question will come – *Where* will you get what's



needed to meet that need?

- b. Don't be like Philip & look to the cost or your inadequacy.
- c. Look to Jesus. Let Him take your little and make it much.