

John 6:1-21
June 22, 2025

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When your faced with the reality of the hunger faced by those around us, how do you respond? Do you feel overwhelmed and do nothing? Do you assume your resources are inadequate to help so you don't release them? Do you worry about how much it will cost to help? [Let people engage]

Transition: Today's text, in which we read the familiar story of Jesus feeding the 5,000, invites us to wrestle with "What are we going to do to feed the hungry?" And the question is being posed – not because God can't do it without us - but because in answering that question, we are invited to re-encounter and be amazed by a God who is not hindered by the magnitude of the problem or the meagerness of our resources. When we see that whatever we have is open to be used by God, no matter how small, He can use the gifts and resources of anyone who is willing to offer what they have. He takes it and does abundantly more with our resources than we could ask or imagine. Let's read the text and process it.

BOOK:

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

6 Sometime after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias),
² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.
³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.
⁴ The Jewish Passover Feast was near.
⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"
⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.
⁷ Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"
⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up,
⁹ "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"
¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them.
¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.
¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted."
¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴ After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

Jesus Walks on the Water

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake,

¹⁷ where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them.

¹⁸ A strong wind was blowing, and the waters grew rough.

¹⁹ When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified.

²⁰ But he said to them, “It is I; don’t be afraid.”

²¹ Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

The practical lesson is clear: whenever there is a need, give what you have to Jesus, no matter how small it may be, and let Him do the rest. We need to release our resources to Him in faith. That little lad is to be commended for sharing his lunch with Christ, and his mother is to be commended for giving him something to give to Jesus. The gift of that little snack meant as much to Jesus as the pouring out of the expensive ointment.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 309-310). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Since John's Gospel is selective (John 20:30–31), he does not record events in the life of Jesus that do not help him fulfill his purpose. Between the healing of the paralytic (John 5) and the feeding of the 5,000, you have many events taking place, some of which are mentioned in Luke 6:1–9:10 and Mark 3:1–6:30. During this period our Lord preached “the Sermon on the Mount” (Matt. 5–7) and gave the parables of the kingdom (Matt. 13).

The feeding of the 5,000 was a miracle of such magnitude that it is recorded in all four Gospels. A great multitude had been following Jesus for several days, listening to His teaching and beholding His miracles. Jesus had tried to “get away” to rest, but the needs of the crowd pressed on Him (Mark 6:31–34). Because of His compassion, He ministered to the multitude in three different ways.

Jesus Feeds the Multitude (John 6:1–14)

The problem, of course, was how to meet the needs of such a vast crowd of people. Four SOLUTIONS were proposed.

First, the disciples suggested that Jesus send the people away (Mark 6:35–36). Get rid of the problem (see Matt. 15:23). But Jesus knew that the hungry people would faint on the way if somebody did not feed them. It was evening (Matt. 14:15), and that was no time for travel.

The second solution came from Philip in response to our Lord's “test question” (John 6:5): raise enough money to buy food for the people. Philip “counted the cost” and decided they would need the equivalent of 200 days' wages! And even that would not provide bread enough to satisfy the hunger of all the men, women, and children (Matt. 14:21). Too often, we think that money is the answer to every need. Of course, Jesus was simply testing the strength of Philip's faith.

The third solution came from Andrew, but he was not quite sure how the problem would be solved. He found a little boy who had a small lunch: two little fish and five barley cakes. Once again, Andrew is busy bringing somebody to Jesus (see John 1:40–42; 12:20–22). We do not know how Andrew met this lad, but we are glad he did! Though Andrew does not have a prominent place in the Gospels, he was apparently a “people person” who helped solve problems.

The fourth solution came from our Lord, and it was the true solution. He took the little boy's lunch, blessed it, broke it, handed it out to His disciples, and they fed the whole crowd! The miracle took place in the hands of the Savior, not in the hands of the disciples. He multiplied the food; they only had the joyful privilege of passing it out. Not only were the people fed and satisfied, but the disciples salvaged twelve baskets of fragments for future use. The Lord wasted nothing.

The practical lesson is clear: whenever there is a need, give all that you have to Jesus and let Him do the rest. Begin with what you have, but be sure you give it all to Him. That little lad is to be commended for sharing his lunch with Christ, and his mother is to be commended for giving him something to give to Jesus. The gift of that little snack meant as much to Jesus as the pouring out of the expensive ointment (John 12:1ff).

But did Jesus really perform a miracle? Perhaps the generosity of the boy only embarrassed the other people so that they brought out their hidden lunches and shared them all around. Nonsense! Jesus knows the hearts of men (John 2:24; 6:61, 64, 70) and He declared that the people were hungry. Surely He would have known of the existence of hidden food! Furthermore, the people themselves declared that this was a miracle and even wanted to crown Him King! (John 6:14–16) Had this event been only the result of mass psychology, the crowd would not have responded that way. John would never have selected this as one of the “signs” if it were not an authentic miracle.

It is significant that twice John mentioned the fact that Jesus gave thanks (John 6:11, 23). Matthew, Mark, and Luke all state that Jesus looked up to heaven when He gave thanks. By that act, He reminded the hungry people that God is the source of all good and needful gifts. This is a good lesson for us: instead of complaining about what we do not have, we should give thanks to God for what we do have, and He will make it go farther.

Jesus Leaves the Multitude (John 6:15–21)

Jesus compelled the disciples to get into the boat (Matt. 14:22; Mark 6:45) because He knew they were in danger. The crowd was now aroused and there was a movement to make Him King. Of course, some of the disciples would have rejoiced at the opportunity to become famous and powerful! Judas would have become treasurer of the kingdom, and perhaps Peter would have been named prime minister! But this was not in the plan of God, and Jesus broke up the meeting immediately. Certainly the Roman government would have stepped in had a movement begun. Did Jesus know that a storm was coming? Of course. Then why did He deliberately send His friends into danger? Quite the opposite is true: He was rescuing them from greater danger, the danger of being swept along by a fanatical crowd. But there was another reason for that storm: the Lord has to balance our lives; otherwise we will become proud and then fall. The disciples had experienced great joy in being part of a thrilling miracle. Now they had to face a storm and learn to trust the Lord more. The feeding of the 5,000 was the lesson, but the storm was the examination after the lesson.

Sometimes we are caught in a storm because we have disobeyed the Lord. Jonah is a good example. But sometimes the storm comes because we have *obeyed* the Lord. When that happens, we can be sure that our Savior will pray for us, come to us, and deliver us. In writing the account of this event years later, perhaps John saw in it a picture of Christ and His church. Christ is in heaven interceding for us, but we are in the midst of the storms of life, trying to reach the shore. One day, He will come for us and we shall reach the port safely, the storms all past.

Actually, there were several miracles involved in this event. Jesus walked on the water, and so did Peter (Matt. 14:28–32). Jesus stilled the storm, and instantly the boat was on the other shore. Of course, all of this happened at night so that only Jesus and His disciples knew what had

occurred. Jesus had led His people into the green pastures (John 6:10), and now He brought them into the still waters (Ps. 23:2). What a wonderful Shepherd He is!

As you read the Gospel records, note that our Lord was never impressed by the great crowds. He knew that their motives were not pure and that most of them followed Him in order to watch His miracles of healing. “Bread and circuses” was Rome’s formula for keeping the people happy, and people today are satisfied with that kind of diet. Give them food and entertainment and they are happy. Rome set aside ninety-three days each year for public games at government expense. It was cheaper to entertain the crowds than to fight them or jail them.

We must never be deceived by the “popularity” of Jesus Christ among certain kinds of people today. Very few want Him as Savior and Lord. Many want Him only as Healer or Provider, or the One who rescues them from problems they have made for themselves. “And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40).

Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 293-294) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

1. Jesus’ signs on the land and the lake (6:1–21).

a. *Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000 (6:1–15)*

The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 is the only sign recorded in all four Gospels (besides Jesus’ resurrection). This fact alone points to its importance. The significance of the sign was expounded by the Lord in a long discourse (vv. 22–71). The miracle was spectacular, and it caused a peak in the people’s messianic expectations. But in its aftermath, many of His followers no longer followed Him (v. 66).

6:1–2. Though **some time after this** is indefinite, it can be learned from the Synoptics that Herod Antipas had killed John the Baptist (Mark 6:14–29; cf. John 3:24), the disciples had preached throughout Galilee (Mark 6:7–13, 30–31), multitudes of people were curious about Jesus, and Herod Antipas was seeking Jesus (Luke 9:7–9). So the time between the events in John 5 and 6 was probably six months. From verses 1–2 it seems that Jesus had gone to the northeast side of **the Sea of Galilee** with His disciples for rest. This lake was also called **the Sea of Tiberias** (cf. 21:1), named for a town on the lake’s west shore built by Herod Antipas. But a **crowd** gathered even in this “solitary” (cf. Matt. 14:13; Mark 6:32) and “remote place” (Matt. 14:15).

6:3–4. The mention of **the hillside** or “the mountain” (NASB) may indicate an intended parallel to Moses’ experience on Mount Sinai (cf. vv. 31–32). The notice that **the Jewish Passover feast was near** is theological and only secondarily chronological. The people were thinking in terms of blood, flesh, lambs, and unleavened bread. They longed for a new Moses who would deliver them from Roman bondage. Since this was the second Passover John mentioned (cf. 2:13, 23), and since he mentioned at least one other Passover (13:1 [5:1 refers to an unnamed feast of the Jews]), Jesus’ ministry extended for about three years. The events in chapter 6, then, took place about one year before He was crucified.

6:5–6. Jesus’ question **to Philip—Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?**—was not for information but was part of His program of educating the disciples. Philip was from Bethsaida (1:44) which was the closest town, and he would know the local resources. The answer to Jesus’ question was that it was impossible, humanly speaking, for thousands of people to get bread late in the day from the little neighboring villages. John wrote, as he thought back on the incident, that Jesus was asking this **to test Philip**. God tests people to refine their faith, never to tempt them to do evil (cf. Gen. 22:1–18; James 1:2, 13–15; 1 Peter 1:7).

6:7. The amount needed was a large sum of money: literally, “200 denarii.” One denarius was the wage for a day’s work; this would have been **eight months’ wages**. Even if the bread had been available, the disciples did not have nearly that much money. The disciples were supported by people who responded to Jesus’ ministry (cf. Mark 6:7–13).

6:8–9. **Andrew**, in contrast with Philip, had gone into the crowd to determine its resources (cf. Jesus’ command, “Go and see”; Mark 6:38). All he could come up with was a little boy’s lunch. Man’s inability set the stage for a manifestation of Jesus’ compassion and power. The **barley loaves** recall the Prophet Elisha’s feeding of 100 men with 20 barley loaves (2 Kings 4:42–44). But here was One far greater than Elisha.

6:10–11. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus made the “sheep” (Mark 6:34) **sit down** in green pastures (cf. Ps. 23:2). According to Mark 6:40, the people were seated in groups of 50 and 100. This made the crowd easy to count and the food easy to distribute. **Five thousand** men were there, plus women and children (Matt. 14:21). Thus probably more than 10,000 people were fed. Since the area was desolate and the time was Passover, **Jesus** was like Moses with the people in the wilderness who needed a miraculous feeding. The miracle itself was not described by John. **Jesus ... gave thanks**, but no eucharistic implications are obvious as many argue in this chapter. Among devout Jews the giving of thanks was the norm before and after meals. As Jesus **distributed** the food (with the aid of the disciples [Mark 6:41]), the miraculous multiplication took place.

6:12–13. The words, **when they had all had enough to eat**, show that John intended to stress that a miracle took place. Some scholars try to explain away the miracle by saying that this was merely a sacramental or symbolic meal. Others say the “miracle” was in the people’s sharing. But these rationalizations are far from the clear meaning of John’s words. The disciples’ gathering of the **12 baskets** of fragments was part of their education, to show them that He is more than adequate for their needs. Later He appealed to their spiritual stupidity (cf. Mark 8:17–21). Even though the disciples were closer to Jesus than the crowds, they too were in spiritual blindness (Mark 6:52).

6:14–15. Seeing this **miraculous sign** (*sēmeion*), the people recalled Moses’ prediction that a **Prophet** like him would arise (Deut. 18:15). Moses had fed the people. Moses had led them out of bondage. Jesus had fed the people. Jesus could lead the people out of the hated Roman bondage.

The people saw His sign, but they did not perceive its meaning. They wanted to seize Him **and make Him King**. This marks the highpoint of Jesus’ popularity and a great temptation for Him.

Could He have the kingdom without the Cross? No. Jesus' kingdom would be given to Him by the Father (cf. Ps. 2:7–12; Dan. 7:13–14). It will not come from this world (John 18:36). The path of the Father's will lies in another direction. Before He can be the reigning Lion of Judah, He must be the Lamb who bears the sin of the world (1:29).

b. His walking on the water (6:16–21).

6:16–17. According to Mark 6:45, Jesus compelled His disciples to get **into the boat** and go to Bethsaida while He dismissed the crowds. From Bethsaida they went on toward **Capernaum**. Both villages are at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. **His disciples went down to the lake**, for the land is hilly and high on the east side. As they got out on the lake, the sun went down and the wind picked up. Jesus was up in the hills praying while watching them in their toil (Mark 6:45–48).

6:18–19. The west **wind**, which often picks up at evening, caught them in the open water. They were headed directly into it and found themselves making little progress. They were “straining at the oars” (Mark 6:48). The Sea of Galilee is notable for its sudden and severe storms. **They had rowed three or three and a half miles**, so they were in the middle of the lake. **They were terrified** to see a figure **walking on the water**. They thought it was a ghost (Mark 6:49). Rational explanations have included the idea that Jesus was walking on the sand by the shore or floating on a large beam or log, but neither notion does justice to the text. This occurred in the “fourth watch” of the night, that is, between 3 and 6 o’clock in the morning (Matt. 14:25; Mark 6:48).

6:20–21. The clause **It is I** is literally “I Am,” and was used by Jesus (in 8:58) with strong theological meaning. In this setting it seems to mean only that Jesus was identifying Himself. When the disciples recognized Him, they welcomed **Him into the boat**. By the words **and immediately the boat reached the shore** another miracle is probably intended. The two signs on the land and the lake reveal Jesus as the Provider of a “bread” which gives life (as the next section will expound) and as the Savior who intercedes for and protects His own. He intervenes in their times of troubles and brings them to safety.

White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 473). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

No Earthly King (6:1–15)

The feeding of the five thousand is the one miracle, apart from the resurrection, that occurs in all four of the Gospels. The number was far greater than five thousand, for this figure refers only to men, since woman and children were not counted (Matt. 14:21). This miracle led the people to try to make Jesus king by force. God's design was not that Jesus manifest Himself as an earthly king but as the Suffering Servant who would give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

Allen, J. P. (1972). *John*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher's Bible Commentary* (pp. 672-673). Broadman and Holman Publishers.

The Bread of Life (John 6:1–71)

The passage—A whole year has gone by since chapter 5. Jesus spent that time in Galilee where the open-minded people made it easier to teach than in Judea. Now he withdraws to the east side of the lake of Galilee. There is need to be away from the press of great multitudes. There he began a six-months period of special training for his disciples in nearby districts. It is now one year before his death.

But there was to be no escape. Great throngs were attracted to him because “they saw the signs which he did” (v. 2, RSV). The size of the crowd was increased by the journeys to Jerusalem on the way to the Passover (v. 4). His popularity was at its peak.

Special points—The miracle of feeding the multitude is a deliberate sign which Jesus planned. He surveyed the mass of hungry people and, turning to Philip, brought up the subject of feeding them. It would not ordinarily have been done. Many were Passover pilgrims and had foodstuff in their camps. Others lived nearby.

But Jesus saw opportunity to make a declaration of a vital truth. He, himself, would feed them. He would give them bread and fish, enough to satisfy. Yet, for those who understood, he would be seen as the one who served living bread. He, in and of himself, was sufficient to nourish men’s souls. All they had to do was receive him. They would have to take him so personally that it could only be described as eating his flesh (v. 48–56).

The narrative is filled with vivid details. The disciples asked the people to be seated by family groups, in ranks, aisles between the squares. Being springtime the grass was green, as Mark vividly pictures (Mark 6:39). Looking down the hill westward, the brilliant colors of their robes and turbans looked like cultivated garden plots. That is the word Mark used.

Jesus bent down to divide the lad’s lunch, and two heaps of bread and fish began to grow. The twelve probably had to be aroused from their amazement and sent to serve the multitude. The baskets they used were their travel luggage. And the fragments they gathered up were of the unused pieces, not scraps of discarded food. There was more than they could eat. The instant reaction of the crowd (vv. 14–15) forced Jesus to withdraw. The popular excitement was calmed for a while, but revived the next day. They followed him across the lake to Capernaum (v. 24).

The lesson Jesus then taught was too hard for them. They had not seen the sign and its truth, they had only eaten their fill (v. 26). In a higher way than their forefathers had received bread from heaven (v. 32), God now had sent the eternal food of the soul. He said it plainly, “I am the bread of life” (v. 35).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 6:1-21. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.