

March 13th, 2016

THE MIRACLE OF BREAD THE MISINTERPRETING OF JESUS

John 6:1-15

As we begin unpacking this miracle of the feeding of the five thousand it's important to reflect upon a couple of truths about how God created this world. **Truth #1: God didn't have to create human beings who needed to eat.** He could have made us with no appetites. He could have made us not to need food in order to be sustained. **Truth #2: God didn't have to make food taste good, or for it to satisfy our physical longings.** Food could have been tasteless. Taste buds are a luxury item. Likewise the satisfaction that comes from a good meal was optional for God. Nobody forced Him to add those sensations to the human package.

Yet God did give us appetites, and hunger, and taste buds, and the feeling of satisfaction after we eat. Why? God gave us these things so that we could know Jesus Christ better. So that when Jesus says in **John 6:35** "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst," we would conclude that we should be hungry for Jesus because He is the true bread. He gave us taste buds, so that we would conclude that there is nothing that tastes better to our souls than Jesus. He gave us the feeling of satisfaction after a good meal, to know that when we are united to Christ by faith, there is nothing in this universe more satisfying.

All created things like appetites, and taste buds, and satisfaction from food are windows for us to look through in order to see Jesus Christ. **Colossians 1:16** "...all things were created through him and *for him*." Meaning these things, all things, exist to teach us something about Christ, or to teach us that we need Christ. And that is true in this passage. This feeding of the five thousand was orchestrated so that Jesus could teach us that He is true bread, the only bread, that can save and satisfy our souls. And yet this crowd, and even His disciples,

and us, struggle to believe this. Nobody in this passage today understands what Jesus was doing. I pray that God will allow us to understand and believe.

- ☆ The Miracle of Bread (v.1-13)
- ☆ The Misinterpreting of Jesus (v.14-15)

The Big Idea

We will either look to Jesus as our soul satisfier or as a slave that satisfies our flesh.

I. The Miracle of the Bread (v.1-13)

1. Jesus labored much for the salvation of souls. (v.1)

After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias.

Consider how much Jesus labored for souls. Chapter four takes place in Galilee, chapter five in Jerusalem, and now chapter 6 in Galilee again. These places are 60 miles apart. Jesus had no car, but traveled by foot from city to city over great distances. Why? To give people the good news, to proclaim that

He is the Savior who has come into the world. He “inconvenienced” himself in order that people could hear the gospel. Do we do the same?¹

2. The crowd didn't follow Jesus but a health and wealth gospel (v.2)

And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.

As Jesus was crossing the sea of Galilee, this large crowd was racing around it's banks in order to be near Him. But notice why they followed him. v.2 says they followed '*because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.*' This verse helps us to understand much of chapter six. In chapter five we saw the sign of healing of the man at Bethesda, and the the rest of the chapter explained what the sign meant. Here we see the sign of the feeding of the five thousand in v. 1-15 and then in v.16-71 we are going to hear Jesus explain what this sign means. Most of these people will leave once they hear Jesus explain the sign. Look at v.57 "This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." Now see how they respond in v.66 "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him." These people that were following him in v.2 were not following him as the Savior of the world but as a health and wealth

¹ This miraculous event is recorded in all four gospel accounts and the other gospels provide us with some additional information. Matthew tells us that John the Baptist was just beheaded by Herod. Jesus just referenced John in chapter five as a witness whom the Jews rejoiced in for a time (v.35) But when John wouldn't stop proclaiming that Jesus is Savior of the world, Herod beheaded him. Proclaiming Christ will cost you. It cost John his head. **Matthew 14:13** "Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself." Jesus was already in Galilee when this happened, but when he heard John was murdered, He took his disciples by boat to the eastern bank in order to spend time with them. [NOTE: Matthew 14:13 says that Jesus went "by himself" but Mark 6:31-32 says that he went with His disciples. This is no contradiction, but rather "by himself" meant not that He was completely isolated but rather that He didn't have the crowds with Him.]

prosperity teacher. ‘Jesus, you turn water into wine, Jesus you heal the sick, what other tricks can you do for us?’ They saw Jesus as a means to a different end. This will be really clear at the end of our passage this morning.

3. Jesus is the feast of the Jews (v.3-4)

Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

This statement about the Passover is almost parenthetical but it’s actually deeply theological. Passover was a deeply held holiday, not unlike how Americans view the fourth of July.² Passover was the remembrance of how the angel of death passed over the homes of the Jews in the slavery in Egypt when He saw the blood on the doorpost. Jesus experienced three Passovers during His earthly ministry. We saw His first Passover in **John 2:13-15** (a year previous to this event) when He cleansed the temple and said “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (v.19) He said this about His own body. He was pointing forward to His last Passover in **John 19:14** when He, like the household lamb that every Jew was to slaughter, would Himself be slaughtered. His first and third Passover deals with the death element in the Passover celebration. This second Passover of Jesus deals with the feast element. The Jews ate the slaughtered lamb in their homes after they wiped it’s blood on their doorposts. So here Jesus is in Galilee, while many Jews were going to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast. But Jesus stayed in Galilee. Why? To show that the feast the Jews celebrated was fulfilled *in Him*. They were celebrating it

² D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), pg. 269

wrongly. He *is* the feast of the Passover. He *is* the meaning behind it. That's the significance of this miracle during Passover.

4. The test: Where are we to buy bread? (v.5-6)

Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.

The gospel of Mark tell us that Jesus had intended to spend time teaching his disciples by themselves.³ But when He saw the crowd He had compassion on them. **Mark 6:34** "When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things." **Matthew 14:14** records that He even "...healed their sick." Oh consider the tender love of Jesus Christ! Here He was well aware that these people came under a false expectation of Him, yet He had compassion on them. He taught them. He healed them. He pities us even when we come to Him with wrong motives. Thank God that Jesus pities us when we come to Him with wrong motives! How many of us woke up this morning desiring to come to church with the sole motive of feasting on Christ? How many of us just came out of an obligation to serve, or because that's what you do on Sunday mornings? But here Jesus is speaking to us through His word anyway. He has compassion on us because we are His sheep in a world full of false shepherds.

³ cf. Mark 6:31-32

So Jesus sees this crowd, and He asks Philip: “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” They were in a desolate place.⁴ He had been teaching them, and healing them all day. It’s dinner time. But there is no place to buy food. Don’t think that Jesus isn’t aware of our needs. Jesus is the first one to think of our needs. He made us to have needs. He takes the initiative here. As Calvin says “...Jesus does not wait till they are famished, and cry out that they are perishing with hunger, and have nothing to eat, but he [seeks] to provide for food for them before they have asked for it.”⁵

But in His plan to provide, He puts His disciples to the *test*. He knew what He was going to do. We’ve already seen five chapters in this gospel in which Jesus declares beyond all doubt that He is God. Have His disciples grasped this yet? Have we? ‘Where are we going to get money to pay for that hospital bill? How are we going to pay for our mortgage this month?’ Who is our God? That’s the real question Jesus is asking: who am I?

5. Philipp: “Send them away! There is no worldly remedy” (v.7)

Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.”

This is Philip’s way of trying to tell Jesus to send them away. Two hundred denarii is 8 months worth of wages. That’s about \$35,000 based on an average American’s income. Philip is saying that would not be enough for everybody to even get some crumbs. There were perhaps upwards of 20,000 people there. **Matthew 14:21** says that there “...were about five thousand men, besides

⁴ cf. Matthew 14:15

⁵ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XVII*, (Grand Rapids, MI,: BakerBooks 2009), pg.228

women and children.” So what is Philip doing? He’s not looking to Jesus, he’s only looking to the means that the world can provide. This is part of the preparation for the sign that Jesus is to perform: there is no worldly remedy for us. ‘Send them away Jesus, there is no worldly remedy.’

6. Andrew: “Send them away! There is no remedy in the church” (v.8-9)

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?”

Five barley loaves and two fish wouldn’t even feed this small congregation. Andrew is not looking for a miracle by giving Jesus a list of what they have. He’s trying to convince Jesus that what they have is not enough. This is also part of the preparation for Jesus’ sign: the resources that the disciples have (the church) is not enough to satisfy. If you are looking for this church or any church for that matter to satisfy you, you will be sorely disappointed. The church is not meant to satisfy you. Only Jesus can do that. The church only has five loaves of poor man’s bread and two dried up fish, and if Jesus doesn’t touch it, we starve.

Jesus asks these questions to test his disciples and us. This testing has an affliction to it. All testing has an affliction to it. Will we turn to the world for our answers? Will we turn to our own resources in the church, or perhaps a different church with more bread and fish? Philip and Andrew’s answer should have been “You are God, you will provide!” But they didn’t get it yet. And we will see next week, that they still didn’t get it even after this miracle. Do we get it? God’s testing has a meaning to it. Listen to the Psalmist “I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted

me”(Psalm 119:75) God afflicts us for our benefit so that we might learn that He is the giver of all things. He wants us to come to the end of ourselves, our own resources, so that He would be seen as the Giver of all that we need. We forget that. So He afflicts because He is faithful so that we can look to Christ alone to supply our needs. Now the stage is set for Jesus to give the sign that points to Him.

7. The miracle of bread (v.10-11)

Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted.

Five things to notice in this miracle. **1) This extraordinary miracle should make us consider the miracle of food that God provides for all the time.** Ask yourself: Which is a greater thing, the feeding of these multiple thousands of people or the 7 billion people that live on planet earth? Not to mention all the animals, and microscopic organisms. But we tend not to be in awe of God’s normal dealings, because our constant use of them make us undervalue them. But the truth is, you have never had a meal that God himself did not provide for you. **Psalm 145:15-16** “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.”

2) Jesus instructed these people to sit down. No labor was required of these people. Jesus had them rest and receive. Just as we are right now sitting and receiving His words of eternal life, these people were made to take comfort while Jesus provided. **3) Jesus gave thanks.** This is the meal before the meal. Giving thanks to Father should never be done out of some mindless tradition. It

certainly wasn't for Jesus. John considers this act of Jesus so important that He repeats it in v.23. Jesus models for us something very important here. All things, meals, miracles, whatever, are to be received with thankfulness to God. Paul says in **1 Timothy 4:4** "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected *if* it is received with thanksgiving, *for* it is made holy *by* the word of God and prayer."⁶ Father is to be acknowledged and praised for all things, and especially for sustaining our bodies minute by minute.⁷ **4) Jesus called into existence the things that do not exist.** In taking five loaves and two fish which isn't enough to feed twenty people, Jesus fed 20,000. He is the God of Abraham who "...gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist." **Romans 4:17** Jesus took meager means, barley bread was the bread of poor people, and He multiplied it, and multiplied it, multiplied it. Philip and Andrew were right. 8 months of wages wasn't enough to feed these people, and neither was the small meal that the boy had. But Jesus was enough. **5) Everybody had as much as they wanted.** v.11 says that everyone had "...as much as they wanted." Nobody spared their stomach, all ate and ate until they were full, seconds, thirds, whatever. Jesus didn't just provide a small snack for everyone, but a feast of abundance so that no one left hungry.

8. The fragments that remained (v.12-13)

And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

⁶ Calvin says here "Hence it follows, that they who swallow them down with thinking of God, are guilty of sacrilege, and of profaning the gifts of God." John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XVII*, (Grand Rapids, MI,: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 230

⁷ <http://www.gotquestions.org/prayer-before-meals.html>

Not only had everyone had their fill, but the leftover fragments added up to more food than they started with. 12 full baskets of food is more than five loaves and two fish. Jesus tells them to gather it and keep it so none may be lost. We'll see the relevance to us in our application. Let's first see how the people respond.

II. The Misinterpreting of Jesus (v.14-15)

1. They were ready to receive Jesus as a "prophet" (v.14)

When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"

At first glance, this seems that the people were giving Jesus a great honor. Jesus taught them, healed them, and fed them, and now it seems that they finally get it, and that they believe. This saying that they utter is what Moses promised about the Messiah. He said in **Deuteronomy 18:15** "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen" Moses went to the mountain to speak to God, Jesus was here on the mountain (v.3) now speaking to them. So they were putting it altogether and concluding that Jesus was the prophet promised by God. They believed right? Wrong.

2. Jesus will not be this kind of king (v.15)

Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Why did Jesus leave? Because Jesus would not be the king that they wanted. They had their bellies filled, they had their sick healed, they saw a miracle

worker and concluded: 'Jesus can free us from Roman occupation. And if He doesn't want that office, we will force Him into it.' They totally missed the meaning of the sign. This multitude came under a false notion of Jesus (v.2), and the sign of the bread did not change their minds. Remember what Jesus said last chapter "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him" (**John 5:43**) These people were willing to receive Jesus as a prophet so long as He did their bidding. 'Give us health Jesus, give us wealth Jesus, free us from Rome Jesus, do our bidding and we will honor you.' Their excitement for Jesus started and ended with having their stomachs filled. They wanted a prosperity gospel Jesus. That's not the kind of King that Jesus is. He doesn't exist to be a slave to our fleshly desires. Multiple millions of dollars are made each year peddling this kind of Jesus and it is disgusting. Jesus won't have it, and He doesn't care how many multitudes are flocking to this perception of Him. He's left the building. This is not an excitement for Him, it is an excitement for His benefits. 'Jesus I don't care who you are, I care what you can give me.' Jesus did not empty Himself and leave the throne room of heaven, and His Father's glory, and the worship of angels, so that He could put on flesh, and suffer as a man, and be a slave to the whims of human beings. Jesus made this bread so that He could point to Himself and say "This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever" (**John 5:58**) 'Yes I came to serve and give my life as a ransom for many, but I didn't come to serve you the gods of health and wealth. I came to serve you up Me! I am health and wealth itself. You want to be satisfied with

your stomachs, but don't you see that I am satisfaction itself.' But they didn't see. And neither yet did his disciples. Do we see?

Application

Our Doctrine: We will either look to Jesus as our soul satisfier or as a slave that satisfies our flesh.

"Why do you love Jesus Christ?...Why do you trust in him? Why do you honor him? Why do you desire to be in heaven with him?"⁸ John Piper asks it like this

"If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven if Christ was not there?"⁹

The people in this chapter could have said yes. They saw Jesus as a means, as a slave that could satisfy their fleshly needs of health and wealth and prosperity, and freedom from Roman occupation. Do you love Jesus? Why? Because of what He can give you? Or because of who He is? Why do you pray (do you pray)? Why do you read the Scripture? Is there hidden in you heart that if you do these activities that you will get what you really want—a successful life, a promising career, a good reputation with others? Can you agree with the

⁸ John Owen, *The Glory of Christ: His Office and Grace*, (Scotland,: Christian Focus, 2004), pg. 63

⁹ John Piper, *God is the Gospel: Meditations on God's Love as the Gift of Himself*, (Wheaton, IL,: Crossway, 2005), pg. 15

prophet Habbakuk when He says “ Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.” **Habbakuk 3:17-18**

Our Duty: We have a duty to receive Jesus as He actually is, and not for His gifts only

The terrifying thing about this chapter is that you can have an excitement for Jesus and be going to hell. You can quote Scripture, and travel great distances, and receive gifts from Jesus and still be subject to the great day of judgment. The excitement that these people had for Jesus is what all of us would feel naturally if we experienced what they did. But that is not salvation. Excitement for Jesus is not equal which salvation. When Jesus interprets this sign later on this chapter, the excitement leaves and so do they. They are done with Jesus when they hear what He has to say. v.51 “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” To receive Jesus truly, and not for His gifts only, you must eat His bread. What does that mean? You must receive Him spiritually, like you receive bread physically. As a meal for your soul, as the only thing that will satisfy. ‘Jesus if I don’t have you I die.’ That’s what salvation looks like. Jesus laid down His life on the cross, giving Himself as a meal for dying and lost sinners, and all who eat that meal will never die. They will live forever because they receive Jesus as He is meant to be received, as the satisfaction of their souls.

Our Delight: We will feast on the fragments of Christ forever!

This whole miracle was a sign (v.14), including the fragments of the feast that were left over. There were 12 baskets left over. 12 baskets for all the twelve tribes of Israel—for all the church. What do these fragments tell us? If the bread points to Christ, so do the leftover fragments. Meaning, Christ is not a one time meal where we only get satisfaction and pleasure from Him once, but today, and tomorrow, and the next day and all eternity. Infinite bread never runs out. Which is good, because our hunger for Him will never run out. Isn't that disappointing sometimes when you eat a good meal only to find that it is like a couple bites short of meeting your satisfaction. But not with Jesus. Jesus can never come up short. He's infinite. Consider spending your first 10,000 years in heaven. What will that be like? You will have tasted more joy in Jesus than all the people on this planet have ever experienced. But that is only the first 10,000 years, there will be a forever number of 10,000 year sets left. We will be forever satisfied but only forever scratching the surface of satisfaction.