

John 6:1–71 (ESV)

Background:

Passover: Exodus (c.f. 16)

- Multitude in the wilderness
- Manna from Heaven

Where shall we find food? Numbers 11

Multiplying loaves: 2 Kings 4:42-44

One commentator notes:

"What is happening here? These images and motifs from the Old Testament suggest that Jesus is fulfilling and recreating images from Israel's sacred past. He is a figure who harks back to great historic figures (Moses and Elisha) who knew God's power intimately. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus alone distributes the bread and the fish (6: 11), although we can assume with Mark that Jesus needed assistance with so many eager and hungry people (Mark 6: 41). John's point is to underscore that Jesus is the provider of food, the source of life for these people (as thus far we have seen him be the source of rebirth, living water, and healing).¹"

- **Jesus does the impossible, twice**
- **Coming to Jesus for the wrong reason**
- **The only way we can truly come to Jesus and believe**
- **The choice**

The Miracle

¹ After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ 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?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of

bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.”⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him,⁹ “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?”¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.”¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.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!”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.

- Jesus has compassion on the crowds and their hunger (physical and spiritual) and he has a plan to address them both by this miracle. Once again, the disciples appear to be little more than unwitting accomplices to this work. Jesus is performing this sign with the bread and loaves to point them to their need for the true bread - namely, himself.
- **What are some implications we can draw from the miracle itself?** (Deffinbaugh):
 - "(1) Jesus commands us to do more than we are (humanly) able, because He enables us to do what He commands...
 - (2) The magnitude of the task should not be used as our excuse for not attempting it, especially when the task is our Lord’s command...
 - (3) Wonder of wonders, God has chosen to multiply and expand our puny efforts and contributions, so as to accomplish His will...
 - (4) Those whom God uses to minister to the needs of this crowd are also those who gain the most from serving others...
 - (5) The disciples are inclined to limit their ministry to what they have seen and done before...

- *(6) Our Lord cares about and takes care of our needs..."*
- The crowd witnesses the miracles and receives the bread, but they misunderstand the significance of who he is and seek to take him for their own purposes.
 - The continuing pattern of misunderstanding:
 - The people at the Temple
 - Nicodemus and the new birth
 - The woman and the well
 - Now the crowd and the bread
 - They think he is the Prophet like Moses spoke of in Deut. 18 (which he is), and like Moses he miraculously provided them food in the wilderness (which he did)
 - Enthusiasm for the wrong Jesus? Seeking to have him for the satisfaction of their carnal appetites.
- Jesus flees because they want to seize him and make him King to rival Herod and Rome.

16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, **17** got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. **18** The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. **19** When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. **20** But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." **21** Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

- Jesus reveals himself to his disciples. **What is significant about what Jesus does and says here?** Jesus walking on water (c.f. Psalm 77:16-20), and says to the disciples "I AM", tell them not to fear and bringing them to their destination (c.f. Psalm 107). Both of these connect Jesus to YHWH, the one who brought the people safely through the waters of the Red Sea and who commands the winds and the waves, as we see in the other gospel accounts.
- This is an amazing miracle, yet Jesus does not perform it for the crowds but for the disciples. And John makes nothing more of it in the rest of the gospel - the focus returns to the account of the bread. **How**

are the two related?

Mark records this fascinating comment:

“And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.” (Mark 6:51–52, ESV)

And a little bit later in Mark:

“Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And he cautioned them, saying, “Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?” They said to him, “Twelve.” “And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?” And they said to him, “Seven.” And he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?” (Mark 8:14–21, ESV)

- In the wilderness facing hunger, Jesus provided abundantly for their need in an impossible circumstance- they had 5 measly loaves, and he feed potentially 20,000 people and when it was done, there were 12 loaves remaining.
- On the sea facing a perilous storm and possible death, Jesus provided abundantly for their need by doing the impossible - walking on water to bring them in safely. And more importantly, as this is the emphasis in John, he is with them in the storm and that alone gives them cause not to fear.

The Explanation

²² On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. ²³ Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where

they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. ²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” ²⁶ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” ²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” ²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

- An expanded crowd hears about the miracle he did the day before and seeks after him for more bread.
- Jesus, knowing their hearts, knows what they're after. He tells them to stop laboring for the food that perishes - stop working so diligently for a full stomach, when you can have sustenance forever if ony you would come to me. He is the one on whom the Father has set his seal. One commentator writes²: "By an appropriate metaphor, he alludes to an ancient custom; for they *sealed* with signets what they intended to sanction by their authority. Thus Christ — that it may not appear as if he claimed anything of himself, or by private authority [136](#) — declares that this office was enjoined on him by the Father, and that this decree of the Father was manifested, as if a *seal* had been engraven on him. It may be summed up thus: As it is not every person who has the ability or the right to feed souls with incorruptible food, Christ appears in public, and, while he promises that he will be the Author of so great a blessing, he likewise adds that he is approved by God, and that he has been sent to men with this mark, which is, as it were, God's *seal* or *signet*"
- The people key on the language of working and immediately ask - what do we need to be doing to get this imperishable food? How do we work the works of God? The answer Jesus gives is simple, and resonates with us to this day - believe. Believe on the one whom the Father has sent and you will be doing the work of God.

Where do we see people seeking Christ today to satisfy the flesh? The most obvious example would be in the health, wealth, and prosperity movement - where Jesus is the ticket to a better life in a number of ways. Even outside of this, it's not uncommon for people to turn to Christianity or the Church as a means of turning their life around or "getting back on the right track." In many areas of our cities and throughout the world, the coming to Christ for bread itself still happens - if a concession to the gospel will get me a meal, then that's what it takes.

How can Jesus response to the crowds instruct us?

- First of all, he did feed the crowd, knowing what would happen - he fed them as a means to bring the people to a deeper understanding, even if they would resist the message and reject him. The method of bringing a fulfillment of a physical need to make people aware of their spiritual need and how Jesus is the ultimate satisfaction of all need is not necessarily inappropriate.
- Secondly, when the crowds return for more of the same of what Jesus provided earlier, he challenges them rather than continuing to satiate their desires. He insists on a response.

30 So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?” **31** Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’ ” **32** Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. **33** For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” **34** They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” **35** Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

- Once again, the demand is for further signs to validate his teaching. That's what they asked for in the temple, that's what they asked for with the healing of the lame man, and now they ask again - as if the healing of a crippled man and the multiplying of loaves to feed thousands wasn't enough of a sign.

- They challenge him, just as they challenged Moses in the wilderness - Moses gave us Manna from heaven to eat. What will you do?
 - Jesus tells them that he is the true bread from heaven, of which Manna was merely a picture. He is the bread of life. What's the value of this imagery? Calvin writes: "When we eat *bread* for the nourishment of the body, we see more clearly not only our own weakness, but also the power of divine grace, than if, without, *bread*, God were to impart a secret power to nourish the body itself. Thus, the analogy which is traced between the body and the soul, enables us to perceive more clearly the grace of Christ. For when we learn that Christ *is the bread* by which our souls must be fed, this penetrates more deeply into our hearts than if Christ simply said that *he is our life.*"
 - How does one consume Jesus? By coming to him and believing in him. The one who comes will never hunger and the one who believes will never thirst. This is the parallel with the later verses 53-57, where Jesus speaks of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Eating his flesh is coming to him, and drinking his blood is believing in him.
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¹ Burge, Gary M. (2009-08-22). John (NIV Application Commentary, The) (p. 144). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

² Calvin, Commentary on John Vol I