

INTRODUCTION

1. I would like to invite you to open your Bibles to John chapter 6 as we look this morning at the 4th miracle that John records commonly referred to as “The Feeding of the 5000.”
2. Read John 6:1-15.
3. In the preceding chapter, we saw Jesus assert His deity in response to the Jews accusation that He had broken the Sabbath when He healed a lame man.
4. Now, in chapter 6, John gives more evidence of Jesus’ deity by showing His power to create.
5. This is the only miracle (apart from Christ’s resurrection) recorded by John¹ that also appears in the other three gospels.
6. This is also the only chapter in John that treats the Galilean phase of Jesus’ ministry with which the Synoptists are so concerned.²

¹John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary : John 1-11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006). 219.

²D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991). 267.

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7. Both Mark and Luke tell us before He performed this miracle that He had been teaching them about the kingdom of God (Mk.6:34; Lk.9:11).
8. The three Synoptics also tells us that this miracle occurred after the beheading of John the Baptist.
9. So, we find this account also mentioned in Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:32-44, and Luke 9:10-17.
10. Matthew 14:13-21, “Now when Jesus heard *about John*, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard *of this*, they followed Him on foot from the cities. ¹⁴ When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick. ¹⁵ When it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." ¹⁶ But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them *something* to eat!" ¹⁷ They said* to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." ¹⁸ And He said, "Bring them here to Me." ¹⁹ Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed *the food*, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples *gave them* to the crowds, ²⁰ and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. ²¹ There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children.”
11. Mark 6:32-44, “They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves. ³³ *The people* saw them going, and

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many recognized *them* and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things. ³⁵ When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and it is already quite late; ³⁶ send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." ³⁷ But He answered them, "You give them *something* to eat!" And they said* to Him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them *something* to eat?" ³⁸ And He said* to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" And when they found out, they said*, "Five, and two fish." ³⁹ And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. ⁴¹ And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed *the food* and broke the loaves and He kept giving *them* to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³ and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. ⁴⁴ There were five thousand men who ate the loaves."

12. Luke 9:10-17, "When the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. Taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida. ¹¹ But the crowds were aware of this and followed Him; and welcoming them, He *began* speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing. ¹² Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and

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get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." ¹³ But He said to them, "You give them *something* to eat!" And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." ¹⁴ (For there were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, "Have them sit down *to eat* in groups of about fifty each." ¹⁵ They did so, and had them all sit down. ¹⁶ Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke *them*, and kept giving *them* to the disciples to set before the people. ¹⁷ And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets *full*."

13. Having recorded the miracle which occurred at the very opening of this ministry (4:43–54), [John] now proceeds at once to the one which marked its close...[and] draws a striking parallel between chapters 5 and 6: in the former he has shown how Jesus was rejected in Judea; in the latter he will now indicate how he was rejected in Galilee...The account of this double rejection is necessary in order to furnish a background for the next few chapters.³
14. John begins by giving us *the place* where this 4th miracle occurred.

³William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001). 1:216.

I. The Place (v.1)

He says, “After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias).”

John begins by stating that this 4th miracle occurred first...

A. “After These Things” (v.1a)

After what things? The events of chapter 5?

Yes, but it did not occur immediately. This phrase (meta tauta) establishes sequence, but not tight chronology⁴ and therefore refers to a period of time [that] had elapsed since the events in chapter 5 took place.⁵

If the feast in 5:1 is Tabernacles, then at least 6 months passed (Oct. to Apr.). If the feast of 5:1 is Passover, then a year passed between these chapters.⁶

⁴D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991). 267.

⁵William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995). Jn 6:1.

⁶John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997, c1997). Jn 6:1.

It was after these things, John says, Jesus went away to...

B. The Other Side of the Sea of Galilee or Tiberias (v.1b)

This would be the northeastern side.⁷

“The Sea of Galilee” was the name given in Mark and Matthew. It is called Gennesaret in Luke 5:1 and “Sea of Tiberias” in John 21:1. Here “of Tiberias” (της Τιβεριαδος [*tēs Tiberiados*]) is added as further description.⁸

In the Old Testament it was called the Sea of Chinnereth (Num.34:11; Jos.13:27) and the Sea of Chinneroth (Jos.12:3).

By the time John wrote his gospel, it had become commonly known as the Sea of Tiberias (cf. 21:1). It was named for the city of Tiberias, located on the lake’s western shore, which was founded by

⁷William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995). Jn 6:1.

⁸A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997). Jn 6:1.

Herod Antipas and named in honor of Emperor
Tiberius (cf. Luke 3:1).⁹

In verses 2-3 we are introduced to...

II. The Crowd (vv.2-3)

John says in verse 2 that “a large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.”

According to Mark 6:32 Jesus and His disciples had crossed the Sea of Galilee by boat but a large crowd from the surrounding cities followed them on foot along the shore (Mark 6:33).

By the time they reached their destination, a mass of people was already waiting for them with more on the way.

Matthew 14:14 says, “When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.”

John tells us why they followed Jesus. It was not for forgiveness of their sin but “because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.

John Gill says they followed “not for the sake of His doctrine, or for the good of their souls, they followed Him;

⁹John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary : John 1-11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006). 220.

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but either to gratify their curiosity in seeing his miracles, or to be healed in their bodies, as others had been.”

They were motivated by the physical rather than the spiritual. Verse 15 also reveals their motivation was political but verse 2 indicates that they were thrill seekers only interested in Him performing another sign. They were no different than those who “believed in His name” when He was performing signs in Jerusalem but 2:24 says He was “not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men.”

They failed to see the true significance of the miracles which unmistakably pointed to Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah.

So this great multitude didn’t actually believe in Him in a saving way. They didn’t trust Him. They were interested in His miracles. They wanted Him because He could make them well.¹⁰

What reason did you come to Christ?

Verse 3 indicates that Jesus withdrew from the crowd. It says, “Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples.”

¹⁰J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1981). 4:401.

John interrupts the narrative to tell us about...

III. The Occasion (v.4)

He says, “Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near.”

Why did he pause to mention it was the Passover?

D.A. Carson says, “Although this is the second of three Passovers mentioned by John (*cf.* 2:13, 23; 11:55ff.), his reason for including this aside is not so much chronological as theological. The Jewish Passover celebrated the exodus from Egypt. Intrinsic to the celebration was the slaughter of a lamb in each household, which then ate it. In this Gospel Jesus is the Lamb of God (1:29, 36). The first Passover to be mentioned (2:13, 23) is in the context of Jesus’ self-designation as the temple that would have to be destroyed—a way of pointing to his death; the third Passover (11:55ff.) is at the time of his death. This intermediate one occurs about (John says it was *near*) the time of the feeding of the five thousand, which precipitates the bread of life discourse, in which Jesus identifies his flesh as the true bread that must be given for the life of the world (6:33, 51), the bread that must be eaten if people are to have eternal life.”¹¹

¹¹D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991). 268.

With so many people that obviously points next to...

IV. The Problem (vv.5-9)

While Jesus is “on the mountain...with His disciples” (v.3) He lifts “up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?"⁶ This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.⁷ Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little."⁸ One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him,⁹ "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?"

A. It was a Test for Philip (vv.5-6)

John indicates something that none of the other gospels point out—this was a “test” for the disciples.

No doubt they had seen the miracle of Him turning the water into wine at the Wedding in Cana so multiplying five barley loaves and two fish to feed such a multitude was no feat for Him.

Something we need to understand is that the miracles were primarily for the disciples to increase their faith.

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1. John 2:11 says, “This beginning of *His* signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.”
 2. When Jesus had heard that Lazarus had died, He said to His disciples in John 11:15 that He was “glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him.”
- B. It was An Opportunity for Jesus to Manifest His Glory (v.6)

How the disciples were to feed the crowd was a test for them not for Jesus. “For He Himself knew what He was intending to do” (v.6).

- C. It was a Test for the Disciples (vv.7-9)

Philip responds to Jesus’ question in verse 7 by stating that “two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.”

One *denarius* was a day’s pay for a common labourer; two hundred *denarii* (also specified at Mk. 6:37) therefore represents *eight months’ wages* (NIV). Since a substantial proportion of a worker’s wage went into daily food, this was, presumably, enough to provide for

NIV New International Version.

a family for eight months or a little longer. But the crowd was so large (v. 10) that even such a large sum of money *would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!*¹²

Andrew, Peter's brother, tells Jesus that there was a boy (paidarion, can refer to a young man or a young slave – BAGD) with “five barley loaves and two fish” (vv.8-9).

The “five barley loaves” were the inexpensive bread of the poorer classes. The “fish” were probably pickled fish to be eaten as a side dish with the small cakes of barley bread.

After the disciples reasoned with the question, Jesus instructs them in verse 10 to “have the people sit down.”

And now from verses 10-13 we see...

V. The Miracle (vv.10-13)

John says there “was much grass in the place.” This is the type of detail an eyewitness would recall. It also gives evidence of this event occurring in the Spring (Passover,

¹²D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991). 269.

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v.4, March or April) before the grass withered under the scorching sun.”

John continues verse 10 by saying, “the men sat down, in number about five thousand.”

Mark 6:40 says “They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties.”

John says there were “five thousand” as does Matthew (Mat.14:21). This did not include the women and children, so the number could have been somewhere between 15-20 thousand people.

Verse 11 says that Jesus “then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted.”

If Jesus used the common form of Jewish thanksgiving, He said something like this: ‘Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth.’ Jesus ‘blesses’ God, *i.e.* He thanks God; He does not ‘bless’ the food.¹³

Jesus didn’t create a large amount of food; no He continually broke the loaves and...kept giving them to the disciples to set before them. He did the same with the fish.

¹³D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991). 270.

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Both Mark 6:41 and Luke 9:16 says He “kept giving” them to the disciples.

John says in verse 11 that He gave the people “as much as they wanted” and then verse 12 says, “When they were filled.”

So they ate until they were filled and then Jesus told the disciples to “Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost” (v.12).

There was possibly another test here for the disciples—to wait until the crowd ate and was full before they ate because Mark 6:31 states before they arrived on the eastern side of the Jordan because there “were many people coming and going...they did not even have time to eat.”

So, the astonished crowd seated on the grassy hillside that evening witnessed the Creator God at work¹⁴ and ate from His hand.

No wonder Matthew 6:31-33, “Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'”³² “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.”³³ “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

¹⁴John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* : *John 1-11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006). 224.

Verses 14-15 records...

VI. The Response (vv.14-15)

How did the people respond to the miracle of the bread and fish?

Did they see Jesus as a Savior for their sin?

It says in verse 14 “when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.’”

This is a reference to the Messianic prophecy given by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-19 which says, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. ¹⁶ “This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.’ ¹⁷ “The Lord said to me, ‘They have spoken well. ¹⁸ ‘I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. ¹⁹ ‘It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him.’”

It’s possible that Jesus’ miracle reminded the crowd of Moses and the manna God provided for Israel in the wilderness.

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The crowd's statement, made immediately after Jesus had healed their sick and filled their stomachs, revealed what the people were really looking for in a messiah. They wanted an earthly deliverer, one who would meet all their physical needs—and food and health were at the top of the list—as well as freeing them from the hated yoke of Roman oppression. Thus they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king.

With Him as their provider, they would never want for food, and would have the potential to be healed of every illness. They could march to Jerusalem, overthrow the Romans, and establish the ultimate social welfare state. Jesus, however, refused to be forcibly made king on their selfish (and unrepentant) terms.

Therefore, He sent the disciples away by boat (Matt. 14:22; Mark 6:45), dispersed the crowd (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:45–46), and withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.¹⁵

I like what John MacArthur says at this point: “Jesus does not acquiesce to whims or fancies. He comes to no man on that man's terms. People cannot manipulate Him for their own selfish ends. Some modern evangelists, in an attempt to be “seeker-friendly,” present Jesus to unbelievers as a quick fix for felt needs like health, wealth, and self-esteem—superficially marketing Him as providing everything unbelievers want. But that turns the gospel

¹⁵John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary : John 1-11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006). 225.

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message upside down. People do not come to Christ on their terms, so that He can heal their broken relationships, make them successful in life, and help them feel good about themselves. Instead, they must come to Him on His terms.”¹⁶

CONCLUSION

1. Again we hear John proclaiming to his readers that Jesus is God. Clearly seen here in His creative role.
2. Do you see this truth this morning?
3. As we have had the opportunity to look at this miracle of the feeding of the 5000, now we have the opportunity to partake of the Lord’s Supper.
4. Both point to the reality of who Jesus is.
5. In the story we have studied this morning, He is presented as Creator God.
6. In the Lord’s Supper He is presented as the Suffering Savior of the world.
7. If you have not surrendered your life to Him, will you do so now as we pray? Let’s pray.

¹⁶John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* : *John 1-11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006). 225.