

John 6 :1-15
Feast on the Mountainside

6 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^[a] 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.

May God add his blessing to the reading and preaching of his holy Word. Let us pray:

Prayer:

Gracious heavenly Father, as we have read your Word, you bring us back in history to a great incident in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was a day like no other day. Help us to see on that day the power and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, as he broke the bread, and all the people ate their fill, and gained strength for the day. May your Word today also strengthen us. We pray in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

God's people have always been in great need. When Jacob and his sons were starving in Canaan, Yahweh sent them to Egypt to find food.

Four hundred years later when they were slaves of Pharaoh, God sent Moses and brought deliverance to them.

When they faced the Red Sea before them and Pharaoh's army in hot pursuit behind them, Yahweh opened up the Sea and they escaped safely to the other side.

They weren't in the wilderness too long when their water and food ran out. God spoke to Moses and told him to strike the rock with the same rod that he had struck the Nile with and when he did so, water poured out to quench their thirst and water their animals.

Then out in the desert wilderness, with nothing but dry sand and wind, there was no food and no way to get any. We can imagine that their little ones began to cry with hunger pains and their parents began to panic – how could they feed their children?

In their desperation the people cried out and complained to Moses, “Why did you bring us out in this desert to starve to death? We had onions and leeks and meat pots in Egypt.” So Moses prayed to God and this is what God did: [Exodus 16:13-19,31-36]

“...the morning (U)dew lay around the camp. ¹⁴ And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, (V)“What is it?”^[a] For they (W)did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, (X)“It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶ This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an (Y)omer,^[b] according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.’” ¹⁷ And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. ¹⁸ But when they measured it with an omer, (Z)whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. ¹⁹ And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.”.....

³¹ Now the house of Israel called its name (AH)manna. It was (AI)like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. ³² Moses said, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’” ³³ And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a (AJ)jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations.” ³⁴ As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before (AK)the testimony to be kept. ³⁵ The people of Israel (AL)ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till (AM)they came to the border of the land of Canaan.”

We see here that the people of Israel were in great need and Yahweh abundantly met that need. This manna that came down from heaven was a very versatile food: it could be boiled or baked or fried. It was tasty and nourishing. The people had a great need and Yahweh supplied that need.

This incident from the history of Israel is the background for what happened on this day some 1,300 years later when Jesus went up on the mountain and taught the large crowd of people. There were 5,000 men with all their families.

What Jesus did on the mountainside that day is recorded in all four gospels – this shows us what a significant event it was. This was a great event. Nothing like it had ever happened before and nothing like it has ever happened since.

Here’s what happened. It was the spring of the year. We know this because verse 4 says, ‘the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.’ The Passover is always in the spring of the year. Also verse 10 says that “there was much grass in that place.” This,

too, pointed to the spring of the year. After the winter the grass has come out on the hillsides. If it had been summer, the grass would have turned brown and withered from the hot weather.

Verse 1 says he went to the “other side of the Sea of Galilee.” The “Sea of Tiberias” is another name for this large inland lake, which is 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. “The other side” refers to the east side, as the west side is the more important side is as to cities and events.

Jesus was with his disciples, but they were not alone. As often was the case, there were crowds following them. There was a reason they were following Jesus. It was because of the (v. 2) “signs he was doing on the sick.” In other words, they saw him healing many sick people and casting out demons and they wanted to see more of these signs. They wanted to see what was going on with him. Some of their motives may have been out of their own desperate need for healing; others perhaps just wanted to see something spectacular or unusual. But we should not miss the point that he had been healing the sick. He had been performing acts of healing. These were signs – they were pointing to something – this man is no minor prophet, but he is a great prophet of Yahweh God.

At the end of John 4 we read that he healed an official’s dying son by pronouncing him cured – and this from a distance of 25 miles. In chapter 5 of John we read that Jesus healed a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. He told him to pick up his bed and walk and “at once he was healed and he took up his bed and walked.” John 5:9.

These were no small miracles in themselves – they were spectacular miracles. They were Messianic miracles, Messianic signs. One day Jesus picked up the scroll in his home synagogue in Nazareth one Sabbath and began to read from Isaiah 61:

(AJ)“The Spirit of the Lord (AK)is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to (AL)proclaim good news to the poor.
(AM)He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and (AN)recovering of sight to the blind,
(AO)to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
19 (AP)to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor....”

21 And he began to say to them, “Today (AS)this Scripture (AT)has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Jesus read to them what Isaiah said would be true of the Messiah, anointed One of God, when he arrived in human history, and he was telling them that he was the one Isaiah was pointing to. These acts of healing that he was doing were indications, signs that he was the one whom Isaiah was talking about.

Now large crowds of people would move through the countryside during the days before the Passover Feast on their way to Jerusalem. So these people may have been such

crowds who had detoured from their journey because they had heard Jesus was nearby and they wanted to see him and hear him and maybe see some of these Messianic signs they had heard he was doing.

Jesus had gone up on a mountain, probably to get away from the crowds so he and his disciples could rest. It is likely that this is what we know as the Golan Heights, an area in Southern Lebanon just to the north of present-day Israel.

I want us to examine this event by looking at in four sections today:

I. The Overwhelming Need

II. The Meager Supply

III. The Abundant Provision

IV. The Inescapable Conclusion

I. The Overwhelming Need

The crowds discovered the whereabouts of Jesus and his disciples up on the mountain and began to walk up to where they were. Jesus must have spotted them first and in anticipation of their situation of being out in the mountains, far from villages and sources of food, he asks Philip, “**Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?**” (v. 5)

In verse 6 we are informed that Jesus ” ... **said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.** Even as God had used the patriarchal prophet Moses to announce to the people of Israel how Yahweh would feed them in the wilderness by raining down manna every morning, so Jesus as the greater second Moses would also feed the people that day in a miraculous way – not by manna appearing in the morning like dew on the ground but by multiplying a few loaves of bread and two fish. We see here Jesus’ Messianic awareness. He knew the OT, he knew all about the provision of manna, and he knew that he was appointed to not only provide bread for the people on this day, but as we will read later in this chapter, he was himself the spiritual bread of God who brings life to all those who partake of him, who believe in him.

There were 5,000 men here. All four gospels record this fact. So this number is irrefutable. But these 5,000 were not alone; their families were with them, many of them probably traveling to Jerusalem for Passover. So we could conservatively estimate there were 20,000 people coming up the mountain in this lonely place.

Philip’s answer to Jesus’ question about where they could buy bread to feed this crowd was this, **Two hundred denarii^[a] worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.** Now a denarii was what a laborer would receive for a day’s pay. So Philip is saying that 200 days of pay would not be enough to provide even a bite to every person. So the situation is overwhelming – it was humanly impossible for this band of 12 men plus Jesus to feed 20,000 people. They did not have the resources to meet this overwhelming need? Maybe you yourself have been or are now in such a situation. Your needs are overwhelmingly great and your resources are meager. So let’s consider...

II. The Meager Supply ...to meet this great need.

Is there no way to feed these people?

But, wait, 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?"*

Now barley was the grain that poor people used to make their bread. So this was very humble loaves of bread. And the fish, as D.A. Carson points out, may have been very small fish, like pickled sardines, to be eaten with the bread. Small barley loaves and tiny fish! How do you feed 20,000 people with this?

So we have the overwhelming need and the meager supply. You know, there is a principle here, a universal truth, but I'm only going to give you the first half of the truth: ***Humanity is always in great need...***, [but Christ is abundantly able to meet those needs] *We all have great needs, do we not? This had been the history of the Hebrew people.*

Jacob and his sons were starving in Palestine until they traveled to Egypt to escape famine.

Israel was about to starve in the desert until Yahweh rained manna from heaven. He did this for 40 years.

We see the needs here. The people came out to the mountain following Jesus and walked up it and Jesus had taught them all day long. His disciples were telling him, "...the day is now over; (N)send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." (Matt. 14:15).

So, what do we see? The Overwhelming Need:

- A. The place – up on a mountain
Mark 6:35 "This is a desolate place" – away from villages where food could be purchased.
- B. The Time – Mk. 6:35 "...the hour is now late."
- B. The crowd of people – 5000
- C. The condition of the people – hungry and tired.
- D. Poverty of the disciples – they had nothing

And we see The Meager Supply:
5 barley loaves and 2 fish

But now, let's consider...

III. The Abundant Provision

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.

Jesus took the loaves in his hands and prayed; he gave thanks to this Father. He may well have prayed the ancient Hebrew prayer: “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.”

As the Son of God he was not independent of the Father, but always in communion with and in dependence on the Father. He said in John 5:30: “I can do nothing on my own.” If Jesus had to pray in circumstances of need, how much more do we?

Look at the abundant provision:

- v. 11 says they ate “as much as they wanted.”
- v. 12 says, “when they had eaten their full”

Mk. 6:42 “They all ate and were satisfied”

I want to give you the second half of the equation I had given you earlier:

Humanity is always in great need..., but Christ is abundantly able to meet those needs.

These people were in need: hungry, tired, and far from any place to buy provision. But Christ fed them well; they were fully satisfied, and they received the sustenance they needed.

¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.”

Christ had done an abundant miracle. The bread was multiplied by an act of God. The leftovers were not something to be wasted. He had the people gather up the remaining pieces, which filled 12 baskets. No doubt the number 12 represented the 12 tribes of Israel.

When Christ does something for people it is to be received and used and not wasted.

So we have seen:

I. The Overwhelming Need

II. The Meager Supply

III. The Abundant Provision

And now:

IV. The Inescapable Conclusion

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!”

What were the people talking about? They were referring to a prophecy that Moses, their greatly beloved and honored patriarch, had given to them:

Deut. 18:15 -

^(A)“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—

Deut. 18:18-19 ^(E)...And I will put my words in his mouth, and ^(G)he shall speak to them all that I command him....

These people were absolutely right. This sign of the feeding of the multitude on the mountainside was an inescapable sign, an irrefutable sign that this was no common man in their midst but a man who was vitally in touch with God.

These people recognized what the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem refused to recognize: that this was indeed the prophet whom Moses had prophesied would come.

We should not underestimate the importance of the signs, the works of power that Jesus did. Was Jesus really the Son of God, was he really the prophet whom Moses spoke about, was he really the one who had come from heaven to reveal God to humanity and to take some of humanity with him into the presence of God by dying for their sins?

How important were the works of Jesus Christ for the verification of his identity, of who he really was?

Listen to what Jesus said:

John 10:36-38

³⁶ do you say of him whom ^(E)the Father consecrated and ^(G)sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because ^(E)I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? ³⁷ ^(E)If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; ³⁸ but if I do them, ^(E)even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that ^(E)the Father is in me and I am in the Father.”

Jesus is saying, if you do not believe me when I tell you that the Father sent me into the world, then look at the works I am doing: they are testifying to who I am. As sane and logical persons you cannot refute the evidence. If you look in the muddy road and seek wagon wheel tracks you know a wagon has passed by. If you see horse hoof prints in the mud, you know a horse has gone down the road – it’s not a cow – because a cow has cloven, that is, split hoofs. A horse’s hooves are not split – they are solid all the way across.

If a man goes around healing people of every kind of disease and affliction, if he delivers people from demons, if he walks on water, if he calms storms on the Sea of Galilee, if he raises dead people back to life, and if he feeds 5,000 men along with their wives and children with only 5 barley loaves and two fish, then who is this man?

We read about him in Isa. 42:4-6:

ⓂBehold, your God

will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.

He will come and save you.”

⁵ ⓂThen the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶ Ⓜthen shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

As Jesus walked back and forth across Judea and Galilee all these things, these signs,, these miracles were continually happening. How do you explain them? How do you account for them?

As Jesus said, the Father was working through him. John the Baptist said the Holy Spirit would come upon him. Luke the historian records in Acts 10:38

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth Ⓜwith the Holy Spirit and with Ⓜpower. He went about doing good and healing all Ⓜwho were oppressed by the devil, Ⓜfor God was with him.

When you and I and anyone reads of this incident on the mountainside when 20,000 people were able to have a feast of all the barely loaves and fish they could hold, what are we to conclude? What should any sane and logical person conclude?

We would have to come to the same conclusion as these people did: **“This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”**

The one who Moses and Isaiah and Ezekiel and Micah and all the prophets declared would has come. He was not hid in corner, but as Peter told Cornelius and his household in Acts 10:39ff:

³⁹ And Ⓜwe are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. ⓂThey put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰ but ⓂGod raised him on Ⓜthe third day and made him to Ⓜappear, ⁴¹ Ⓜnot to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as Ⓜwitnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

Peter says, “all that he did.” He did, he performed, he demonstrated many divine acts of power and authority and mercy as he did on the mountainside that day, enabling 20,000 tired and hungry people to have a feast.

Summary:

- I. The Overwhelming Need**
- II. The Meager Supply**
- III. The Abundant Provision**
- IV. The Inescapable Conclusion**

We see here the great truth: : ***Humanity is always in great need..., but Christ is abundantly able to meet those needs.***

That he did this act of power and compassion is irrefutable – it is confirmed by 4 historical records – the four gospels. The 12 disciples were there; they saw it happen. It was written so that we too could know that it happened, so that we could know that Jesus is indeed the prophet, the Messiah, whom God sent into the world. In him is life, abundant life, life that only God could give.

What is your need today? Is it great? Is it overwhelming? Look to the Lord Jesus Christ. Call upon him. Ask him to extend his hand of power in your behalf.

Look at all his mighty works. Accept the evidence. Believe the signs that point to who he really is. He is the Prophet who has come into the world to reveal the Father and to die for the sins of his people.

Believe in him, serve him and proclaim him. Tell what he has done. He fed the 5,000 men with only a few barley loaves and fish. He indeed is the prophet whom Moses said would come, the Son of God.

Service in his name is the only way to live the Christian life. It is the way of joy – to live in the truth of who Jesus is and proclaim it. Let us go forth to live for him and proclaim him.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for what our Lord Jesus did on the mountainside that day - the hungry and tired were fed and refreshed. Your provision was abundant and supernatural. Jesus, you are Lord, you are provider. You bless your people abundantly and we give you thanks. In your name. Amen.

-by Jeff Gregory, Pastor

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