

“The Feeding of the Five Thousand”
John 6:1-14
(Preached at Trinity, February 6, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Chapter 6** opens with the words, “After these things . . .” John is telling us that this is taking place following Jesus healing at the Pool of Bethesda, although six months to a year have elapsed since that event. John tells us in the former event the rejection of Christ in Judea; in this event he tells how Jesus was rejected in Galilee.
2. Jesus was continuing to grow in popularity and the size of the crowds following Him continued to increase. John tells us in **Verse 4** that the Passover was near.
 - a. This is significant because it tells us that multitudes had come to Jerusalem for the feast.
 - b. It is also significant because the Passover reminded Israel of their deliverance from Egypt and turned their thoughts to Rome. When would God deliver them from their bondage to Rome? They were looking for a deliverer.
3. They had followed Jesus into a remote area away from the cities and away from provision. In **Verse 5** Jesus looks to Philip and points to the size of the crowd. “How will we feed such a multitude?”
John 6:5 NAU - "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?"
4. John points out that Jesus was asking the question for the sake of Philip. He knew exactly how what He was about to do and how He was going to feed them.
We have in this passage the miracle of the feeding of the 5000. It is the only miracle apart from the resurrection recorded in all four Gospels. But John is much more detailed in describing the significance of the miracle. Only John tells us that this was a time of testing for the disciples, that Jesus Himself is the true Bread that satisfies spiritually, and the effect of the miracle upon the multitude.
5. There are several other things we need to see in this account in the life of our Lord
 - I. Although this was a great multitude that had come to see Him most of them would continue in unbelief
 - A. The Scriptures tell us there were 5000 men besides the women and children
John 6:10 NAU - "So the men sat down, in number about five thousand."
Matthew 14:21 NAU - "There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children."
 1. This means there were most likely over 10,000 people present
 - a. They came with great zeal and passion
 - b. They came in spite of the personal inconvenience
 2. But almost all of this great multitude would leave in unbelief
 3. They came to Jesus because of a momentary zeal.

- B. Why were they coming in such large numbers? What was the attraction?
1. Some were hoping Jesus could be the promised Messiah
John 6:14-15 NAU - "Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone."
 2. **Verse 2** tells us it was because they were amazed by His healing miracles. They weren't interested in obeying Him. They only wanted to see His miracles. The excitement level of the crowd was high. They had heard so much about Jesus. This moment had become a sensational event. Sensationalism has never been a means of grace. External excitement is not necessarily an indication of the inward work of the Holy Spirit.
 3. For some, they came because of a personal needs. They weren't just interested in seeing others healed. They had their own infirmities and were hoping to be healed.
John 6:2 NAU - "A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick."
Matthew 14:14 NAU - "When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick."
Luke 9:11 NAU - "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."
 4. Some were fascinated by His words. The teaching of Jesus was like none other.
Mark 6:2 NAU - "When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man *get* these things, and what is *this* wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?"
Matthew 7:28-8:1 NAU - "When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; ²⁹ for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes."
 5. Later Jesus would accuse them of following Him only because He fed them. Like those who were being healed, they were more concerned about their physical needs than their spiritual need.
John 6:26 NAU - "Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled."
 6. People come to Jesus for many different reasons. But there is only one way to be saved. It demands receiving Him as your Master and as the only way of having our sins forgiven.
 Eventually most would forsake Him
John 6:66 NAU - "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore."

- II. God works through His appointed means. He is sovereign over all His works
- A. The multitude of people were in need of food – Jesus could have used any means to provide the food. Satan tempted Jesus to turn rocks into bread, and he knew Jesus was able.
1. Philip complained that the problem was a lack of funds
John 6:7 NAU - "Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little."
 - a. A denarii was an equivalent of a day's wages. Money was not an issue for Jesus. Philip was declaring it would cost thousands of dollars to buy enough food.
Does the Lord of all the earth have need of funds?
 - b. At one point Jesus took a coin from the mouth of a fish to pay the Temple tax
Matthew 17:27 NAU - "go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for you and Me."
 2. Jesus could have fed them supernaturally without the loaves and fishes. He could have caused bread to appear in the lap of each person.
- B. God is the first cause of all things. All things exist by His power. Yet, He usually works through second causes
1. God made the heavens and earth of nothing – yet made Adam from the dust of the ground just as the other animals.
 2. God brought plagues upon Egypt. He could have just destroyed Egypt and led Israel immediately into Canaan
 3. Israel had to take dominion over Canaan – yet the battles were of God
 4. Here, Jesus takes bread and fish and makes more bread and fish. He could have created from nothing, but instead He used the existing bread and fish to bring about the miracle.
- C. God works through second causes in our life
1. He uses the preaching of the Word to create faith within our hearts
 2. He uses trials to test and increase our faith
 3. A.W. Pink writes: "What happened to Philip is, in principle and essence, happening daily in our lives. A trying, if not a difficult situation confronts us; and we meet with them constantly. They come not by accident or by chance; instead, they are each arranged by the hand of the Lord. They are God's testings of our faith. They are sent to 'prove' us. Do we, like Philip and Andrew did, look at our resources? Do we rack our minds to find some solution? or do our first thoughts turn to the Lord Jesus, who has so often helped us in the past? *Here*, right here, is the test of our faith.¹

¹ Arthur Walkington Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1923–1945), 290.

- D. The problem was not with the ability of Christ to provide. The problem was with the ability of the Disciples to believe
1. They were only able to think in terms of what they could see.
 - Philip began calculating how much money they would need. His mind went to the market place, to the price of food.
 - The other disciples began calculating how much food they had on hand.
 - Andrew calculates that it was not nearly enough.
 2. Faith looks beyond what is seen
Hebrews 11:1 NAU - "Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

III. In His compassion God provides our daily bread.

- A. Notice the fare of the feast – There were no fleshly comforts
1. He commanded them to sit down on the grass
John 6:10 NAU - "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place."
 2. Although they were in the presence of the King of kings this was no feast for a king.
 - a. Barley bread was considered by some to be poor-man's bread
 - b. The word translated "fish" here is ὀψάριον – it refers to the flesh of a fish. Originally, the word referred to a tidbit. Most assume this was small pieces of fish to make the barley bread more palatable.
 - c. There was no wine provided – we must assume they drank water
 - d. There were no utensils, no cups, no plates – they ate with their fingers
 3. God is gracious to provide our needs but is not interested in satisfying our lusts. This doesn't mean He doesn't bless us with good things. We must be careful not to set our heart upon them.
 We should notice they ate until they were full—as much as they wanted.
- B. The Charismatics who focus upon materialism do not understand the focus of the Christian life. We must not focus upon worldly wealth
Matthew 6:19-21 NAU - "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."
1 Timothy 6:7-8 NAU - "For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. ⁸ If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content."

IV. We can see in this feast the nature of the gospel

A. It must be initiated by God

1. Jesus was in control of the event
2. Jesus told them what to do and how to do it
John 6:10-12 NAU - "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. ¹¹ 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. ¹² When they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost."
3. The gospel has never been left to our own designs – nor will it ever be
 We are commanded to "Preach the Word"

B. God was sovereign over the miracle--The increase comes from God

John 6:12-13 NAU - "When they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten."

1. Those whom Christ feeds shall be filled
John 4:14 NAU - "but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."
John 6:27 NAU - "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."
John 6:51 NAU - "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."
2. Those who come to Christ shall find life abundant
John 10:10 NAU - "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly."
3. Jesus is the only true bread that can satisfy our true need

C. Before a man will look to Christ he must be convinced of the weakness of his own resources. He must come with nothing—empty handed.

1. The disciples understood that there was no place to buy food and they didn't have the resources even if there was.
2. Looking among the crowd all they could find was five barley loaves and two fish. Again, wholly insufficient to supply their need.
3. We often take food for granted. We have it in abundance and can obtain more with just a trip to the supermarket. Food in ancient cultures was significant. They were dependent upon harvests and food was often in short supply. This situation was one they knew all too well. There was not enough food and they were helpless to obtain more.
4. In the realization of our own helpless condition, Jesus is able to provide. In the Gospel we must come to a point of utter helplessness where there is nothing can do to help ourselves.

Conclusion:

1. God provides all of our needs in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:19 NAU - "But my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."
2. He provides richly and abundantly. Our greatest need is to be reconciled and restored unto God. Jesus has accomplished this to the fullness.
Notice that the multitude was fed abundantly with an abundance left over—twelve baskets, perhaps pointing to the twelve tribes of Israel. In other words, in Christ God has provided above and beyond the needs of His elect people. All fullness dwells in Christ. John wrote at the beginning of this Gospel:
John 1:16 NAU - "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace."