



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

WHO IS JESUS • The Bread of Life

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

John 6:1-42; 66-71

Do You Want Fries With That?

Believe it or not, in your lifetime you will probably spend about thirty-five thousand hours eating food. That's the equivalent of eight years of eating nonstop, twelve hours each day. And you know what's amazing? A few hours after that 34,999th meal, you'll be hungry again!

Context

In chapter five, Jesus made a big splash in Jerusalem. He healed a lame man and sent him into Jerusalem, prompting a discussion with the Jewish leaders. In chapter six, Jesus is going to make an even bigger splash, and this time he's not targetting the leaders. He's turning to the people. It all starts with him climbing up a hill.

John was careful to record the place and time of the scene for us. The hill he ascended was in Galilee. Today this area is called the Golan Heights. A spacious pasture spread before him. The Jewish feast of Passover was near.

The Passover and Messianic Expectation

The Feast of Passover was instituted by God Himself. You can read about it in Exodus chapters 11 and 12. The Passover celebrates the climactic plague on Egypt, the death of the firstborn sons. The night before God enacted that plague, He instructed the Israelites to sacrifice lambs as substitutions for their sons, and to spread blood from those sacrifices on the doorposts of their homes. When God struck down the firstborn sons across the land, he passed over the sons of Israel, because of those substitutionary lambs. This final plague decimated Egypt, and initiated the Exodus.

And by this spring day, as Jesus stood before a massive crowd of people, the Jews had been celebrated the Passover Feast annually for more than 1000 years. The political climate bore some resemblance to the era of the Exodus as well. The Jews longed for deliverance from Roman oppression.

What's the Big Idea?

Jesus is the Bread of Life, who truly nourishes our souls.

What's the Problem?

Instead of drawing close to God, we devote our hearts to shallow things like money and popularity.



The Crowd

In verse 2, John told us why the crowd was there. They had seen or heard about Jesus' healings. Many wanted healing for themselves. Others just wanted to see Jesus do a miracle with their own eyes. When John says, "so the men sat down, about 5000 in number," he's only listing the number of men (households). The actual number of people was 15,000-20,000.

The Perplexing Question

Keep in mind, Jesus and his disciples were in the middle of a field, standing in front of a massive crowd when he asked them, "Where can we buy food for these people to eat?" They had no cell phones, and no Burger Kings or Jimmy Johns.... Even today, with those resources, it would cost at least \$150,000 and weeks of advanced planning to feed that many people. So Andrew and Philip both spoke up.

Philip said, in effect, "we don't have enough money." Andrew said, in effect, "we don't have the resources." But of course, Jesus knew what he was going to do the whole time. He was simply drawing their attention to it.

Jesus Dodges the Crowd

You have to understand the nature of this crowd to understand this story. Pay special attention to verses 15 and 22. Once they saw this miracle, the crowd immediately tried to take Jesus by force and make him king. They wanted a political leader who could provide for them, bless the economy, and deliver them from Roman oppression. They didn't really care about his teaching. They just wanted him for what he could do for them. So Jesus dodged them. He sent the disciples away by themselves later that night while the crowd was watching then slipped away, and eventually joined them on the water.

The Nature of True Faith

Later, some members from that crowd found Jesus in Capernaum and tried to talk him into feeding them on an ongoing basis. This conversation (6:25-59) reads like an old western standoff. Jesus repeatedly invited them to believe in him. He even stated, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him who he has sent (v. 26)." But the crowd repeatedly tried to manipulate him. And they eventually said, "Sir, give us this bread always," implying that they would only believe if he agreed to provide for them first. Jesus refused to be their puppet and provide miracles-on-demand. So most of the crowd eventually left.

Things haven't changed much today. Lots of people follow Jesus when it's easy to do so, but they're quick to abandon Jesus as soon as trials or temptation hits. True believers, in contrast, cling fiercely to Jesus. Take one of the apostle John's disciples for example. His name was Polycarp. In his days, around 160 A.D., Christians were called "atheists" because they refused to worship the Roman gods. He was eighty-six years old when he was arrested by Roman soldiers and brought before a tribunal.

The Roman Proconsul tried to persuade him to deny Christ, saying, "Have respect for your old age, swear by the fortune of Caesar. Repent, and say, 'Down with the Atheists!'" But instead of criticizing his fellow believers, Polycarp looked grimly at the wicked heathen multitude in the stadium, and gesturing towards them, he said, "Down with the Atheists!" "Swear," urged the Proconsul, "reproach Christ, and I will set you free." Polycarp replied, "86 years have I have served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?" A few minutes later, Polycarp willingly stepped onto a pile of wood, and he was burned to death.

What's Our Response?

Because Jesus truly nourishes our souls, we can follow Him anywhere.

What Are the Questions?

John 6

LAUNCH

Have you ever been in a relationship where you felt more used than loved? Explain.

EXPLORE

Read [John 6:1-15](#)

1. How would you characterize Philip's and Andrew's response to Jesus' request?
2. Jesus obviously knew what he was about to do. Why do you think he asked his disciples for their advice?
3. How do you think the disciples felt as they gathered up all that leftover food?
4. How did the crowd respond?

Read [John 6:16-21](#)

5. Imagine that you are one of the disciples facing that storm. You've seen Jesus turn water into wine and you've seen him heal sick and lame people. Then all of the sudden you see Him walking toward you on the lake. Is your perspective of Jesus changing? How so?
6. Why do you suppose Jesus joined the disciples on the water instead of leaving with them earlier?

Read [John 6:22-40](#)

7. Why did members from the crowd sought Jesus and found him so quickly the next day? What were they after?

8. According to verses 27, how did Jesus try to redirect their thinking?
9. What promises did Jesus make in this conversation?

Read [John 6:41-42](#)

10. How did the crowd respond?

Jesus, the Bread of Life

Verses 43-58 read like a standoff. The crowd continued to ask Jesus for ongoing provision, and Jesus repeatedly told them to trust him for eternal life. At one point Jesus said, "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 (John 6:51)." And many people left him.

11. What's the difference between desiring Jesus for who he is and seeking him for what he can give us?

Read [John 6:66-71](#)

12. How did the apostles respond when Jesus asked them if they wanted to leave too?
13. Have you ever known anyone who stopped following Jesus? Why did they stop?

APPLY

The martyrdom of Polycarp, one of John's disciples, is well known. During his interrogation, the Roman Proconsul threatened to burn him alive. He replied, "You threaten me with fire that burns for an hour and then is extinguished, but you know nothing of the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly. Why are you waiting? Bring on whatever you want."

14. Why is it that some Christians are willing to die for their faith and others give in at the slightest trial or temptation?
15. Has Jesus satisfied your spiritual hunger? How?
16. When are you most tempted to deny your faith?
17. Can you think of a time when it was scary for you to follow Jesus?
18. Following Jesus doesn't always bring quick rewards. What are some of the costs of following Jesus? Why do it?

What Are the Answers?

1. Philip and Andrew did the best they could. They were polite but confused. Jesus asked an "impossible" question. This is the miracle commonly known as the Feeding of the 5000. And 5000 is just the estimate of the number of men. Women and children were also there. Most scholars estimate there were about 15,000 people altogether.
 2. Jesus was drawing attention to what he was about to do. He wanted to involve his disciples.
 3. Discuss
 4. Pay special attention to verse 15. This was a very visible miracle. And the crowd suddenly knew Jesus could not only heal people, but he could also provide food for them. The average American spends over \$150 per week on food. Add that to all your healthcare costs, and you can see why this crowd suddenly decided Jesus was going to be their king, regardless of whether he wanted the job or not.
 5. Throughout the whole book of John, the disciples are growing in their understanding of Who Jesus Is.
 6. Notice the end of verse 5 as well. One reason Jesus didn't leave with the disciples is because he was avoiding the crowd.
 7. They wanted economic provision and they wanted to champion a popular king.
 8. Look at verses 27, 29, and 33. Jesus repeatedly said, "It's me you want, not another meal!"
 9. He promised eternal life! And he promised eternal satisfaction, saying, "Whoever comes to me shall not hunger and shall never thirst!" He specifically mentioned resurrection in verse 40. These are amazing promises!
 10. The crowd didn't want Jesus' promises. They just wanted him to agree to provide food for them.
 11. Loving what Jesus can give us is not the same as loving Jesus himself. If we only love what he gives us, we'll stop following him as soon as our circumstances begin to challenge our devotion.
 12. The disciples continued to grow in their understanding of Jesus, day by day.
 13. Share
Polycarp also walked willingly onto the pile of wood and prayed, "Lord sovereign God, I thank you that you have deemed me worthy of this moment..." Then he was burned alive.
 14. One reason is because not everyone who claims to be a Christian has a genuine relationship with Jesus. Being in a garage doesn't make you a car. And being in church or from a Christian family doesn't make you a Christian. Each of us must make a decision to follow Christ on our own. See Romans 10:13
- 15-18. Discuss

Memorize

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."

John 6:35