



Disciplers Bible Studies

JOHN
LESSON 7

The Bread of Life John 6:1-71

Introduction

A. Christ's Public Following (John 2-5)

In the last lesson (John 5), we saw a foreboding turn-around in Jesus' public ministry. Previously, in John 2-4, His following had increased in Galilee and Samaria because of His awesome presence, divine words and miraculous signs. Then, in John 5, His healing of the lame man on the Sabbath in Jerusalem, along with His claim to be equal with God, caused great consternation among the Pharisees. Their flaming anger and threatening influence continued to arouse Jerusalem and Judea. The authorities wanted to kill Him.

B. Opposition to Christ (John 5)

Jesus had cited many witnesses to the Jerusalem Jewish leaders concerning His claim as the divine Messiah. In Chapter 5 He pointed specifically to the testimony of God the Father, John the Baptist, His own miraculous works and the Old Testament writings of Moses. But the Jews were so blinded by their own self-righteousness and man-made Sabbath rules that they could not comprehend His supernatural signs and spiritual words. In spite of Old Testament prophecy, they could not in any way recognize this Divine Being as their Messiah. They still wanted to put Jesus to death.

C. Summary of John 6

In John 6, we see Jesus' fourth and fifth miraculous signs; the feeding of the five thousand and walking on water. Coupled with these miracles is His great discourse on the Bread of Life. These events brought forth both the high point and the low point in Jesus' popularity. His reputation soared after He fed the multitude and they clamored for Him to be King in order to continue feeding their stomachs physically.

Later, after His "eat-my-flesh, drink-my-blood" discourse, the multitude and many of His disciples could not understand the deep, spiritual meaning of His words. They left Him and walked with Him no more. His twelve original disciples, however, stayed with Him.

Outline of John 6:1-71

- I. Fourth Sign: Feeding of the Five Thousand (6:1-15)
- II. Fifth Sign: Crossing of the Sea (6:16-24)
- III. The Source of the Bread of Life (6:25-34)
- IV. The Nature of the Bread of Life (6:35-50)
- V. The Eating of the Passover Lamb (6:51-71)
- VI. Memory Verse

A. Geographic Setting

Because of His severe opposition in Judea, Jesus withdrew to northern Galilee where He and His disciples ministered for several months. Then, after Jesus heard about the beheading of John the Baptist, the group crossed the Sea of Galilee to get some rest.

It was Passover season when many Jewish males and sometimes their families traveled to the capital city of Jerusalem. Perhaps many of these Galileans were on the eastern route to avoid going through Samaria. They had heard that Jesus and His disciples were in the area northeast of the lake. They were eager to hear Him and benefit from His healing powers. Five thousand men and probably several hundred additional women and children gathered on the mountainside.

B. Jesus' Compassion for the Multitude

Jesus ministered to many of the sick, then sat with His disciples and looked upon the great crowd with compassion. He thought of the Passover meal and embraced the opportunity to provide food and spiritual teaching to these needy people. It was almost as if the Lord was saying to His disciples, "We, too, will celebrate the Passover feast which My Father will provide." Jesus would show His disciples how they could work with Him in the same way that He worked with His Father – in perfect oneness of love and cooperation.

C. The Source of the Physical Food

1. The Hopelessness of Feeding the Multitude

Jesus asked Philip where they could buy food, not because He needed to know, but in order to train Philip to trust Him in a situation that seemed hopeless. Philip's response was in effect, "Master, it can't be done with the money we have, humanly speaking." All of the disciples must have recognized and appreciated the impossibility of resolving this situation apart from a miraculous work from the hand of God .

2. The Lad With Bread and Fish

Then Peter's brother, Andrew, told Jesus about a lad present with five barley loaves and two fish. The fact that Andrew brought this to Jesus' attention seemed to imply that he thought maybe Jesus could do something with this totally inadequate amount of food. Andrew's positive attitude, however, was mixed with doubts and unbelief.

The lad willingly gave what he had to Jesus, not knowing whether he would go without food, or whether to trust Jesus that everything would be all right. The loving, compassionate face of Jesus "told" him this was the right thing to do. Jesus fed more than 5000 people with only five barley loaves and two fish.

Application:

This is an example of what God does with the sacrificial giving of our resources and time. He multiplies our giving to meet the needs of others and satisfies our needs at the same time. When you or someone around you has a need that seems impossible to handle on a human level, do you, like Andrew, bring it to Jesus with whatever is available, recognizing that He can multiply it and use it beyond your greatest imagination?

D. The Sign Miracle

1. Food for All With Fragments Left Over

The miracle itself took place after Jesus gave thanks to His Father and blessed the food (Luke 9:16). The disciples then distributed the bread and fish to the great multitude. They were so busy passing out food that, for a time, they didn't realize what an incredible, supernatural event was taking place. Everyone in this large, hungry multitude was filled and there were more fragments left over than they had started

with. Jesus had met their physical needs and had some remaining.

2. Significance of the Miracle

The importance of the feeding miracle is clearly emphasized in the Bible by the fact that all four Gospels include it (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:11-17.) The miracle provides indisputable evidence of Jesus Christ's creative power, supreme sovereignty and divine glory.

E. Misinterpretation of the Miracle

The multitude became excited and wanted to force Jesus to be king. They had misinterpreted the miraculous sign which was given to reveal God's loving compassion for human need and to reveal the divine authority of His Son. Instead, their thoughts were on material comfort and security. They wanted Jesus to serve their ends. But He departed from them to be alone on the mountain and told His disciples to leave by boat without Him.

II. Fifth Sign: Crossing of the Sea (6:16-24)

A. Jesus Walked on Water and Calmed the Sea

1. The Raging Storm

The disciples departed that evening in a boat to cross the sea for Capernaum. It was a dark, stormy night and the sea was raging fiercely. Dr. Adam Clarke suggests that Satan, the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2), may have provoked this treacherous sea-storm.

2. Jesus Calmed the Sea

From His mountain site, Jesus surveyed the situation and knew that His disciples did not have the needed strength to battle against these uncontrollable elements and reach the shore safely. So, He timed His deliverance perfectly and walked upon the water to find them. He calmed their fears with His presence and brought the wind and sea under control at once (Psalm 107:29.)

3. Was There a Second Miracle?

John then wrote, "*Immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.*" John seemed to speak of their sudden arrival there as extraordinary and miraculous. However, there is nothing in the text to substantiate that this was a second sign from His walking-on-water miracle.

4. The People Searched for Jesus

When the people saw that Jesus had left the mountain, they got into boats and crossed the sea to Capernaum looking for Him.

Application:

Do you sometimes feel that uncontrollable forces are raging against you? You seem to be in the dark, carried along by a strong current, fearful of the outcome? The promises of God come to you, but you are discouraged and unable to claim them with confidence. This lesson teaches us to believe in our hearts that Jesus knows all about our situations, is praying for us and will deliver us in His perfect timing. Fix your eyes on Jesus in every trial and tribulation. Flood your mind with memorized Scriptures (such as Isaiah 41:10; 43:1-3a; Philippians 4:6-7,) and wait for His purpose and plan for you.

III. The Source of the Bread of Life (6:25-34)

A. The Food That Endures to Everlasting Life (6:25-27)

The people found Jesus and He confronted them with the devious intentions of their hearts. They sought Him for physical and superficial reasons, looking for material gain and temporary satisfaction. Many people today are interested in Jesus only because of the benefits He may give them. All such self-indulgence eventually turns to ashes, just as food ultimately turns to waste. The food of eternal life, which Jesus gives, is the only thing that satisfies the hunger of the human heart.

B. The Works of God

Jesus explained to them that this is the work that God now requires – to believe and accept His Son. The point is to seek Him and make a deliberate choice to follow and obey Him. No other work is acceptable in God's sight. Jesus claimed to be able to give this food of eternal life because His Father had given Him the authority and set the seal of approval on Him.

C. Manna Versus Spiritual Bread

The people still thought only in terms of their physical needs. They thought of Moses' prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15. In effect they said, "Yes, Jesus, You just fed thousands of us, but You did it just once. Moses fed our forefathers in the wilderness many times. What work can You do to prove that God has sent You?" Jesus replied that it was God, not Moses, who gave manna and

that it was perishable bread given to keep their bodies going. God now provided the true Bread of Life for the spiritual needs of the soul. "The bread of God is He who comes down from heaven." This is the bread that gives life and preserves from death. The crowd, however, still dwelt on the level of material food.

IV. The Nature of the Bread of Life (6:35-50)

A. The Only Bread That Satisfies and Sustains

Next, Jesus expanded His explanation. He said, "I am the Bread of Life." Jesus is the food that sustains and satisfies your spiritual hunger and thirst completely. Being nourished by and abiding in Him is the only answer for mankind – for a needy and perishing world. He is the only way to a fulfilling earthly and eternal life.

B. God's Electing Grace

Importantly, Jesus told them how a person comes to Christ (vs. 37, 39, 44.) The Father draws them, and gives them to Jesus. The ability to believe in Jesus requires the empowering gift of faith from God. Only those whom the Father enables to believe come to Christ. Jesus pointed out that the ultimate cause of faith is God's electing grace, not man's freedom of choice. John MacArthur states it well: "Coming to Christ requires a conscious decision on our part in response to God's Spirit drawing us to Himself. After we come to that decision, we begin to discover that God had moved our minds to understand, He had moved our emotions to desire, and He had moved our wills to choose to decide."

C. The Bread That Came Down From Heaven

Again in vs. 48 Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" - the living bread which came down from heaven. He explained further that the bread He gives is His flesh, referring to His future sacrifice at the cross. It is interesting to note that Jesus had said seven times in this discourse that He had come down out of heaven, emphasizing the fact that He was God's gracious gift to mankind (vss. 33,38,41,42,50,51,58.)

V. Eating the Passover Lamb (6:51-71)

A. Life Is In the Blood

We need to keep in mind that this discourse took place at the Capernaum synagogue at the time of the Passover feast. Thus, Jesus' words, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man," refers sym-

bologically to the ceremony of eating the Passover Lamb, which itself pointed to the Lamb of God on the cross. Christ stated that a believer spiritually eats His flesh when he opens his being to receive and live by the fact that He died to give the person a new life. Moses said in Leviticus 17:11, *“For the life of the flesh is in the blood.”* Hebrews 9:22 said, *“without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.”* Jesus gave His life – His blood – for our sins that we might be reconciled to God and have everlasting life with Him.

B. The Meaning of “Drink My Blood”

Again in vs. 53, to *“drink His blood”* meant to participate spiritually and personally in the death of Christ, realizing that He will die for every person’s sins. Jesus was saying that unless you become partakers of the blessings about to be purchased by His flesh and blood, His passion and His violent death, you cannot have eternal life. In other words, if you don’t spiritually participate in the grace of the atonement He was about to make by His death, you cannot possibly be saved. It should be clear to every reader of this discourse by now that Jesus was speaking in metaphors, not literal terms.

C. Rejection by Many Disciples

1. The Withdrawal

As Chapter 6 comes to a close, Christ’s profound teaching ended in a parting of the ways. In vs. 52, 60, and 66, we see the antagonism of the Jews growing in proportion to the deeper teaching of Jesus relating to the cross. They found His words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood intolerable. They misunderstood His words in vs. 63 that His discourse is based on the spiritual dimension of life, not the physical. His language was metaphorical, not literal.

From that time on, many of His disciples withdrew. Note that the two terms, “disciple” and “believer”, are not necessarily synonymous. Some disciples were believers, but many were just following the crowd and learning. Their faith was not genuine, their attachment to Jesus was only superficial.

2. The Testing of the Twelve

The twelve, on the other hand, except for Judas, were believing disciples. Even though they did not clearly understand yet how Jesus could be the Bread from heaven to bring mankind eternal life, or how eternal life can and must result from His death, they did not leave Him. He questioned

the twelve to give them the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment and allegiance. Peter answered for all of them except Judas, *“We have believed and come to know that You are the Holy One of God.”*

Application:

You and I need to be concerned with the care of our souls and focus our lives on the food of eternal life. Believing in Jesus satisfies the basic human need and desire for life. It is by suffering with Him and by feeding on Him that we obtain life initially and continue to flourish spiritually. Do you honestly believe in your heart, and can you sincerely say with the Apostle Paul in Galatians 2:20, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me?”*