
John 6:1-15

After this, Jesus crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias. A huge crowd kept following him wherever he went, because they saw his miraculous signs as he healed the sick. Then Jesus climbed a hill and sat down with his disciples around him. (It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration.) Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, "Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?" He was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do.

Philip replied, "Even if we worked for months, we wouldn't have enough money to feed them!" Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. "There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?"

"Tell everyone to sit down," Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered 5,000.) Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, "Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted." So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves.

When the people saw him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, "Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!" When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself.

We have exhaustively covered the discussion in Chapter 5 between the religious leaders and Jesus after He healed the man at the pool of Bethesda and now we move from Jerusalem back to Galilee. But before we make the jump I think it might be helpful to understand the story behind the story. Matthew and Mark pitch in and tell us of a couple of significant events that happened which led Jesus to take the disciples to this isolated place.

First of all Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, was beheaded by King Herod. I can imagine that this must have had a huge impact on Jesus. *Matthew 14:13* tells us that as soon as Jesus heard the news He hopped in a boat to go to a remote area to be alone. It is important to never forget that although John has emphasized Jesus' deity, Jesus was also a man with real feelings.

Maybe John's death got Him thinking of what He was going to have to go through in the not too distant future. Maybe He was just sick and tired of the damage and effect of sin in this world and wanted to escape for a while to a quiet place, away from the constant reminder of how messed up things are. Maybe He was thinking about how many prophets and messengers that He had sent to the world to convince us of our need to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and how, almost without exception, they were all killed. Now, there is one more to add to the count of the faithful who were martyred. Maybe He was concerned about how the news would impact those who were with Him. According to Mark 6, they had just returned from their first missionary journey and I am sure the news about John would have put a serious damper on this exciting event.

Mark 6:30

The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had

done and what they taught. The Jesus said, “Let’s get away from the crowds for a while and rest.”

So the backdrop of this story is that they were looking for a little respite from all the recent activity. Now, in studying the gospel of John I hope you are noticing a little pattern. John always gives a verse or story that is in effect a set up to something important that Jesus is going to say later on. For example, the emphasis on light in Chapter 1 was in contrast to the darkness Jesus talked about in Chapter 3; a darkness which prevented Nicodemus and the other religious leaders from believing. The story of the Samaritan village and those who believed just by hearing the Word of God was a set up and a contrast to the Jews who heard, saw miracles performed in their midst, and still refused to believe all the while demanding another miraculous sign. The story of Jesus healing one man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath was a set up to the encounter with the religious leaders where He made it clear that:

- His father was always working and so He must be about His Father’s business (Sabbath or no Sabbath).
- He only did what His Father told Him to do. Hence, only one man, out of the multitudes of sick people, was healed.
- He always sought the will of God and always refused to do His own will.
- He did nothing without first consulting the Father.
- He only cared what about the Father’s will and He did not care what others thought about Him. He was not going to appease them in any way shape or form, and told them that to their face.

- He also made it clear that the Father has turned over all judgment of life and death to the Son so that all people one day will honor the Son because He is the One.

Now, this miracle of the bread and the fish and the feeding of the 5,000 is a set up to the next major teaching that Jesus gives later on in Chapter 6. In this story John communicates to us using numbers and types or symbols to give us the trailer or the preview of the intense message that Jesus is going to give.

It must have been early spring as John tells us the Passover celebration was near and they are in place far away from the towns and villages, just trying to relax. Then low and behold, the crowds start coming. You would think this is a good thing, but John makes it clear that they are coming because of the spectacle Jesus has created through the healings and miracles He performed. This is a very important point in terms of the “set up” for Jesus’ next teaching. These people have such misplaced notions of what is happening, why it is happening, and they really have no comprehension of who they are dealing with.

A man is in their midst whose miracles and teachings testify to the fact that He has come from God and they just want to be part of the action. Notice, it does not say that they came all the way out to this isolated place because the deeds He performed convinced them that He is the Messiah—the Son of God—and they just want to be in the presence of the living God. They came because of what they were hoping He would do for them.

Even at the end of this story, in *verse 15*, we are told that Jesus saw that they were going to take Him by “force” –literally seize Him – and declare Him to be their king. Can you imagine; they were actually planning on seizing God in the

flesh in an attempt to make Him king. When you think about it that way, it's ridiculous: trying to take Jesus and forcibly crown Him as king. They simply had no idea who they were dealing with. But before we get too haughty, is it really that different from what we have talked about over the last couple of weeks about whether or not we have actually chosen to let Jesus be our Lord? Most of us are comfortable with Him in the role of our Savior but we get a little squeamish when we talk about letting Him have absolute rule and authority over all areas of our life.

Like most of us, they wanted God to do things their way. They were ready for a king to come and kick out the Romans and free their land from foreign occupation and their people from oppression. The times were desperate, is that really too much to expect from one who has obviously come from God? Notice that no one even stops to consider what God wants or even thinks that the Father might have a plan. They are just fixated on what they think Jesus can do for them.

How often do we expect God to do things our way? How often are our prayers and all that we bring before God centered on what we want. If Jesus is God, which John has told us directly or through inference 24 times in just the first 5 chapters (I've started to keep track), and if we are pretty sure that we are not God, then who are we to constantly expect Him to do things the way we want them done.

This picture John paints stands in stark contrast to the last chapter where Jesus gave us a living example of how we are to be in relationship with God. Jesus said that He always seeks the will of the Father and at the same time always refuses to seek His own will. This is how Jesus lived! Yet, it is so natural for us to just think about what we want, when we want it, and how we want it, with little to no consideration for what God wants.

Think about your day – a normal day – where you are running around doing all that you do. How much of your mental time is spent seeking to understand what

God has for you today and considering how His plan might unfold? Or do you basically wake up, get out of bed, drag a comb across your head, go downstairs and drink a cup, and just get going and take care of the things that you know you “need” to take care of: work, school, family matters, and even ministry falls into this category?

Or consider how much time you spend dwelling on what bothers you, who bothers you, why they bother you, and so on? Oh, and here is one of my favorites, how much time do you spend thinking about how you don’t really like your life and how you just wish that things could be different?

This obsession on self is chronic. It is interesting to note from this passage that it is not something that is unique to our generation resulting from the materialism and “me” centered culture we live in. It seems that the “me” is a septic condition of our *Old Man* and the “me” has always plagued mankind.

This condition is then exacerbated by the fact that too often we relate God as if He is our genie in the bottle. Of course we would never say that, but our choices and our actions are a pretty good reflection of what we really believe. We are busy managing our own life taking care of things and when something happens that is a little too much for us to handle, we take our lamp out and rub it and ask God to fix things and solve our problems. Of course, we like to make things easy for Him by telling Him our 3 wishes: how He should handle things, what we like, and what we are expecting from Him.

If, in His mercy, He comes through and helps us out, then once the pressure, fear, and worry are relived, the lamp goes back in our pocket and we get right back to managing our own lives and taking care of things. But if, in His mercy, He does not help us out, our mind gets filled with doubts and we become disillusioned wondering if He really loves us, if He really cares, if He is really watching and

interested, and whether He will really do all those things He said He would do or be who He said He would be for us. After all, we asked Him to fix things—doesn't that mean He is supposed to answer and do something? Then this uncertainty propels us back to that place where we try to manage and fix our own issues since it does not seem that He is doing a very good job of being the Lord of our lives.

Imagine for just a moment what it would be like if you came to God because He is God and not because you need Him to do something for you. And while we are instructed to bring our cares to the Lord, imagine, just for a moment, how your prayers might be different if you really believed 100% that He is God, that He was in control of all the details of your life, and that He really did truly love you and has your best interests in mind? Imagine if you really believed 100% that what has happened in your life and what is going on now has been allowed by God and is being used by Him in order to accomplish His ultimate purpose in your life: which, according to ***Romans 8:28-30***, is to conform you into the image of His Son.

Imagine if you believed 100% the verses in ***Proverbs 2:1-11, 3:5; 20:24; Psalm 40:8; 106:13; Romans 12:2; Colossians 1:9; Ephesians 5:10, 17; and Galatians 5:25*** which all say that you are to seek the will of God for your life, you can know the will of God for your life, and that you have the power to choose to walk in it?

I don't know about you, but I think that if I really believed what the Bible says, so many of the ways I relate to God would change. I would not be constantly wrestling Him trying to forcibly take Him to overpower the Romans in my life and free my land and people from oppression. I believe like Jesus I would always seek the Father's will for my life and always refuse to follow my own desires and my own plan for my life. I definitely would not be showing up asking for help only when things get difficult and too much for me to control. Rather, I would have a continual and ongoing dialogue with Jesus every day, all day long, and I would

continually desire to be smack dab in the center of His will understanding that what He has allowed in my life is intended to make me more like Him.

Over the next couple of weeks, Jesus is going to deal with this notion of believing what God has said about His Son and about our need to be 100% dependent upon Him for all things. We will discover that what we actively believe about the truth is the lynch pin that determines our ability to experience God and experience eternity now.

Notice that Jesus moves in on Philip in order to test his belief. In John Chapter 2, when Phillip first met Jesus he instantly went and grabbed his friend Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about!” Since that time, Philip has seen many miracles and has even gone out to the towns and villages preaching the good news that the Messiah had come. But now was the time to stop and have Philip take a look within and come to grips with what he really believed and how deep his belief really ran. Did he believe that Jesus was God, was he willing to seek the will of the Lord, or was he going to try and fix things and solve the problem with human means?

Jesus often does this with us. He allows people or circumstances to come into our lives to test our faith. Rest assured, He is not worried about whether we will fail the test (after all, He died for our failure and he knows beforehand whether or not we will fail); in fact, I think He often brings us tests knowing that we are going to fail. You see, He always has a greater purpose in mind. He wants to help us understand how big the gap is between what we say we believe and what we will actually choose to believe. I believe that He uses these tests to pop our little bubble of spiritual pride and personal competency and once again remind us of our innate inability and further convince us of how much we really need Him to be the “Lord” of our lives at all times, in all things.

Look at Philip's response: "Even if we worked for months, we wouldn't have enough money to feed them!" I would say that he failed the test; after all, he was hanging out with the Messiah, the one Moses and the prophets wrote about. Surely this was not too big of a problem for Him. If Moses could bring their ancestors bread from heaven, then surely this was a no brainer for the Son of God.

Imagine if Philip believed 100% that Jesus was God and was in control of all that was happening, maybe he would have responded to the question a bit differently: "Buy bread for all these people, really? I figured you would take care of them. Please just let me know if there is anything you want me to do." Imagine if we responded this way to the issues in our life trusting that God is God, that He is in control, and He always knows how He is going to handle things.

Then Andrew pitches in and brings a small lunch from a boy in the crowd and presents it to Jesus. But similar to Philip, Andrew is also stuck in natural thinking. "But what good is that with this huge crowd?" What I find interesting is that the disciples are not offering any of their own their lunch. Maybe Jesus and His disciples were rushing to get away from it all and they just jumped in the boat and forgot to pack any food. This might explain why they are, so to speak, off their spiritual game. They probably were already worried about what they were going to eat.

This part of the story, and the natural thinking of Philip and Andrew, is very challenging to me. I have found that this is an area where God has tested my faith and I have often failed. For a good part of my adult life I never really had to worry about such things as paying for food or paying my monthly bills, I always had jobs that made that a no brainer for me. It was not really an issue of faith in my life. I just had the money and never really thought too much about how God was going to provide. I had it covered and just looked to Him for more important issues. But

now that my job situation is radically different, I find that I try to figure out how I am going to deal with things, try to analyze what I need to do, and how I am going to provide. Oh sure I pray for God's help, but since I have not recently seen Him perform any type of dramatic miracle of provision for my life, I find myself overcome with worry. This tells me that my "belief" that God is God and sovereign over my life is at times more words than reality. But thank goodness the point of this story is that God is God and He is in control regardless of our failings and our unwillingness to believe.

There is also some humor in this story. The two little fish that Andrew brings to Jesus are even smaller than you can imagine. There are 3 Greek words for fish. "Icthus" which means a normal size fish, "Ichthudion" which means "a little fish;" and the word that is used in this text, "Opsarion" which means a dainty dish or relish of fish. So we are talking about an amount that is less than a snack; barely enough for this boy much less a crowd of people.

We are told that there were 5,000 men in this crowd, so if you add women, teenagers, and children, there were probably 8, 9, 10 thousand people or more. So from a purely humanistic perspective, they had a big problem on their hands and not just a small problem.

Jesus had them all sit down and after saying thanks, He started distributing the food. Let's look again at what Jesus had to work with: 5 barley loaves of bread and 2 little relish size portions of fish. Yet, when He was done feeding this enormous crowd there were 12 baskets of barley bread pieces that were leftover. Remember, in the book of John wherever we are given specific—seemingly random—details, we have to remember that John is likely communicating something deeper through Biblical symbols, numbers, and types. Therefore, we always want to stop and attempt to discern the richness of what he is communicating.

First, let's look at the numbers: 2, 5, 7, 10, and 12 and then the Biblical types he uses. There were 2 fish, 5 loaves, a total of seven; yet, if multiplied they equal 10. And then there were 12 baskets remaining.

In Biblical numerology the number 2 has two meanings. First it represents union, as in the union of a man and a woman (which we will get to at the end of this story). But more often it represents the number of division. God created 2 lights, one to rule the day and one to rule the night. There was division between Cain and Able, Isaac and Esau. The Son has two natures, human and divine. On the 2nd day of creation God divided the water and the land. There are two types of people that will be divided: sheep and goats.

In this instance, I think it might represent the division between what everyone says they believe versus what they choose to believe. Further, it might also represent the division between what comes from the sea (which is a type or a Biblical symbol of humanity—*1 Chronicles 16:32, Isa 43:6, Isa 57:20; Nahum 1:4, Jude 13; Revelation 13:1*) and that what comes from God (the bread of life).

Next we have the number 5 in the crowd of men (5000) and the 5 loaves of barley bread. This number also has a dual meaning: on the one hand, it means man's absolute weakness. For example, every chapter number 5 in the Bible contains some story of man's weakness and inability. For example, Genesis 5, although men lived many years, they must eventually die. Exodus 5, God's people in their weakness were crushed by their oppressors. Leviticus 5, God recognizes the poverty and inability of the people and allows them to bring a sacrifice of a turtle dove (which costs next to nothing) versus a large animal which costs much. Numbers 5, the weak and diseased people were put outside of the camp. Deuteronomy 5, the people were too weak and afraid to hear and listen to the voice of God and were afraid of dying so they asked if God would only speak to Moses

and not them. Joshua 5, all the men were circumcised and had to just rest until they got better. Esther 5, the weakness of Haman is revealed in his inability to conquer Mordecai. Mark 5, the men were too weak to control the demon possessed men in the tombs. John 5, the man at the pool of Bethesda was too weak to enter the water. Revelation 5, no man was found who could open the book. You should check it out for yourself; it's remarkable in the fact that every Chapter 5 points out man's ultimate state of dependence.

On the other hand, whenever you see man's weakness you also see God's grace and the mercy that He pours out on man. God added the 5th letter of the Hebrew alphabet to Abraham's name and to Sarah's name when He changed their names and marked them out as beneficiaries of His covenant. The Holy Anointing oil was made up of 5 parts. Israel came out of Egypt 5 in rank. The day of Pentecost (which comes from the Greek word for 5) is when God poured out the Holy Spirit to empower believers who were once afraid but were suddenly bold in the power of the Lord. In Revelation, when no man could open the book, the Lamb stepped up and opened the book.

So the number 2 represents unbelief, which is inherent in all that comes from the sea of humanity. The number 5 represents the grace of God because of the absolute weakness and inability of man. The summation of these is 7. The pattern of 7's run through the scriptures more abundantly than any other number and it is the hallmark of the Holy Spirit's work and denotes perfect completion. In other words, man's weakness is made strong through the grace of God. Man's unbelief is turned into belief by the grace of God. We are complete because of Him.

Also, if instead of adding you multiply, $5 \times 2 = 10$ or the number of divine perfection represented by the perfect law of 10 commandments; the 10-I Am

statements made by Jesus in the book of John; and the 10 Passover's which are mentioned in the Bible.

I guess no matter how you look at it, if you add God to anything it becomes complete and perfect. Getting back to the other meaning of number 2, man who is ultimately and completely weak and unable to provide for himself is made perfect and complete through his union with God.

Then there are the 12 baskets filled with bread for others to eat. 12 is the number which denotes God's governmental control of His people: 12 tribes, 12 Patriarchs, 12 spies, 12 Apostles, and the 12 gates around Jerusalem which controlled who was allowed to come into the kingdom. In this picture, Jesus was showing us how He would fill up, with Himself, each of these empty baskets—the disciples who were empty with unbelief—and none of it would be wasted.

Notice that which came from the sea (again, the sea is a Biblical symbol of humanity) is consumed and there is nothing left over. There is no mention of leftover fish. They picked up baskets of left over barley bread; that which symbolizes God—the bread of life. The metaphor is clear; the bread of life fills, is never exhausted, and is always provided in excess. As we will find out later in this chapter, the bread of life is Jesus Himself; He is our living manna. His supply in our life is never exhausted and can never be exhausted; but He fills and always satisfies. In fact, He provides Himself in abundance and desires to fill us so completely that He is then able to flow from us to others. This is the meaning behind *John 10:10* when Jesus says that He came to give us life and give it abundantly. Our life is found only in Him and He comes in excess.

Finally, John points out twice that this is barley bread—again a little seemingly random detail. Why is that significant? Why did he not just say bread? In the book

of Ruth, barley is a symbol of great blessing for one who had returned to the Lord from their backslidden state or from their having lived in unbelief.

There is such richness in the details. It is so easy to run through some of these scriptures when we are reading and skip over and never see any of it. This little interlude of a story is all about powerful contrasts: unbelief and belief; absolute inability and the grace of God which is fully able; that which comes from man and gets consumed and that which comes from God and is excessive in provision. This story should cause us all to look in the mirror and once again ask ourselves the following questions:

- Do we live as if we are absolutely and completely dependent upon God for all things?
- Do we believe that God is God and He is sovereign over all the affairs of our life?
- Do we believe that He loves us and has a plan that He is working out in order that we might reflect the image and glory of His Son?
- Do we believe He will fill us and satisfy every ache and desire in our soul?
- Is He just your Savior or is He your Lord?

These are not just rhetorical questions to wrestle with and then leave here and try to do it better. No, the reality of each of these concepts in our life teeters on the issue of active belief in the truth, or Biblical faith. Please understand contrary to what we might think, mere “belief” is never enough. Let me explain. Look, at *verse 14*, after seeing this miracle they exclaimed: “Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!” What they saw caused them to believe in the fulfillment of

Deuteronomy 18:15-19. They understood Jesus to be this one that Moses spoke about—they “believed.”

But what did Moses specifically say? He told them that they had better listen to this Prophet because God promised that He will personally deal with anyone who did not listen to Him. Yet, do they listen to Jesus? Do they even care to ask His opinion about this whole king thing? No, they just try and get Jesus to do what they want and if He does not cooperate, they will even use force.

This demonstrates the difference between “belief” and active belief, or faith. We can all come to the conclusion that Jesus is “Lord” and boldly exclaim it like these followers—but as it says in *James 2:19* even the demons believe and shudder. True Biblical belief is about faith; and, we are not living in faith until we choose to listen to Him, choose to let His voice have ultimate authority in our lives in all things, and choose to live in such a way that we only do what He tells us to do, only go where He tells us to go, and only say what He tells us to say. And this can only be our reality if we continually seek His will and continually refuse to seek our own. If we let Him be the “Lord” of our life.

As a final point, notice again that Jesus always lived only to do the will of His Father and always refused to do either His own will or the will of others who wanted Him to do their bidding. It was not the time for Him to be exalted as King. It was simply not the time. So he left and went alone into the hills. There seems to have been no confrontation, just separation. Sometimes this response is not only necessary it is the best option. If you find yourself being pressured to do something that you know is not the will of God and you are surrounded you might just have to leave. It is practical and might just keep you from making a compromise that may dramatically and negatively impact your life. Let’s always live to follow His example. Let’s Pray