Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study

"THE FEEDING OF THE 5000"

For individual study or group discussion

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN *Presbyterian Church*

DATE: May 3, 2026

SPEAKER: Wil/Brian

SERIES: The Gospel of John

PASSAGE: John 6:1-15

In John 6:1-15, the mountain setting and the proximity of the Passover provide a rich theological backdrop, suggesting that a new Exodus is underway. In **the feeding of the 5000,** Jesus takes a few loaves and fish to feed a vast multitude. The miracle points forward to the Bread of Life discourse (vv. 22-58), where Jesus reveals that he is the true Bread from heaven, greater than the manna given to the Israelites in the wilderness. What God once provided temporarily, Christ now provides eternally in himself.

The need - too big (vv. 1-6)

While the religious leaders in John 5 meet Jesus with growing hostility, the crowds in John 6 follow Jesus, drawn by his signs and wonders. Greeted by a vast multitude as he steps ashore from the Sea of Galilee, Jesus asks Philip where to buy bread to feed the hungry crowd. Testing his disciples, he intends to highlight a need that is far too big for any human remedy.

- What motivated some of the crowds to follow Jesus? (cf. Luke 11:29-32) What similar motivations can people have for following Jesus today?
- Some of the Bible's most foundational stories happen on mountains. Eden is described as the "*holy mountain of God*" (Ezekiel 28:13-14), and Israel meets God at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:2-3). Here in John 6:3 (and also in Matthew 5), Jesus ascends a mountain and sits with his disciples. What does this shift suggest about the nature of the New Covenant?

The resources - too little (vv. 7-9)

When confronted with this need, the disciples focus on visible, earthly limitations. Philip calculates the impossibility of two hundred denarii buying enough food. Andrew brings forward a boy's meager offering of five barley loaves and two fish while skeptically asking, "*What are they for so many*?" highlighting the "too little" nature of human effort when detached from the power of the Creator.

- In 2 Kings 4:42-44, we read of another event in which a large crowd needed sustenance. What similarities do you see between these two accounts of God providing for a large crowd?

The provision - too much (vv. 10-13)

The scene shifts dramatically as Jesus takes the meager elements, gives thanks, and distributes them until the five thousand men (plus women and children) are satisfied. His provision is "too much" in the best sense—an overflowing abundance that mirrors the Father's generous grace. The miracle points beyond physical bread to the spiritual reality that Jesus is the true Bread of Life who sustains his people to the fullest.

- John does not include the Last Supper in his Gospel; however, he anticipates it here. What about the description of this miracle reminds you of the Lord's Supper? (cf. Luke 22:7-20)
- Matthew Henry writes about the tremendous leftovers found after the thousands were satisfied: "*The provision Christ makes for those who are his is not bare and scanty, but rich and plentiful; an overflowing fullness.*"[1] We should not be surprised when God goes above and beyond all that we would ask or dream. Read Ephesians 3:20. Can you remember a time in which God provided for you more abundantly than you could have ever imagined ?
- Read Deuteronomy 8:3-10. How does God's promise to his people of eating "*bread without scarcity*" find it's fulfillment in Jesus in John 6?

The perception - too shallow (vv. 14-15)

Unfortunately, the crowd's perception of the miracle is too shallow. Their attention is focused on the temporal, not a realistic assessment of their own need. While they correctly identify Jesus as the Prophet promised by Moses, they immediately attempt to harness his power for their own political ends by making him king by force. They desired a "bread king" who would provide physical security and national liberation from Rome, failing to see their deeper need for spiritual redemption. Perceiving their intent, Jesus withdraws to the mountain alone. Refusing to be co-opted by the crowd's agenda, theologian Lesslie Newbigin notes that while, "*Jesus has come, 'to proclaim liberty to the captives,' he will not become the mascot for a people's movement of liberation.*"'[2]

- In what ways might you misunderstand who Jesus is and what he came to do in your life?
- Read John 18:36-37. If Jesus' Kingdom does not originate from the world, what does that teach us about the danger of trying to use Christ to validate our own political and social agendas today?

Family Dinner Table

Much Grass

"No detail therefore, is pointless; everything has a meaning, but someone has to understand what that is." – Augustine

"*Now there was much grass in the place*" (John 6:10). While a casual reading might overlook the mention of "*much grass*" as mere scenery, RTS-Atlanta president and professor Dr. Guy M. Richard suggests this seemingly minor observation is a deliberate theological marker intended to reveal Jesus' identity: "*The account of the feeding of the five thousand, recorded in all four Gospels, contains several seemingly insignificant phrases—but one in particular has recently grabbed my attention. In John 6:10, after Jesus tells the disciples to have the people sit down, we read that 'there was much grass in the place' and that, because of that fact, 'the men sat down, about five thousand in number.' I find that interesting. Why would John tell us that 'there was much grass in the place'? Besides the fact that there obviously was 'much grass' there, is anything else going on here? I think that John wants us to see that Jesus is not only the 'Prophet who is to come' but the Shepherd of Psalm 23 who cares for his people and provides abundantly for our needs. Mark's account of this event explicitly tells us that Jesus looked upon the crowds that had followed him and 'had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd' (Mark 6:34). So, in order to fill this role as shepherd, Jesus taught them 'many things' and fed them with more than enough food. Not only did the feeding of the five thousand occur in 'green pastures,' but it also occurred by the 'still waters' of the Sea of Galilee. John, therefore, could very well be implying that Jesus is the Shepherd of Psalm 23.*"[3]

- What other parallels can you find in John 6:1-15 to the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23? (See also Mark 6:30-44)

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[1] Matthew Henry. *Matthew Henry's Commentary.* https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/matthew/14.html
[2] Lesslie Newbigin. *The Light has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel.* 1982, Grand Rapids, MI. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 76
[3] Guy M. Richards. *The Shepherd Feeds His 5000 Sheep.* April 2024, TableTalk.org. https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/the-shepherd-feeds-his-5000-sheep/