

Jesus Feeds a Multitude

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: Jesus miraculously provided food for a crowd and then declared that He is the bread of life who meets the greatest need we all have—salvation.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: John 6

Remember the food pyramid? You can probably picture it in your head. Wide base. Narrow, pointy top. Horizontal layers and sections detailing how many servings a day to eat of each food group, such as fruits, grains, or dairy. The food pyramid told you to eat more vegetables and consume way less sugars. But aside from these disappointing conclusions, the food pyramid gives a balanced look at a healthy diet—something we could all be more diligent about.



What is one memory you have associated with your favorite or least favorite food group?

Group Time

Point 1: Jesus invites others into His work of meeting the needs of people (John 6:4-10).

⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.” ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ⁹ “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” ¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number.

Jesus’ fame and popularity were growing every day as crowds flocked to see Him heal the sick. But Jesus thought of the people’s hunger on this occasion. Food is a basic human need, so hunger is not an ailment to be healed but a requirement to be filled. Not only did Jesus concern Himself with the people’s hunger, He took the initiative to meet their need.



What are some reasons we fail to notice the needs of others?

Jesus could have fed all the people right away by speaking food into existence or turning the stones on the ground into bread. Instead, He invited others into His work! He asked **Philip**, one of His disciples who was a local, what they were going to do. Whatever they did, Philip knew it would be expensive. **Andrew**, another disciple, found a **boy** with a meager lunch that wouldn’t go far. Jesus knew how to feed the giant crowd, yet He still took the time to invite His disciples and the boy into what He was about to do.

Social Concern: All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the _____ of Christ supreme in our own _____ and in _____.

Point 2: Jesus provides superabundantly for the needs of people (John 6:11-14).

¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”

The boy’s lunch was paltry at best. Barley was what the poor used to make their bread. Furthermore, loaves in that day weren’t the kind of loaves we buy from the store. Rather, they were more the size of biscuits, and the fish were probably small morsels of pickled fish used as a condiment. ¹ On top of that, the story tells us the number of men who were in the crowd was five thousand, not counting women and children. Five biscuits and some fish jam for well over five thousand hungry mouths just wasn’t enough. But Jesus does the impossible: He took a meager meal and multiplied it into a fantastic feast.

Voices from the Church

“Jesus demonstrated power over the physical realm to point us to his power over the spiritual realm. Every visible miracle Jesus performed during his earthly ministry was a whisper ... They pointed to the most dumbfounding miracle of all: the display of his power to transform the human heart from stone to flesh.”²

—Jen Wilkin

Miracles: Because we believe God to be

_____ and personally _____ in this world,

we believe He can and does perform miracles.

Jesus could have given the crowd just enough to curb their hunger and taught them about contentment or just enough for everyone to feel full and shown them His perfect provision. Jesus could have provided no food at all and used it as a teaching moment on fasting and feeding on the word that comes from God (Matt. 4:4). But He did none of those this time. Jesus showed them all, including His disciples, that He has the power to provide abundantly, just as He came to give life abundantly (John 10:10).



What are some points of caution we should take in applying this passage to our own situation?

Point 3: Jesus offers Himself as the bread of life who satisfies the greatest need of people (John 6:26-27,32-35).

²⁶ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.”

.....

³² Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

³⁵ 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.

Jesus told His hearers, and us, not to chase after things that perish but to go for the eternal bread that satisfies forever. The crowd was hoping for something like the manna that God provided for Israel in the wilderness (see Ex. 16). God fed and sustained His people daily for forty years with manna, a sweet bread that was found on the ground when they woke up each morning. The crowd was looking for a miracle like this, which they attributed to Moses, but they were searching for the wrong kind of bread. Jesus didn't come primarily to *give* bread but to *be* bread. He is the true bread from God that lasts forever, satisfies our deepest hunger, and gives life.



What are some ways we might come to Christ for the bread He can provide instead of the bread that He is?

How do we get this bread? The crowd had the same question. Jesus' answer was simple: He is the bread of life, so come to Him and believe in Him. People were already coming to Him, but they were coming for the physical food He could give them. They were coming to Him without faith (John 6:36). Not only must we come to Him, we must come to Him *in faith*.



How have you found Jesus—the bread of life—satisfying to your soul?

My Mission

Because God has met our greatest need in salvation through Christ, we seek to meet the needs of others—physical, emotional, and spiritual—through Jesus.

- **How do you need to come to Jesus in faith for a deeper relationship with the bread of life?**
- **What needs can your group meet to help people in your community find eternal satisfaction in Jesus?**
- **How are people you know trying to find satisfaction apart from Jesus, and how can you point them to Jesus instead?**

Voices from the Church

“Our faith needs to be more than something that makes us feel good. Our relationship with Jesus needs to be more than just wanting our prayers to be answered and our needs to be met. We must follow Christ because he makes us complete and whole.”³

—*Africa Study Bible*

Notes

Daily Study

Day 1: Read John 6:1-10

This passage contains a nugget regarding Jesus' deity and His supernatural knowledge: Jesus saw the hungry crowd, and *already* He knew how He would feed them.

Yet Jesus took this opportunity to test Philip with a question, not for His sake but for Philip's. A test shows something about the person being tested. The teacher already knows the material and presumably has taught it to the students, so the test reveals whether or not the students have grasped the material. Philip believed Jesus was the Prophet greater than Moses (John 1:45), but how far did that belief go? When tested, Philip resorted to earthly considerations for providing food, but he was being tested by the very Bread of life, a lesson he was about to relearn through a hands-on, miraculous experience.



Voices from Church History

"If God works or promises to do anything, then let it be believed in simple faith. Just because we are powerless to accomplish anything, we should not let God be accused by our inability to understand how he will accomplish things beyond our understanding."⁴

—Cyril of Alexandria
(c. 378-444)



How is your faith in Jesus being tested today, and how will you respond?

Day 2: Read John 6:11-14

Every word of Scripture has been inspired by God to reveal Christ and His righteousness that we may taught, rebuked, corrected, and trained in His righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). Even small phrases serve this purpose, such as “giving thanks,” which Jesus did when He received the bread and fish and began breaking them apart to pass out to the hungry crowd. Jesus, who already knew what He was going to do to feed the crowd, thanked His Father for the provision of bread.

Jesus Himself had experienced hunger, though on a much greater scale, and still He trusted in His Father to provide for His needs at the right time (Matt. 4). He also taught His disciples to pray to the Father for their daily bread (Matt. 6:11). So if we are going to follow Jesus’ example and teaching, we ought to pray to God in faith for His provision, and when we receive it, just as God has promised to give it, then we ought to thank Him for His care.



What are some ways you need to thank the Lord for His faithful provision in your life?

Day 3: Read John 6:22-27

Have you ever had a person in your life who only talked to you when they wanted something? The crowd that Jesus had fed so well the day before couldn’t find Jesus, so they began investigating where He went and eventually found Him on the other side of the sea.

We could applaud their diligence in searching for Jesus; it seems like they wouldn’t stop until they found Him. But Jesus knew *why* they were looking for Him: They had gotten a free lunch the day before and were looking to keep that benefit going. They were following Jesus because of what He gave them. As Leon Morris wrote, “They were moved not by full hearts, but by full bellies.”⁵

Jesus loves blessing His people, but His gifts pale in comparison to who He is. When we follow Him in faith, He promises that He’ll give us more of Himself, and we’ll find out that’s what we needed all along.



How has Jesus satisfied your heart this past week?

Day 4: Read John 6:28-46

The day after Jesus fed the five thousand, the crowd searched Him out, hoping for another round of bread. They had visions of their glorious history in mind when manna was provided for their ancestors in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt (Ex. 16). (Incidentally, manna was first graciously provided for the Israelites in response to their grumbling about being hungry and blaming Moses for their troubles.) They mistakenly attributed this miracle to Moses, but Jesus was clear that manna was a provision from God Himself. Still, Moses was the prophet and leader in charge while the people received manna from heaven.

Manna was a temporary bread. It lasted for the day, or the weekend, to sustain the people. Any leftovers the people tried to keep overnight spoiled. They received exactly what they needed for the day. But Jesus is the greater Moses. He Himself provided bread and did so in abundance, to the tune of five-thousand-plus full bellies and twelve full baskets. And Jesus is the greater manna—Jesus is the true bread from heaven.



What are some other ways you have seen Jesus portrayed as greater than a person or thing from the Old Testament?

Day 5: Read John 6:47-59

Jesus' words point to His sacrifice on the cross: His body broken and blood poured out so that we might have eternal life. Whoever believes in Jesus and what He has accomplished will be saved. But we're so prone to forget what Christ has done and accomplished for us.

The night before He was betrayed, Jesus instituted a practice for believers to commemorate the cross and remember Jesus. We call this the Lord's Supper. As we eat the bread, we remember the body of Christ broken for us, and as we drink the cup, we remember the blood that was poured out for the forgiveness of sins. This practice isn't a magical ceremony, as if we physically eat the transformed body and blood of Jesus; it is a regular reminder and proclamation of the gospel for those who have put their faith in Jesus. We aren't just remembering the facts of an event two thousand years ago; we are remembering the present experience of true deliverance from our sin!



What are some ways you can “remember” what Jesus has done and worship Him?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- Jesus invites others into His work of meeting the needs of people (John 6:4-10).
- Jesus provides superabundantly for the needs of people (John 6:11-14).
- Jesus offers Himself as the bread of life who satisfies the greatest need of people (John 6:26-27,32-35).



How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?



When has God provided for you in an undeniably extraordinary or abundant manner?



What can the church do to show we care for people's physical needs while not taking emphasis off of their deeper spiritual needs?

Notes

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Jesus was born to die—a jarring statement indeed, but one that is quite true.

Christmas and Easter are fused together, linked hand-in-hand in such a way that each is dependent on the other for its meaning. The theology of such a statement is solid but incomplete, for Jesus was not born to die immediately but rather some thirty years later. Jesus' life, then, was not utilitarian—existing just so it could be taken away and picked up again—it had greater meaning and purpose. What Jesus did during those thirty years of walking the earth mattered; He lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father. He satisfied the demands of righteousness that we could not so He might take away our sin when we trust in Him and so His righteousness might be credited to us, making us fully pleasing to the Father (2 Cor. 5:21).

In this volume we delve deeper into the marvelous truth of the incarnation to see still further glimpses of Christ's glory on earth. His righteousness did not occur in a vacuum but rather among people, ordinary people like you and me. In each unit of this volume, we will look at Jesus' interactions with people as through a prism, making slight turns to see different yet equally brilliant perspectives of Jesus' works. In Unit 22, we will see Jesus' power to heal coupled with His deep compassion for people, even those who were marginalized in society. In Unit 23, we will see Jesus' riveting teachings empowered by His divine authority. And finally, in Unit 24, we will see Jesus' miraculous power over nature, revealing His identity as Creator God.

Each ray of light we will see points to the same truth: that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God given for our salvation. Jesus was indeed born to die, but He lived so that we too might live.

UNIT 22**SESSION 1**

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1. Kim Huat Tan, *Mark, in New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015) [Wordsearch].
2. Ray Ortlund, "Jesus and Faith," *Renewal Ministries*, January 27, 2013, renewalministries.com/message/jesus-and-faith.

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1. Kelyn Soong, "Veteran who lost both legs completes 31 marathons in 31 days, runners trailing his every step," *The Washington Post*, November 12, 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/news/dc-sports-bog/wp/2017/11/12/veteran-who-lost-both-legs-runs-31-marathons-in-31-days-in-31-cities-trailed-every-step/?utm_term=.8f45e3e7c805.
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3. Frank Thielman, "Matthew," in *Gospel Transformation Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 1275, n. 5:13–16.

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2. J. C. Ryle, "What It Costs to Be a True Christian," December 4, 2019, www.the-highway.com/cost_Ryle.html.

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2. John Onwuchekwa, *Prayer: How Praying Together Shapes the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 43.

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1. Leo the Great, Sermon 90.4.1, quoted in *Luke*, ed. Arthur A. Just Jr., vol. III in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].
2. Rebecca Faires, "Consider the Ravens," in *She Reads Truth Bible*, gen. eds. Raechel Myers and Amanda Bible Williams (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2017), 1763.

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UNIT 24**SESSION 1**

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