

JESUS TOOK THE LOAVES AND GAVE THANKS

John 6:1-21

Key Verse: 6:11

“Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.”

Today’s passage covers two more signs among seven which Jesus performed. Through each sign, Jesus reveals another aspect of himself as the Messiah. “Messiah” is a Hebrew word, equivalent to “Christ” in Greek, which means “God’s anointed.” God sent the Messiah as he promised to be our Savior and King. He not only saves us from the power of sin and death, but also rules us with peace and love as our King. This is the meaning of “Messiah.” As a diamond has many beautiful facets, so each of Jesus’ signs reveals his beauty and glory as the Messiah. Jesus reveals himself so that we may know him as he truly is. We tend to see everything from our own viewpoint, even the Messiah. Those with a financial problem tend to see Jesus as a provider. Those with health problems tend to see Jesus as a healer. Of course, he is these things. But is our view of Jesus too narrow? Jesus is so much more. Let’s learn from today’s passage who Jesus the Messiah truly is.

First, Jesus feeds the multitude (1-15). Verse 1 begins, “Some time after this...” “This” refers to what had happened in Jerusalem in chapter 5. Now John turns our attention to an event in Galilee. John follows the progression of Jesus’ signs to reveal him as the Messiah, ignoring how Jesus came to Galilee. In Jerusalem, Jesus was rejected by the religious leaders. In Galilee, Jesus was warmly accepted by a crowd who needed him desperately. They saw the signs Jesus had performed by healing the sick and they followed him doggedly (2). Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples (3). John notes in verse 4 that the Jewish Passover Festival was near. John mentions the Passover more than any other New Testament writer, and identifies three distinctive Passovers during Jesus’ ministry. The first one mentioned is in 2:13, when Jesus cleared the temple. The second is

here in 6:4. The third is in 11:55 and following chapters, leading up to Jesus' crucifixion, where he became the Passover Lamb. Jesus was in Jerusalem for the first and third Passovers, while he is in Galilee as this second one draws near. During the Passover all Jewish men traveled to Jerusalem. It was a national holiday. This is one of the reasons that so many people could follow Jesus.

From the mountainside with his disciples, Jesus could see a great crowd coming toward him. Jesus already had in mind what he was going to do (6). Jesus had a plan to feed the entire crowd. According to Mark 8:34, Jesus had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus felt their pain and was deeply aware of their need: they were very hungry, even malnourished, their immune system was down, and they were vulnerable to diseases. There were so many sick people among them, and demon possessed people as well. This crowd looked very burdensome. Yet Jesus wanted to provide what they needed, out of his great compassion. At the moment, they needed to eat something.

Jesus could have met their need all by himself. However, Jesus chose to involve his disciples. So he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Until now, the disciples had been observers of Jesus' ministry. But now Jesus wanted them to participate. He wanted them to begin to think like servant leaders for needy people. As a former resident of Bethsaida, Philip knew the area well. He could tell Jesus where the best bakeries were. Yet Jesus did not really need information from Philip. The author comments that Jesus asked this only to test him. The Bible tells us that God tests his people to reveal what is in our hearts and refine our faith, never to tempt us to do evil (Dt 8:2). Jesus tested Philip to reveal what was in his heart, and to help him grow in faith. Jesus had hope for Philip to become a good shepherd for his people.

What was Philip's response? He answered, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Philip should have tried to discern Jesus' heart behind his question. But he was overwhelmed by the request and could not understand what Jesus meant. Actually, it was impossible to buy enough bread to feed such a great crowd.

Yet Philip should have depended on Jesus. He had seen Jesus change water into wine, heal an official's son with his word, help a man paralyzed for 38 years to get up, and had seen many more miracles. This Jesus could feed the crowd! But Philip did not consider Jesus. He only looked at the situation and became negative. His mind was paralyzed due to his lack of faith. It is easy for us to be like Philip. When we don't see Jesus and what he is doing, we are easily overwhelmed by a situation and become negative. When we become negative, everything looks impossible and gloomy, and we fail to see what God is doing among us. We begin to blame others. Jesus must have been sorry about Philip's negative attitude and lack of faith.

When Jesus asked Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Andrew overheard it as well. However, his response was different from Philip's. Andrew understood Jesus' heart and knew he wanted to feed the crowd. He tried to do something. He looked around and found a boy with a lunch bag. He brought the boy to Jesus and said, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish..." (9) He knew that it was a tiny offering in view of the great need of the crowd. It may be that his words, "...how far will they go among so many?" expressed his inner despair. We can understand Andrew. As we serve God and confront impossible situations, we easily allow despair to creep into our hearts. Still, we try to be positive and offer something by faith, but it always seems so small. So we feel sorry to God. Our prayers may be more like laments than petitions. However, there is a big difference between Philip and Andrew. Philip did nothing while Andrew did something to respond to Jesus. Philip did not consider Jesus, while Andrew considered Jesus. Philip did not take the problem to the Lord, while Andrew took it to the Lord. Philip did not understand Jesus' plan to feed the crowd, while Andrew shared Jesus' heart to feed the crowd. Let's not look at the situation and despair. Let's take it to the Lord, like Andrew.

The important fact is that Jesus accepted Andrew's offering. Jesus might have been very happy when Andrew brought something, even though it seemed to be nothing. Jesus is always most pleased when his people put their faith in him and his words (Heb 11:6). So Jesus said to his disciples, "Have the people sit down." Jesus wanted them to participate in feeding the

crowd. He wanted them to share his compassion and experience his power. There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (10). The author commented that five thousand men were there. If women and children were included, it may have been more than fifteen thousand people.

Let's read verse 11. "Jesus then took the loaves and gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish." The words "Jesus then took the loaves and gave thanks" are very meaningful. It means that he accepted Andrew's offering. He was not disappointed with Andrew for bringing such a small offering. Rather, Jesus was very thankful and used it to feed hungry people. When we take something to the Lord with a sincere heart and faith, whether it is small or large, he accepts it thankfully and uses it in his redemptive work.

More than that, Jesus gave thanks to God for his compassion and mercy on needy people. He gave thanks to God for his almighty power and abundant provision. God has infinite resources. He can provide whatever people may need without limit. Nothing is impossible for God. In Ephesians, Paul says that God is "able to do immeasurably more than all that we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph 3:20). God is rich. We can withdraw anything from God by faith. For example, the son of a rich father never has to worry about having enough money. He can go and withdraw what he needs any time as long as he has a right relationship with his father. Our Father is the Creator God. We are his beloved children. God wants us to come to him and ask what we need every day. If we ask according to his will, he will answer. Even before receiving something, we can know that God hears and will answer our prayers. 1 John 5:14-15 says, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him." This is the assurance Jesus had when he gave thanks to God.

Verse 12 tells us that they all had enough to eat. Philip could not imagine that each person would have a bite. But God's provision was so abundant that all of them were fully satisfied. There were even leftovers. So Jesus said, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted."

Jesus is environmentally friendly. Jesus is also very frugal--he lets nothing be wasted. As the disciples gathered the leftovers, each one had a full basket. This made a great impression on Philip and all of them. Andrew may have shed tears which dropped onto his bread.

When the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they were so excited. They began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." It meant they saw him as a Messianic figure like Moses, who provided manna in the wilderness (Dt 18:15,18). They wanted to make him king by force. The Passover Festival was an opportune time to rally a movement of nationalistic zeal. They wanted to raise Jesus as king, whether he wanted it or not. Through him, they wanted to overthrow the Roman oppressors, just as Moses had led his people out of Egyptian bondage. Though their thought was based on Biblical examples, they had a wrong concept of the Messiah. Jesus knew their motive and withdrew to a mountain by himself. Jesus did not come as a political, economic or military deliverer, but as the one who saves us from sin and death. He did not agree with the people's demand, but followed God's will. He would go up to Jerusalem to fulfill God's plan for world salvation. For this purpose, he denied himself and was condemned to death by the religious leaders. He suffered and died on the cross for our sins. But God raised him from the dead and made him our Savior and Lord. This is the Biblical meaning of the Messiah. Like the people who wanted to make Jesus king by force, we sometimes demand Jesus to follow our desires and become the Messiah we want him to be. But we should accept Jesus as the Messiah based on the Bible's concept and listen to him and follow his will.

Second, Jesus walks on water (16-21). In this second event we can see another aspect of the Messiah in Jesus. When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake (16). They were exhausted physically and emotionally, and Jesus was not with them. Anyway, they wanted to go to Capernaum, crossing the lake by boat. It was dark (17). To make the situation worse, a strong wind began to blow and the waters grew rough (18). Some of them were fishermen, and knew how to handle a boat. They rowed for about three or four miles and seemed to get stuck. They must have had a hard time. At this moment, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on

the water. They were frightened (19). They could not recognize Jesus. They never imagined that Jesus would come to them, walking on the water. Jesus knew that they were in a critical situation. So Jesus walked quickly on the water to help them. Jesus had not abandoned them; he was right there to help them.

Walking on the water was another sign of the Messiah. This was a powerful, visible demonstration of Jesus' sovereignty over the world that he had created. The Old Testament declares that God alone rules over the seas (Ps 107:28-30). This tells us that Jesus is God who controls nature. He is almighty, but he is not a distant, impersonal force. He is willing to help us in our time of need. He approaches us at the moment we need him most. He comforts us. He said to the frightened disciples, "It is I; don't be afraid." Sometimes we are exhausted and in a critical situation, like the disciples. We are desperately trying to overcome the situation and to find the way. We should realize that our true help and comfort come from Jesus. Recently, Mei Kim neiu was diagnosed with stage four bone cancer. Her oncologist said that there is no hope and no cure. But Jesus is her true help and comfort. When Mei prayerfully sought God, she found a possible treatment center in Mexico. She will leave tomorrow to go there for three weeks. Let's pray that Jesus may bring her complete healing and recovery. As human beings, we are all destined to die once. We have to cross the sea of death. When we confront the reality of death, we can be very fearful. In that moment, no one can help us. No one else can comfort us. Only Jesus can. Jesus said, "It is I; don't be afraid" (20). When the disciples heard Jesus' words, they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading (21). Like the disciples, let's take Jesus' words to our hearts, and be willing to take him on our journey. When Jesus is with us, we can reach our destination safely. Eventually, Jesus will bring us to his glorious kingdom.

Jesus is the Messiah. He is almighty, compassionate and merciful God. He is a good shepherd who takes care of God's people and our Provider. He is also the Sovereign Ruler of nature. He is willing to help us in our time of trouble. He is our true comforter. Let's come to Jesus! Let's learn Jesus' heart as his disciples and grow to be like him.