

TUTORIAL
1.44

Jesus fed 5,000 people

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: **John 6:1-35**.

Last time

One afternoon Jesus was asleep in the back of a boat as He and His disciples were crossing the lake. A fierce storm threatened their lives but the wind and waves calmed immediately when Jesus told them to do so. On the other side, they encountered a demon-possessed man who lived among the graves. Jesus commanded the evil spirits to leave him. They entered a herd of pigs nearby which ran into the lake and were drowned. The people in the area didn't want Jesus around and begged Him to leave.

Jesus miraculously provides food for a huge number of people

We continue with the story of the life of Jesus the Messiah, this time with John's description of another astounding incident. (John 6:1-15) Through everything Jesus says and does, God is continuing to reveal Himself. All His characteristics – His power, righteousness, grace, faithfulness etc. – are being perfectly communicated in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. We again find Jesus crossing the Sea of Galilee with His disciples. John places the incident on the calendar, just before the Jewish Passover – the annual remembrance of God providing their ancestors with a way to escape the death that came to every Egyptian family. By now, a huge crowd is following Jesus everywhere, drawn by the healings and other miracles.

Sitting on a hill with His disciples, He sees a huge crowd of people coming toward them. Jesus turns to one of the disciples, Philip, and asks where they could possibly buy food for all these people. John notes that Jesus already knows full well what He's going to do, but He wants to use it as a teaching opportunity for the disciples - to show them the gaps that still exist in their understanding of what He can *do*, who He *is*. As we've seen a number of times already, God is committed to teaching, equipping and involving faithful followers in every aspect of His purposes. Indeed, Philip's response shows that

he still has a long way to go – “what can be done? They are small in number, the people’s need is huge, there’s no money, no resources, forget it, it’s hopeless.” The Narrative doesn’t say, but you have to wonder if the others laugh at Andrew when he mentions that he’s come across a young boy with five small bread rolls and two fish. Of course, he quickly adds, what use is that among so many? But the presence of the One who first created wheat and fish and even the hillside they are all sitting on changes everything. Normal rules and limitations don’t apply. He is the Creator, Provider, the One in whose hands *not even close* can become *more than enough*.

Jesus takes the food into His hands, thanks God His Father for what they're about to eat, then starts passing it on...soon the thousands of people sitting around are eating bread and fish. After everyone has eaten all they can, there’s still lots left over. The crowd is gripped by a sense of amazement, excitement, anticipation. “This must be the One! God’s prophet, David’s descendant. Let’s declare Him King. We won’t take no for an answer. We’ll depose Herod, throw out the Romans. It’ll be great, no one will ever be sick, and we’ll always have plenty to eat.” Jesus, of course, knows what is being said, what they are planning. He knows that most of the people are not wanting to follow him because of spiritual hunger. They’re not drawn to Him by a sense of their immense need before God. The miracles, the healing, feeding them in such an amazing way – these are not ultimately about meeting people’s physical needs, much less their desires. He cares about them deeply, but His purpose in coming to earth is not to make them contented and comfortable. The signs and miracles are about demonstrating his authority, they are statements about *who He is*...to draw those who’ve been waiting for the Messiah to provide the final solution for their debt of sin before God. The great Story God is writing in history, and Jesus’ role in it, does not call for Him to be a king on earth at that point, like the people want. So He quietly slips away into the nearby hills.

Jesus walks on the top of the water

John now relates yet another amazing incident...in a fairly matter of fact way. It’s almost as though by this point the disciples have come to expect astounding things from Jesus. (Jn 6:16-21) After the thousands of people have been fed, the disciples wait for Jesus on the shore. When it gets dark and He still hasn’t shown up, they head back across the lake to Capernaum. Before long they’re caught in a storm, fighting huge waves. It’s tiring, paddling on and on, hour after hour. Then someone catches sight of something in the darkness. “Look, what is that? Where? Over there. Looks like a figure...a person. But out here on the water? You don’t think it’s a spirit, like a ghost or something? It’s coming this way. Hurry, row away...” Then a familiar voice, “Hey, stop worrying. It’s me.” Relief. “Oh, it’s the Master. Look at that! He’s walking on top of the water. Incredible. Yeah, well it’s Jesus, nothing’s difficult for Him.

Welcome, Master. Get in the boat with us. Wow, are we glad to see you. We were terrified.”

Suddenly they've arrived, safe and sound...with the comforting sound of the keel running up onto the pebbles at Capernaum.

Jesus declares that He is the Bread of Life

The next morning the crowds from the day before come to Capernaum looking for Jesus. But He's not flattered by the attention or excited by His growing popularity. He tells them up front that He knows very well they haven't understood the underlying, important things He's demonstrating through the miracles. Basically they just want Him to provide more food. They're thinking of physical desires, not spiritual needs. (John 6:22-35) But even though He knows their motivation, He doesn't send them away. He patiently tries to help them understand the truth. He challenges them not to be consumed with physical, transient things like food. They should put their energy into understanding how He can give them eternal life. He can do this, He asserts, because He comes from God, is approved by Him. They claim - perhaps not very sincerely - that they want to do things that will please God...and ask what they should do. This is the same mistake we've seen through the Narrative that humans always make, beginning with our ancestors when they originally rebelled against God. Their first impulse was to *do* something, to somehow make things right, to cover up their shame, to try to look okay in God's eyes.

But to the crowd on this morning in Capernaum, Jesus replies that there's only one thing God wants from them...that is, to believe in Him, the One God sent. We don't know if there were individual exceptions, but the crowd is not in a mood to humbly accept Jesus' words, nor to give up their hopes of another miraculous feed. “Well if you want us to really believe you're from God, you'll have to come up with something amazing...how about more food...yeah, on a regular basis. Moses gave our ancestors bread from heaven. How about something like that? Like manna.” But Jesus points out that Moses didn't give them bread from heaven. That was God who did that. It was *His* mercy, *His* grace. And that was only physical bread anyway. Now God is offering them the real thing. Bread from heaven that gives life to the world. *What* is it? *Who* is it? It's Jesus Himself. He's the Bread of Life, He tells them. He's the one who fills every real need, who satisfies the real hunger and ache that humans have in their hearts...the great void that has been left by their turning away, the very real sense of guilt before God, even if they don't recognise it. When people realise their need, realise they can't *do* anything for themselves, when they look to Him, the One sent from God, then He'll never turn them away...He'll give them eternal life and satisfy the deepest spiritual hunger in their hearts.

The crowd though cannot, or are unwilling to, see beyond their small concerns. They refuse to look past their small self-absorbed worlds. And so tragically, they miss the fact that God's Son is standing before them, offering them everything they so desperately need. The same thing, of course, has

happened countless times down through history. He never stops seeking, but only a handful accept what He's offering, Himself, the Bread of Life.



DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. What do you think Jesus was hoping to teach Phillip and the other disciples in the process of feeding thousands of people from just a few fragments of food? What assumptions and limitations in their worldview do you suspect He was exposing? Do you feel you might share any of those assumptions and limitations? If so, can you pinpoint any ways He challenges those things with you?
2. Reflect on your understanding of what Jesus offers those who follow Him. If someone was considering becoming a Christian and asked you whether or not that would mean greater safety for them and their family, more financial security, or an increased chance of being treated fairly by others...how would you respond?
3. Expand in your own words on the concept of Jesus as the Bread of Life. Consider the background understanding of the Jewish crowd He was addressing. With that in mind, describe any difficulties you can imagine in trying to explain Jesus' statement about being the Bread of Life to someone in our society who has no Narrative foundations.



ACTIVITIES

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1. Review the Narrative covered so far and note any evidence you can find in support of the proposition that God is committed to drawing faithful followers to His purposes and equipping them to be effective.