

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN6A_Jesus Feeds a Multitude and Walks on Water)

Introduction

We do not know exactly how long a period of time transpired between the events of chapter 5 and 6; however, we do know that the following events occurred in the interim period between the two chapters:¹

- From the Synoptic Gospels, we know that Herod Antipas had killed John the Baptist (Jn 3:24 cf. Mk 6:14-29).
- The disciples had preached throughout the area of Galilee (Mk 6:7-13, 30-31)
- Evidently, multitudes had speculated about Jesus and Herod Antipas was seeking Jesus out of curiosity (Lu 9:7-9)

Therefore, the time between the events of chapter 5 and 6 was about six months.²

In chapter 5, we saw a vivid testimony to Jesus' status as the Son of God – He healed a man who had been infirm for 38 years. Since He did this on the Sabbath, He raised the ire of the Jewish religious types and John records this as the beginning of the persecution of Jesus. Jesus responded to their persecution with a discourse regarding His co-equality with God the Father. In chapter 6, we see two other miracles performed by Jesus (6:1-21) that become the basis for additional discourse (6:22-71). These two miracles constitute the fourth and fifth “signs” recorded in the book of John.³

Jesus Feeds Five Thousand Men Plus Women and Children (6:1-15)

The Jewish Passover Feast in the Spring was at hand and Jesus is in the north near the Sea of Galilee in chapter 6. This is the second Passover mentioned by John in his Gospel and it places us about one year prior to Jesus' crucifixion at the time of the next Passover mentioned by John (13:1). Jesus and His disciples had been so busy with the crowds that at times they did not even have time to eat their meals (Mk 6:31). Evidently, Jesus had decided to not go to Jerusalem for the Passover at this time because He knew that based upon the persecution He had begun to experience since the events of chapter 5, He would only face more intense persecution during the Passover. God's time for Him had not yet come (Jn 5:18; 7:1).

However, many Jewish people would be traveling to the city of Jerusalem in an annual pilgrimage. Jesus took His disciples and entered a boat on the northwest shore near Capernaum and set out for a point further west along the shore of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias as it was named for a town on the west shore built by Herod Antipas in honor of the Emperor Tiberius). Evidently, word had spread that Jesus was in the vicinity (Mk 6:32-33) and many from Capernaum

¹ John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1993-1995), 293.

² Ibid.

³ There are seven signs recorded in the book of John that John uses to validate Jesus' claim to be the divine Son of God. **1)** water turned to wine at Cana (2:1-11) – demonstrates Jesus' creative power over nature; **2)** healing of the nobleman's son (4:46-54) – the power that was at the Son of God's disposal transcended space; **3)** healing of the man at the Pool of Bethesda; **4)** feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15) – demonstrates Jesus' creative power over nature; **5)** Jesus walked on the water (6:16-21) – control over nature; **6)** healing of the blind man (9:1-41) – contrasts the spiritual blindness of the religious leaders with the faith of the physically blind; **7)** raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44) – demonstrates power over death.

joined with the pilgrims who were taking a route to Jerusalem along the Sea of Galilee's western shore in order to avoid Samaria. They brought their sick and lame hoping to see Jesus heal them (Matt 14:13-14). As a weary Jesus disembarked, a deep compassion for those who had shown such perseverance to seek Him filled the soul of Jesus. Instead of being concerned about His own physical and emotional needs, Jesus immediately seized the opportunity to minister to the thousands. After all, God the Father would not have allowed this circumstance to unfold in Jesus' life at this time had He not meant Jesus to use it to the Father's glory. Due to Jesus' unconditional yieldedness to the Father's will and purpose for His life, He prepared a feast of food and teaching to the multitudes.

In contrast, the disciples were concerned that the people would get home before dark (Mk 6:35-36). In John 5, Jesus described how He worked continuously with His Father. Here in John 6, Jesus provides a very real example to His disciples of this principle. His disciples are going to work with Jesus to minister to thousands (cf. Jn 14:12; 17:21-23). Some of the individuals are of particular note to John, the Gospel writer and apostle:

- Philip (Jn 6:5-7) – Jesus forced Philip to recognize the impossible nature of accomplishing the feeding of the multitude. Philip's logical mind quickly assesses the situation and concludes that almost two-thirds of a year's wages could not even provide a little snack for all of them, not to mention where they would locate such a stash of food in short order. All of Jesus' disciples needed to recognize the impossibility of the situation on a human level in order to appreciate Jesus' supernatural work.
- Andrew (Jn 6:8-9) – Andrew was possibly a close friend of Philip's since both were from the same town of Bethsaida (Jn 1:44). Andrew is most often seen bringing someone to Jesus and in this case it is a young boy with five barley loaves and two fish. Maybe Andrew thought that it couldn't hurt to bring this fact to Jesus' attention just in case.
- The young boy (Jn 6:9) – we do not know the thoughts passing through this boy's mind. Perhaps he thought he would go hungry himself. Perhaps Jesus gave him a knowing look or smile that everything would be all right. Little did he realize that his sacrificial act would end up meeting the needs of so many.

Principle: God tests us to refine our faith (Jas 1:2; 1:13-15; 1 Pe 1:7)

Principle: When we risk by faith, we then know by experience.

Application: In the past week or month, can you name one way that you've seen the Lord has used you due to a faithful action or response on your part? For instance, has the Lord provided you an opportunity to witness to a lost person? Minister to a fellow believer? Answered a prayer? Delivered you from an adverse set of circumstances? Worked through a set of circumstances to glorify Himself?

Next, Jesus proceeded to give thanks for the food provided by the Father. Then Jesus gave food to the disciples who then distributed the food to the thousands. No doubt, this procedure took some time and gave the disciples opportunity to think as they made multiple trips back and forth to from the source (Jesus) to the recipients (the multitudes). The disciples probably handed food out to at least six or seven thousand people.

John notes that all were filled. The meal was a simple meal consisting of barley loaves of bread that the poor ate since they could afford no other. The fish may have been eaten raw since there was likely not enough wood to have built a fire to roast the fish. The fish might have had scales and fins still attached as it was distributed. Perhaps the people had to gut the fish too or perhaps Jesus did that for them. Nevertheless, there would have been a lot of fish intestines, scales and fins that remained! However, one thing that you do not see in this account is any complaint from Jesus' disciples or the multitudes. No one whined about the lack of proper silverware, white linen cloths, improper seasoning, butter for the bread and fish, seasonings, ambiance, etc. All ate and were filled.

Not only were all filled, but they gathered up all of the leftovers and filled twelve baskets. Even though Jesus' provision was very liberal, there was no need for waste. Also, it is possible that Jesus gave the twelve baskets of leftovers to the young lad although we don't know for sure. If so, the young boy experienced a sizable return on his investment of faith. Jesus demonstrated a principle of good stewardship over that which the Father had provided.

After experiencing such a wondrous miracle, the multitudes who had been thinking of the significance of the Passover at that time of year and who were in a geographical setting that reminded them of Mt. Sinai. The river Jordan empties into the Sea of Galilee at its north end near a grassy plain. Further north, the hills rise higher and higher to the mountain range of Mt. Hermon which is snow capped virtually all year long. Just as Moses had provided food for the multitudes during the Exodus, Jesus had provided food for the Jews during their pilgrimage to Jerusalem in a grander fashion. Was Jesus the "Prophet" of whom Moses spoke?

The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear. (Deut 18:15)

If Jesus were this anticipated Prophet, He must be the Messiah and perhaps He would provide food like this every day. They would not need to work and toil and the subservient position that they held under Rome would be done away. Could this be the Messiah who would rule over such a glorious kingdom of whom the Prophets spoke?

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Isa 2:2-3)

The Lord also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the Lord will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. (Joel 3:16-17)

And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be – 'The Lord is one,' and His name one. (Zech 14:9)

If Jesus was that Messiah, then the time had come for the Messiah to establish his kingdom and rule and reign from Jerusalem. The crowd was inclined to turn into a mob and take Jesus by force and make him king (v. 15). The scene must have turned from a tranquil, almost picnic setting to a scene of upheaval and confusion. Jesus commanded His disciples to get into the boat and He dismissed the multitudes (Matt 14:22). Jesus needed some time of solitude perhaps to deal with this new temptation to take kingdom without the Cross (see also Matt 4:8-10). Jesus needed time to pray and maintain orientation to the Father's plan. Jesus had no human friend who would understand His thoughts and the nature of His temptations. Only the heavenly Father could provide the solace Jesus needed (Matt 14:23). After all, it is the Father Who will give the kingdom to the Son (Psa 2:7-12; Dan 7:13-14) and it is not of this world (Jn 18:36).

Principle: The believer who is not Christo-centric in thought pattern will succumb to the pressure to glorify self and promote one's own agenda.

Application: Do you conform to the enthusiasm and public opinion of the present moment or are you guided by principles greater than self?

Jesus Walks on Water (6:16-21)

This miracle is focused upon Jesus' disciples in contrast to the miracle of the bread and the fish which was directed primarily toward the multitudes. Jesus had sent His disciples to the boat and commanded them to go forward without Him (Matt 14:22). At about the fourth watch (3 to 6 a.m.), Jesus came to them walking on the water as they were afraid from the wind and waves. The disciples had just witnessed a great miracle in the feeding of the five thousand and they were obeying Jesus' command to set out in a boat. It probably did not occur to them that if Jesus was capable of performing such a miracle and that if Jesus commanded them to do something, He would surely watch over them.

Principle: There is an inner joy and satisfaction over learning a new spiritual truth, but spiritual stability only results when such truth has matured through application. (The disciples were not spiritually stable and Jesus knew it).

Application: Are you constantly seeking the stimulation of learning a new spiritual truth? Or have you stabilized in your spiritual walk so that you find joy in testing and adverse circumstances when you successfully apply truth?

When Jesus saw His disciples in trouble, He not only prayed for them, but He took action and went to them.⁴ He helped them in their trial. This is the sign of a caring leader and nothing endears a leader to his followers than very personal demonstrations that he cares for them. The military leader who on the one hand commands the unhesitating obedience of his men and who on the other hand is visibly grieved over the fall of one of his own will have the utmost respect from his charges.

Principle: Only the believer who is Christ-like in his/her thinking and orientation can be capable of a balanced combination of objectivity and compassion.

Application: Can you objectively evaluate circumstances in life and at the same time weep for those who are suffering and lack understanding?

When we are faced with trials today, we should reflect upon Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 10:13.

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Several things are to be observed from this passage. *First*, trials are common to man (all people). This is true of Christians and unbelievers alike. *Second*, God is faithful and does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear. (Jesus was faithful to His disciples as He sent them into the tempest). *Third*, in every trial, God has a provision for us so that we can endure it.

Controversial verse – In verse 19, the phrase “walking on the sea” is the Greek phrase ἐπι τῆς θαλάσσης (epi taʹs thalassaʹs). It is the same phrase that is used in John 21:1, but it is translated in that passage as “at” or “by the sea.” Therefore, some have tried to explain away the miracle of Jesus' walking on the water to be simply Jesus walking near the shore and before the disciples could take Jesus into the boat, they grounded. This would also account for their sudden arrival at their destination. However, the context of the event demands its interpretation as a miracle. Today, the miracle of the resurrection is central to

⁴ There was possibly a full moon at Passover.

⁵ Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, *The Greek New Testament*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1983.

our faith (Rom 10:9 and 1 Cor 15:3-4). If we can believe the resurrection, any other miracle is minor. Therefore, we can rest assured that the Bible's account of this event as a miracle is correct.