



Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: John 6:1-15

¹ After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was performing by healing the sick. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. 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 5,000 in number. 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!*” ¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. (John 6:1-15 CSB)

I. Introduction to the Miracle (Jn. 6:1-4)

- “A comparison between John’s account of the feeding of the 5,000 and that of the Synoptics makes clear that *John provides his own independent account*. He mentions *several details not found in any of the other gospels*, such as the *crossing of the Sea of Galilee* (v. 1), the

approaching Passover (v. 4), the involvement of *Philip and Andrew* (vv. 7–8), the fact that the five loaves contributed by the boy were loaves of *barley* (v. 9), and *Jesus' command* to his disciples to *gather all the fragments* so that nothing would be lost (v. 12).” (Andreas Kostenberger, *Encountering John*, p. 82)

1. The location (v. 1) – across the Sea of Galilee – Bethsaida (Lk. 9:10) – Philip’s home town (Jn. 1:44)
2. Motivation of the crowd (v. 2) – followed because they saw signs of healing Jesus performed
3. Jesus retreats with his disciples (v. 3)
4. Time stamp for Jesus’ ministry (v. 4) – 2nd of 3 Passovers in John’s Gospel (2:13; 6:14; 13:1)
5. “The multitude [was] following Jesus, up on a mountain at the times of Passover...While crowds of pilgrims are making their way to Jerusalem, another crowd is thronging around Jesus in Galilee.” [R. Alan Culpepper, *John*, p. 154]

II. Jesus’ Grace: The Heart of the Feeding Miracle (Jn. 6:5-13) – Jesus’ heart

- “[This miracle] reflects the actions of *a host at a Jewish meal*. Jesus takes the food, gives thanks over it, and gives it to his guests.” (Gail O’Day, *John*, p. 505)

1. Jesus, the Host in John’s Gospel
 - A “motif...carefully described by...[John 6:1-15 is] *hospitality*. Eucharistic [communion] images are noticeably absent...Instead, the Gospel is explicitly showing *the service of the host & the nature of his hospitality*. The crowd did not come to [Jesus] because he would feed them; they came because he was healing the sick. This is exactly what God does, made manifest by Jesus is the fourth Gospel. *Jesus exercises better hospitality* than the bridegroom at the wedding in Cana (Jn. 2), *offers hospitality* to the Samaritan woman by offering her ‘living water’ (Jn. 4), *offers hospitality* to his disciples...by washing their feet (Jn. 13), & *offers hospitality* when he invites his followers fully to inhabit the dwelling...he shares with God (Jn. 14, 15). Since, ‘*hospitality is one of the dominant metaphor[s]*...for...the incarnate presence of God-with-us,’ (G. O’Day) the fourth Gospel makes clear that *Jesus is the grace-filled host of God, and we-the readers—are the invited guests.*” (Edward W. Klink, *John*, 307-8)
 - “Jesus comes into the world...*As host he welcomes children, sinners, and vulnerable people into his presence*. After distributing bread to 5,000 people, he describes himself as the bread of heaven, the manna (Jn. 6). In Jesus, the elements of hospitality—host, guest, & meal—take on profound theological importance, and divine hospitality becomes the model for human practice.” (Daniel J. Treier (ed.) *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p.)
2. Jesus knew he would feed the multitude (6:5a, 6b) – even though they followed Jesus because of the signs he had performed, as the loving *HOST*, he still wanted to properly care for them
3. The disciples—Philip & Andrew—fail the test (6:5-9)
 - “After noticing the great throng of people...Jesus summons Philip & asks ‘Where will we buy bread so these people can eat?’...This question is a ‘test’ (6:6, cf. Ex. 16:4; Dt. 8:2). Philip should have recognized that Jesus...as the divine Son of God is the great Life-giver & will provide for the crowd. Philip...witness[ed]...Jesus turning water into wine (Jn. 2) & countless other miracles, so he should have ‘put 2 and 2 together.’ The same can be said of Andrew...These two disciples, probably representing [the rest] have yet to grasp... fully Jesus’ identity. They should have applied what they saw previously...In the same way...Israel, despite witnessing Yahweh’s unique acts in redeeming his people from Egypt, immediately fails to [apply them] to their present situation in the wilderness. But...Jesus is YAHWEH incarnate, merciful & gracious; he overcomes the disciples’ unbelief, multiplies the bread, & creates a new people of God...[by] his future death & resurrection.” [Benjamin L. Gladd, *Handbook on the Gospels*, p. *Ixii*]
4. Jesus helps his disciples see him more clearly (6:5b-9) – the more time spent with Jesus the clearer we become about who he is

- “Jesus is keenly concerned to prepare and instruct his disciples (6:5–9, 12–13, 16–21; cf., e.g., chap. 4). By his signs, he wants not merely to reveal himself to the crowds, but, more importantly, to deepen the faith of his disciples and to train them for ministry.” (Andreas Kostenberger, *Encountering John*, p. 83)
- a. Asked Philip “where” they could find enough food to feed everyone? (6:5b) – Philip’s hometown was nearby so he should know
- b. Andrew says, five barley loaves & two fish are not enough for the need before them (vv. 8-9)
- 5. Jesus, the Host, takes the initiative (6:4)
 - Jesus’ signs are typically in response to a request. Here, “the request is absent....Jesus ‘saw a large crowd coming towards him’ (6:4)” [R. Alan Culpepper, *John*, 155]
 - “In John’s telling of the story, Jesus is the focus of attention: it is *he rather than the disciples*, who *distributes the bread & fish*, where as the Synoptics include the disciples in that role...In John’s version, Jesus’ actions do *not* reflect the more liturgically-styled actions of the Synoptic accounts, but rather *reflect the actions of a host...*” [Robert P. Vande Kappelle, *Truth Revealed...John*,]
- 6. Jesus, the Host, feeds 5,000 plus people (vv. 10-13)
 - “The *traditional Eucharistic elements* that feature in the Synoptic tellings of the story (liturgical formula: Jesus took the loaves, blessed, broke, gave) *are played down or are absent in John*. The theological significance of Jesus’ gift of himself in the bread is heightened.” (Gail O’Day, *John*, p. 504)
 - “The feeding of the multitudes also conveys the image of *Jesus presiding as a host over an abundant meal*, a theme found already in the Prophets (e.g., *Isa. 25:6*) and picked up by Jesus in some of his parables (e.g., Mt. 22:1–14; Luke 22:16, 29–30). Here we see a *parallel* between *Jesus’ first sign* (at the wedding of Cana) *and this one*: as he provided abundant wine there, so he here provides abundant bread.
 - *Bread and wine, in turn, symbolize the [End-time] messianic banquet.*” (Andreas Kostenberger, *Encountering John*, p. 83)
 - a. He asks them to sit down on the grass (v. 10)
 - b. He took the five loaves and two fish, and gave thanks (v. 11b)
 - c. Jesus himself distributed the food to the people (v. 11a)
 - “Jesus’ [personal] distribution of the food enhances the Christological focus of the miracle: the gift of food comes from Jesus himself.” (Gail O’Day, *John*, p. 506)
 - In contrast to the Synoptic accounts of the feeding, *Jesus himself distributes the bread & pieces of fish directly* to the people...Perhaps...there’s an implication that the disciples were involved... but this is not explicitly stated. The 4th Gospel seems to...stress that the *people receive the food immediately & abundantly from Jesus.*” [Brendan Byrne, *Life Abounding*, 112]
 - d. But, this needn’t be a Eucharistic Allusion—Jesus is the host
 - “*That Jesus distributes the bread need not be a Eucharistic allusion...Jesus as the host* would naturally be credited with this [role—distribution].” [Gary M. Burge, *Anointed Community*, p. 179]
 - e. He asked his disciples to gather the leftovers (vv. 12-13)
 - “It was customary at Jewish meals to collect what was leftover pieces of bread were not to be thrown away, & any food the size of an olive or larger was to be picked up.” (D.A. Carson & G. Beale, p. 444)
 - “Jesus’ words in 6:12...make an important connection between this story and the manna story of Exodus 16. In Ex. 16:19, Moses asked that the people not leave any extra manna around, but the people disobeyed Moses...and [it] ‘bred worms and became foul’ (Ex. 16:20). Jesus’ words in 6:12 seem to caution against a repetition of Exodus 16. The connection between the feeding miracle and the manna story...is thus introduced early on.” (Gail O’Day, *John*, pp. 505-6)

III. The People’s Need was Fully Met (Jn. 6:11b – 12a)

1. Each person got “as much as they wanted” (v. 11c)

- “Immediately...the number of about 5,000 men is mentioned. As a result, from the very beginning the *emphasis* comes to lie on *the immense crowd* for which Jesus prepares the meal. As *host*, he gives thanks & distributes the bread & the fish, then the miracle is realized in the abundance he sets before these thousands of people (cf. 10:10).” (Herman Ridderbos, *Theological Commentary: John*, p. 163)
2. Each person was “full” (v. 12a)
- “Notice how Jesus distributes the bread & fish: he gives the people ‘as much as they wanted’ (6:11). Those who go to God to get their needs met will not find him stingy. God will give as much as is wanted of what we need. This doesn’t mean we will have everything...according to our sinful desire, but it does mean that God will meet the needs of his people. Christ is enough & more to satisfy forever & always.” [*ESV Expository Commentary (Vol. 9): John–Acts*, p.]

IV. The Response (Jn. 6:14-15)

1. The crowd

- a. Declare, “This truly is ‘the Prophet’ who is to come into the world” (6:14; Deut. 18:15, 18)
- Moses promised: “The LORD your God will raise up for you *a prophet like me* from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” (Dt. 18:15)
 - “The reference in John 6:15 to ‘the prophet’ means the prophet *like Moses*...In John’s Gospel, Jesus is ‘the prophet’ whom the Jews have awaited based upon Deut. 18:15.” [Saeed Hamid-Khani, *Revelation & Concealment of Christ*, p. 108]
 - “The fourth Gospel narrative has taught the reader to *suspect any response to Jesus that is based on a surface reaction to signs* (2:23-25; 4:48). The [response] is ambiguous, because it rests on the evidence of signs.” (Gail O’Day, *John*, p. 506)
- b. Wanted to “*make Jesus their king by force*” (v. 15a)
- “According to 6:14-15, the [feeding of 5,000] elicits an incredible reaction & the crowd confesses, ‘This truly is the Prophet who is to come into the world.’ (6:14b)...The crowd believes that Jesus is the long-awaited King of Israel who has arrived...to usher in political peace & the [End-time] kingdom. But Jesus’ kingship breaks the mold of what many first-century Jews believed. His kingship is not marked by political triumph but by suffering & death...Not primarily by political peace; He brings spiritual peace to the cosmos.” [Benjamin L. Gladd, *Handbook on the Gospels*, p. *lxii*]
 - “To make Jesus king is to take his grace and twist it to conform to preexistent systems of power and authority. To make Jesus king is to judge him according to human glory (5:44) rather than to see in him God’s glory.” (Gail O’Day, *John*, 508)

2. Jesus withdrew to the mountain by himself (v. 15b)

- “When Jesus withdrew from the crowd, he showed that he would offer his gift of grace without claiming worldly power. In that moment his glory was revealed, because true glory has nothing to do with worldly power.” (Gail O’Day, *John*, p. 508)

V. Jesus, Host & True King

1. Jesus meets all of our needs

2. Jesus will be King on God’s terms

- “The *kingship of Jesus is an important theme in John*, first introduced in 1:49. Israel’s desire for a king is part of its Messianic expectations, the hope for a 2nd David. Jesus will be king in John, but *he will be king according to his definition* of kingship (18:36-38), *not forced to fit the world’s definition*. The kingship theme reaches its resolution in the crucifixion narrative of John 18-19.” (Gail O’Day, , p. 506)
- “*Jesus does not give the multitude a chance to put their conceptions concerning him into effect. He rejects a priori any notion of kingship as they conceived it.* And the reason is not that he wanted no part of the messianic kingship for himself (cf. 1:49; 12:13ff.) or that he objected to the application to himself of the prophecy of a prophet like Moses (cf. 1:45; 4:25, 26). But he wanted

no part of kingship in the way the people understood it, something he would later describe as a “*kingship of this world*” (18:36). What the multitude envisioned was that *they* would *make* him king and that he would exercise a worldly kingship over them.” (Herman Ridderbos, *A Theological Commentary: John*, p. 165)

- “The real nature of Jesus’ kingship becomes a major issue in the passion narrative (18:33ff.). The truth of the matter is that Jesus’ kingdom was like no other (18:36). *Jesus himself knew that the way his kingdom would triumph would not be by beating the enemy in siege warfare, but by dying and rising from the dead; ‘he would go to Jerusalem not to wield the spear and bring the judgment, but to receive the spear thrust and bear the judgment’.*” (D. A. Carson, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: John*, 212)

VI. Application

- Feeding on God’s Word (Matt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3)
 - Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘*Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*’.” (Matt. 4:4)
 - YAHWEH “humbled you by letting you go hungry; then he gave you manna to eat, which you & your ancestors had not known, so that you might learn that *man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*” (Dt. 8:3)
- Serve others as host
 - “To the disciples...[this] is not merely an exhortation to embrace the hospitality of Jesus, but to fully embrace his earlier command to ‘lift your eyes and look on the fields’ (4:35). The basket that each [disciple] carries as the [episode’s] end serves as a...reminder of the miraculous provision of Jesus and the duty they now need to perform...*Christian ministry is emulating the hospitality of Jesus, inviting people to enter the hospitality of God and serving as an intermediate host until God himself embraces them.*” (Edward W. Klink, *John*, 308)
- How much do you want? – there’s a never-ending supply of God’s love, grace, mercy, hope – Don’t put a limit on what God has for you – a speed governor on a truck D.Will you take Jesus as your King on his terms?
 - Many people want to experience God’s grace as they face their difficulties, but don’t want to follow him, they want him as king on their own terms:
 - We tell him what we want him to do
 - We bargain with him – “Do this and I will...” – But, do we follow through?
 - We want the king’s blessings without the king
 - Will you lay down your expectations, your requirements, all the attached strings & simply follow him?

APPENDIX:

- **A1 The Claim that John 6:1-15 is Eucharistic (i.e. alludes to Communion/Lord’s Table)**
 - “If we have careful regard to the 6th chapter of St. John’s Gospel, we will find this work-sacrament nexus beautifully represented. The first part of John 6 (6:1-16) invites us to appreciate the Eucharistic multiplication of the loaves, We are told that Jesus ‘took the loaves, & when he had given thanks, he distributed to them to those who were seated’ (6:11). This is the action of the Eucharist [communion]:taking, blessing, breaking (implicit here) & distributing.” [Owen F. Cummings, *Liturgical Snapshots*, p.]
 - “The feeding [of the 5,000] foreshadows the Eucharist, which is itself a sacramental anticipation of the divine hospitality of the kingdom. The description of the feeding in John 6:1-15...” [Brendan Byrne, *Life Abounding...John’s Gospel*, 110]
 - Raymond “Brown (wrongly in our opinion) uses his ‘evidence’ from John 6:1-15 to argue for a Eucharistic motif in the subsequent discourse.” [Gary M. Burge, *Anointed*

Community, p.179]

- **A2 The Claim Rebuffed**

1. No mention of the 'breaking' of the bread

- "The feeding of the multitude *does not in itself constitute a Eucharistic meal* [communion]"—A. J. Köstenberger, *John*, 200 #7]
- "Sacramental...interpreters have found an emphasis on the Eucharist [communion] throughout John 6...However, the case for seeing *a primary reference to the Eucharist [communion] in 6:1-15 is tenuous at best...*This case can hardly be sustained. Initially, *Jesus makes no mention of the 'breaking' of the bread.* This element ['breaking the bread'] is common to all accounts of the [Lord's] supper in the NT...*That Jesus distributes the bread need not be a Eucharistic allusion...Jesus as the host* would naturally be credited with this [role—i.e., distribution]." [Gary M. Burge, *Anointed Community*, 178-9]

2. John's Gospel omits the Eucharist [communion] from the Last Supper scene (Jn. 13)

- "If all we had was the Gospel of John, there would be no biblical basis for baptism & communion...in the life of the church....[It is a] fact that the institution of a meal of remembrance [breaking of bread] is totally missing from the Last Supper [Jn. 13] in John. Disciples are invited to eat & drink the flesh & blood of Jesus after the feeding of the 5,000, but if the Evangelist really wanted to insist upon the Eucharist [communion], why not include it at the Last Supper?" [Paul N. Anderson, *Riddles of the 4th Gospel*, pp. 39-40]

3. 'Fish' not related to the Eucharist (6:11b)

- "If Mark...intend[s] to distance the Eucharist from the feedings by *emphasizing the fish*, maybe *John* does the same, for he *too highlights [the fish]* (it is of the fish the people eat to satisfaction [6:11b])." [Ian D. Mackay, *John's Relation...with Mark*, 140]

- **B1 This is Not an Allegory**

- "John 6 is not...an allegory"—Paul Anderson
- "The literary form of the narrative in John 6 is not that of an allegory, devised to convey a set of abstract ideas"—Paul Anderson
- John's account contains multiple narrative details, yet none "of them [is] used symbolically elsewhere in the narrative. For instance, [there's] no elaboration...on what good fortunes befall young lads who share their lunches with those in need; nor is any mention made of barley loaves being the least of loaves—& yet the best of foods—having been blessed by Jesus; nor is there any further mention of the distance the disciples had rowed being suggestive of the inadequacy of human rigor when it comes to faith...The literary form of the narrative in John 6 is not that of an allegory, devised to convey a set of abstract ideas illustratively...It is a narrative which...interprets the events of Jesus' ministry...[so] as to *lead the reader into the transforming event of 'knowing' the [Christ-centered] truth* of the narrative...The...*illustrative detail of John 6 serves no...rhetorical function.*" [Paul N. Anderson, *Christology of the 4th Gospel*, 188]

- **B2 An Example of (invalid) Allegorizing**

- "The allegorical significance of this sign is rather obvious"—Margaret Ralph, *And God Said What?* 248]
- "John appropriates the story [feeding the 5,000] & through subtle changes, gives us signals that he has turned it into an allegory about...the risen Christ in the Church...who feeds his people...So...we see that the historical Jesus stands for the risen Christ, the disciples stand for the Church, the crowd stands for those hungry for spiritual nourishment, & the bread stands for the Eucharist [communion]...Notice...12 baskets of bread are left over. Twelve stands for the 12 tribes [of Israel], the 12 apostles, the whole Church. Through this allegory, John is teaching his end-of-the-[1st]-century audience that Christ is present to them in the Eucharist..." [Margaret N. Ralph, *Does the Bible Tell Me So?*, p. 68]

- B3 The Early Church's Allegorical Interpretations
 - The '5 loaves' are the 5 Books of Moses [Gen. to Deut.]—Augustine
 - The 'green grass' represents Human Flesh or is linked to the 'green pastures' in Ps. 23
 - Almost Everything Physical Represents something Spiritual:
 - "This boy [with 5 barley loaves] can symbolize Moses, because of the imperfection of the Law ('the Law brought nothing to perfection' Heb. 7:19)...The loaves are 5...to be absorbed via the 5 [human] senses. The 2 fishes indicate the Psalms & the Prophets. The Law had only 5 loaves, the 5 books of Moses, but also [needed] '2 fishes,' i.e., the Psalms & the Prophets. The OT is divided into these three [sections] (Lk. 24:44)" [Thomas, *John*, Vol. 1:344-5]
 - Cyril of Alexandria (5th century) makes the '2 fish' the NT Gospels & Epistles.
 - Today, most interpreters believe John rarely planted so many 'spiritual' meanings...One (Christ-centered) point, perhaps, but not many more points..." [Frederick Dale Bruner, *John*,]
- B4 Avoid Allegorizing
 - In interpreting the Bible one basic "principle: unless a passage declares itself to be allegorical in nature, do not allegorize biblical passages. To allegorize means to translate the details of the passage into another set of meanings, usually a set of conceptual meanings...What this principle prohibits is allegorizing a passage—that is the details into a set of conceptual or historical meanings that the text itself does not intend." [James C. Wilhoit, Leland Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching*, p.]