

The Gospel of John

Lesson 9: Feeding the Multitude and Walking on Water -- John 6:1-24

The crowd has followed Him around the lake, thousands of them, drawn by the signs He has been doing for the sick. Evening is coming, they are far from any town, and they are hungry. Jesus turns to Philip with a test: "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" Philip does the math, and the math is hopeless. Even eight months' wages would not buy enough to give each person a bite. Then Andrew, almost embarrassed to mention it, finds a boy with five barley loaves and two small fish, the lunch of a poor child, and says what we have all felt staring at our own small resources before an enormous need: "But what are they for so many?"

What happens next is the only miracle, apart from the resurrection, recorded in all four Gospels. Jesus takes the boy's lunch, gives thanks, and starts distributing, and the bread does not run out. Five thousand men, plus women and children, eat until they are full, and when it is over there are twelve baskets of leftovers, more at the end than there was at the beginning. The boy gave Jesus everything he had, which was almost nothing, and Jesus fed a multitude with it. There is a sermon in that alone for everyone who has ever felt that what they have to offer is too small to matter.

But the crowd misreads the sign completely. They see free bread and a powerful man, and they decide to make Him king by force, the kind of king who keeps the bread coming and throws off the Romans. They want the gift more than the Giver. So Jesus withdraws to the mountain alone, and that evening His disciples set out across the lake without Him. A storm rises, the wind is against them, the waves climb, and they are straining at the oars in the dark, three or four miles from shore, when they see something that terrifies them more than the storm. A figure is walking toward them on the water.

"It is I," He says. "Do not be afraid." The words are literally "I am," the name of God, spoken over a storm. The same Jesus who multiplied bread now treads the waves as their Master, and the moment they are willing to take Him into the boat, immediately they reach the shore they were straining toward. Put these two scenes together, the feeding and the sea, and you see a Jesus who provides what we cannot provide and rules what we cannot control. Read this passage and ask whether you have been chasing His gifts when He is offering you Himself.

Group Discussion: The crowd wanted to make Jesus king because He fed them, seeking the gift more than the Giver (vv. 14-15). In what ways do we today seek what Jesus can give us more than we seek Jesus Himself, and how can we tell the difference in our own hearts?

Personal Reflection: A boy's small lunch became more than enough in the hands of Jesus (vv. 9-11). What "small lunch" of time, ability, or resources have you held back because it seemed too little to matter, and what might Jesus do with it if you offered it to Him?

Read John 6:1-24

Study Questions

1. Jesus tested Philip by asking where they could buy bread, “for he himself knew what he would do” (vv. 5-6). What does this reveal about how Jesus uses moments of apparent impossibility in our lives?
2. Faced with an overwhelming need, Philip calculated the cost and despaired (v. 7), while Andrew brought what little he found to Jesus (vv. 8-9). When you face a need beyond your resources, which response is more natural for you, and what would it look like to bring your little to Jesus?
3. Jesus fed more than five thousand people from five loaves and two fish, with twelve baskets left over (vv. 10-13). What does this abundance teach us about the character and provision of God?
4. Jesus had the leftovers gathered up “that nothing may be lost” (v. 12). What does this attention to the fragments teach you about how God values what seems small or leftover, including the seemingly small parts of your own life?
5. The crowd concluded, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!” and tried to make Him king by force (vv. 14-15). Why did Jesus refuse the kind of kingship they wanted, and what does this reveal about the nature of His kingdom?
6. The disciples were straining at the oars against the wind, in the dark, without Jesus (vv. 16-18). When have you found yourself rowing hard against the wind in a season when Christ seemed absent, and how did you keep going?
7. When Jesus came walking on the sea, He said, “It is I; do not be afraid” (v. 20), words that echo the divine name “I am.” What does His mastery over the storm reveal about who He is?
8. As soon as they were willing to take Jesus into the boat, “immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going” (v. 21). What does this teach about what changes when we welcome Christ into our struggles rather than facing them alone?
9. Putting the two signs together, the feeding of the multitude and the walking on the water, what is John showing us about the identity of Jesus, and how do these signs prepare us for Jesus’ great claim, “I am the bread of life,” which follows?
10. Look back over this passage, from the boy’s lunch to the figure on the waves. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you, both to offer Him your little and to trust His presence in the storm?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 23:1-5, the Lord as shepherd who provides and leads beside still waters; Exodus 16:11-18, God providing manna in the wilderness; Psalm 107:23-30, the

Lord stilling the storm and bringing sailors to their desired haven; Job 9:8, God who alone treads on the waves of the sea; Philippians 4:19, God supplying every need according to His riches.