

# The Bread of Life

John 6:1-15, 25-40, 48-51

## Feeding the Physically Hungry

☐ Read John 6:1-15.<sup>1</sup>

1. When Jesus asked Philip about feeding the crowd, how did Philip respond, and why?<sup>2</sup>



☐ Jesus asked Philip the question only to test him (6:6). Jesus wanted to teach a lesson. After Andrew mentioned the boy with five small loaves and two small fish, Jesus gave his disciples instructions. They followed his instructions.

2. What resulted from the actions of Jesus and his disciples?<sup>3</sup>

☐ The obvious result was the feeding of the crowd. They not only “had enough to eat” (6:12), they had plenty of leftovers! (6:13) But Jesus’ primary purpose was not the filling of stomachs (that is, the physical satisfaction of the people). Jesus wanted to teach something.<sup>4</sup>

## Feeding the Spiritually Hungry

☐ After feeding the 5,000, Jesus crossed the lake to Capernaum, and a crowd of people went looking for him (6:16-24).<sup>5</sup>

☐ Read John 6:25-35.

3. According to Jesus, why was the crowd looking for him? In what way had they misunderstood the significance of the miraculous “sign” (Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000)?<sup>6</sup>

4. After Jesus told them, “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life,” they asked a question (see 6:28). How did Jesus answer (6:29)? How did Jesus’ answer correct their misunderstanding?



<sup>1</sup> This story (often called ‘Jesus feeds the 5,000’) is also recorded in Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:32-44, and Luke 9:10-17. Besides the story of Jesus’ resurrection, this is the only miracle story recorded in all four gospels.

<sup>2</sup> It was obvious that five loaves and two fish were inadequate for such a ‘great crowd of people’ (6:2). It would take more than half a year’s wages just to give each person a bite! (6:7) Thus buying food for the crowd was not feasible. Andrew noticed a boy with five small loaves of bread and two small fish, but that would feed only a few (6:8-9).

<sup>3</sup> The crowd was fed by a miraculous multiplication of food. Jesus was able and willing to provide. Some who are biased against miracles have proposed naturalistic explanations, but such explanations are not convincing.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, the miracle demonstrated Jesus’ power and authority over nature. It teaches us that Jesus is the Provider and can do great things with the ‘little’ we have to offer. But Jesus used this event to speak to our deepest needs.

<sup>5</sup> John 6:16-21 records Jesus’ miracle of walking on the water.

<sup>6</sup> The crowd was seeking Jesus because he had fed them. He had met a physical need, and provided an easy, free meal. They had seen the miraculous sign, but missed its significance. The feeding of the 5,000 was a ‘sign’ that pointed beyond the material to a deeper reality. It pointed to the ‘food’ that gives eternal life.

- ❑ They assumed Jesus meant they must “work” for eternal life, as if they could earn it. However, this is impossible. Jesus corrected them by saying there is only one “work of God” (that is, one thing God requires). That is “to believe in the one he has sent” (6:29). Eternal life is a gift of God received through “faith” (believing and trusting in Jesus Christ).
  - ❑ However, before they would believe, they wanted to see a miraculous sign (6:30). They wanted to see a continuous provision of bread, like the manna<sup>7</sup> in the wilderness (6:31). Their request reveals a materialistic (perhaps political) expectation, but that was not Jesus’ purpose, and he could not become captive to the wishes of a demanding crowd.
5. Read John 6:48-51. What is the difference between the “manna in the wilderness” and the “[living] bread that comes down from heaven”?<sup>8</sup>



6. Jesus said, “Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (6:35). What kind of hunger and thirst is Jesus talking about? To what extent can the “Bread of Life” bring satisfaction to our lives? How can we experience it?<sup>9</sup>
- ❑ Jesus came to do the Father’s will, which includes accepting and protecting all those given to him by the Father (6:37-39). To everyone who “looks to the Son and believes in him” he gives eternal life *now*, and he will complete the believer’s salvation in the future (6:39-40).<sup>10</sup>

### *The Light & You*

- If you are not a believer, do you want “signs” before you will believe? How might your desire be similar to the crowd’s desire? (6:30-31) What do Jesus’ words say to you?
- Are you hungry in the deepest part of your being? What can satisfy your hunger? Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.” Only he can satisfy our deepest needs. Come to Jesus.
- If you have already “believed in him,” do you still lack satisfaction? Are you looking for fulfillment in the wrong places? Learn to “feed on the Bread of Life,” which involves trusting God, regular intake of His word, consistent prayer, and a commitment to do his will. Read and reflect on John 6:1-59 and make a specific commitment to “feed on the Bread of Life.”

<sup>7</sup> ‘manna’ – a bread-like substance given to the Israelites in the wilderness after their escape from Egypt. This manna miraculously ‘rained down’ from the heavens (*Psalm 78:23-25*) over a 40 year period.

<sup>8</sup> The manna in the wilderness was material, corruptible, and temporal. It was useful for sustaining physical life, but the people who ate it eventually died. The ‘living bread’ or ‘true bread’ (6:32) is a person (Jesus) who gives spiritual life – abundant and eternal. Earthly, physical food is essential for physical life. Jesus is essential for spiritual life. Those who feed on the Bread of Life will live forever (6:50-58). ‘Feeding’ on him refers to receiving him into one’s life and abiding in him. By feeding on the Bread of Life, we receive the benefits of his sacrificed flesh and shed blood, given for us so that we may have life.

<sup>9</sup> This hunger and thirst is not physical; it is spiritual. It is the hunger and thirst of the inner being for spiritual life. It is a hunger for meaning, purpose, fulfillment, peace, and joy. The person who comes to Jesus finds his/her hunger satisfied and thirst quenched. This does not mean that there is no need for continued ‘feeding,’ but the source of refreshment and life has been found. There are many things we pursue in this world – family life, academics, career, sports, projects, etc. The realization of these things, and the achievement of goals, brings satisfaction. However, as only food satisfies physical hunger, only the Bread of Life (Jesus) satisfies spiritual hunger (at least ultimately).

<sup>10</sup> Jesus promises the following: 1) he will never drive away anyone who comes to him (6:37); 2) he will not lose anyone the Father has given him (6:39); and 3) he will raise them up on the last day. These verses reveal God’s grace and faithfulness. God initiates and completes our salvation. God is faithful to accomplish his good purpose, and if we believe in Jesus, God is faithful to accomplish his good purpose in us, including eternal life.