

John on Jesus - Fishes and Loaves

Sign Title: Fishes and Loaves

September 16, 2012

Good morning Faith Church. For those of you who are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We are working our way through the Gospel of John. Today we begin John 6. Turn there in your paper Bible or iPhone. If you didn't bring a Bible, take a pew Bible. It is on page 891. Take the notes out of your bulletin and follow along.

Today, we are looking at the only miracle of Jesus, besides the resurrection, that was recorded in all four Gospels. This was a big miracle. It was the feeding of the 5,000. That is not a good name. It was 5,000 men that were fed; that number left out the women and children. Maybe a better title would be the feeding of the 20,000. That is a small football stadium of people. I have a hard enough time making dinner for a family of five, so I have a great deal of respect for Jesus' culinary skills in this one. This miracle is also unique. Unlike many other miracles, it was not simply one person that experienced it. In this miracle, we have 20,000 people experiencing the miracle all at once as Jesus gave out food that kept multiplying from his hands. That is amazing.

Before we put our finger in the text, let's pick up where we left off last week. In John 5, Jesus was in Jerusalem. The Jews were riding his case because he healed a man who was an invalid for 38 years. He did it on the Sabbath. There was nothing wrong with that except it violated their rules. When John 6 begins, they were no longer in Jerusalem. Jesus was up north in Jesus' home region by the sea of Galilee.

After this, Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. John 6:1–2 (ESV)

In chapter 5, Jesus was in Jerusalem for an unidentified feast. It was probably the Feast of Tabernacles. In a moment, we will see that as chapter 6 begins, it was time for the Jewish holiday of Passover. This means there was approximately a six-month gap between the end of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6. The words “after this” in the Greek, do not mean immediate consecutive order but rough chronological order. The wording allows for this six-month window.

I mentioned this miracle wasn’t just discussed in the Gospel of John but it is in all four Gospels. As I studied the miracle, I enjoyed examining it using the lens of the other Gospels. I learned a little of more about what transpired in that mysterious six-month window between the end of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6. The Gospel of Mark, chapter 6 gives us some insight. We learn that after John 5, Jesus and his disciples returned to the region of Galilee after leaving Jerusalem. Jesus continued to heal people. There were lines of people to be healed. Everyone loved Jesus’ health care plan because there was a low deductible and quick recovery. Everyone with a problem ranging from a hangnail to leprosy was looking for Jesus.

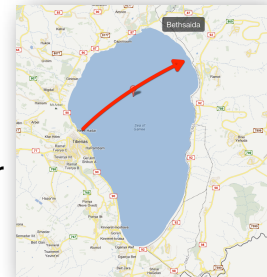
In Mark 6:7, we also learn that in this six-month window Jesus sent his disciples into the countryside two by two. They were casting out demons, anointing the sick with oil and watching God heal them. The disciples were acting like Jesus juniors and setting up regional healing offices in Jesus’ name.

Just before the feeding of the 5,000, the disciples returned to Jesus. They had amazing success. Life was insanely busy. Everyone wanted to see Jesus. Everyone wanted to hear Jesus teach. Everyone wanted to be healed by Jesus. Mark 6:31 says that so many people were coming and going that Jesus and the disciples didn't even have time to eat. I know many of us have a busy fall schedule but we have all found time to eat. At this time, Jesus and the disciples were busier than anything we usually experience.

Mark 6:31 also tells us why they went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus told his disciples they needed to get away to a desolate place to rest. They needed a vacation. Vacations are biblical. Jesus tried to take one.

The game plan was for Jesus and the disciples to get in a boat and sail to the east side of the Sea of Galilee. Nobody lived there. They could chill out, emotionally recharge, and debrief from the disciples' mission trip.

Here is a picture of the Sea of Galilee. It is a freshwater lake. To give you an idea of its size, it is 7 miles wide and 12 miles from top to bottom. It is fed by the Jordan River in the north, and the Jordan River flows out of it in the south. Most of the cities were on the west side. Jesus and the disciples were heading to the east side of the lake into a desolate area known today as Golan Heights. Unfortunately, their plan backfired.



The crowds saw them getting into the boat. They realized they couldn't swim across the lake, but they were willing to walk around it to the other side. Jesus and the disciples were already facing burn-out when the crowds began

trickling in. According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus didn't tell the crowds to go home, but he had compassion on them and began to teach them. He taught all day long and into the dinner hour. Yes, Jesus was a long-winded preacher.

Thankfully, he was a good preacher!

Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. 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?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. John 6:3–6 (ESV)

We have a problem. They were in the middle of nowhere. People wouldn't leave Jesus. Everyone was tired and hungry. There were 20,000 people and no Casey's or McDonald's in the area.

Why did Jesus ask Philip where they could buy bread? Why not Peter? I think the answer is simple. Philip grew up in Bethsaida. It was a nearby town. Philip knew the area. If there was a good restaurant in the area, he could find it.

Then the fun began. Jesus didn't just ask Philip because he grew up in the area. He asked Philip to test him. Here is a big issue. Jesus knew they would have a food crisis if he taught all day long. He knew everyone would be tired and hungry. He did this to test Philip and see what he would do in the crisis. Where would Philip look for a solution? Would he just look to his own resources or would he look to God's resources?

Philip was not the only one Jesus tested. The Bible tells us Jesus also tests us. He will intentionally put us in a crisis, just like he did the disciples, to see where we will turn. Jesus will intentionally put us into situations that are beyond our ability to handle to test our faith. He will do this to us as a church,

and he will do this to us individually. This is not a new teaching. This is an old teaching. Remember Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22?

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” Genesis 22:1–2 (ESV)

This really freaked Abraham out. If you remember the story, God made Abraham and Sarah wait until they were almost dead to have a child. We are talking 100 years old. Then God told Abraham to take his only son, the son he waited until he was almost a hundred years old to have, and sacrifice him. That made no sense. Why would God tell him to do this? It was a test. Would Abraham obey God and trust in God’s resources which could raise his son from the dead or would he just look at his own resources and blow God off? In that story, Abraham obeyed God’s Word, and he did go to sacrifice his son. After he bound his son on the altar and the knife was beginning to descend to kill him, God stopped him. God showed Abraham a ram caught in the thicket that he was to sacrifice on that mountain instead of his son. Abraham passed the test.

In this passage, Jesus is doing the same thing. He led the disciples into an impossible predicament --- 20,000 hungry people looking for food in the woods. Jesus tested Philip. “Philip, where do we buy food?” Philip responded, “Jesus, there isn’t a store for miles around here. Besides, we couldn’t buy enough food for these people if we wanted to. Look at our bank book.”

Don’t just look at my resources, look at God’s resources.

Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.” John 6:7 (ESV)

Did you notice that Philip didn't answer Jesus' question? Jesus asked him where to buy lunch. Philip answered that they didn't have enough money to buy lunch.

Philip was the bean counter in the group. He was the guy who did the spreadsheets. He was the number cruncher. He shook the piggy bank and looked at the people. His calculations said the money came up short. Two hundred denari is approximately eight months' wages. Eight months' wages wouldn't even be enough money to buy the pickle that would go with their sandwich.

What amazes me about Philip's answer is the background we have from Mark 6. These disciples were with Jesus for more than a year. They watched him miraculously heal hundreds of people. They have just returned from their own mission trip where they were sent out two by two. God used them to heal people. Philip was very familiar with the power of God working miraculously through Jesus. Philip was very familiar with the power of God even working miraculously through his own life. When it came to the new challenge of feeding 20,000 people, what is the only thing he saw? His own resources! He conveniently forgot everything that happened in the last 12 months.

Folks, we are no different. God will test our faith as a church. He will test our faith personally. He does that intentionally by putting us in situations that look hopeless when we look at our own bank account. Jesus knows this. He wants us to stop looking at our own resources and thinking strictly on the human plane. He wants us to look at God's resources. He wants us to remember

everything God has done in the past and remember that just as God was faithful in the past, he will continue to be faithful as we head into the future.

Let me get practical. In our October business meeting, we will vote to affirm opening another campus in Spencer. That will be a big financial commitment. On paper, it looks like trying to feed 20,000 people. If we look only at our own resources, it doesn't work out on the spreadsheets. I have a question. Has God been faithful to Faith Church in the past? In the last three has God been faithful? The congregation gave almost \$600,000 dollars beyond the regular budget to eliminate debt, perform needed repairs and do the technology updates for the stage. As we face this new challenge, God is testing us. Are we going to just look at our own resources and wilt, like Philip, or are we going to look at the resources of our God? God was faithful in the past, why wouldn't he continue to be faithful in the future?

Don't just look at the size of the gift, look at the sacrifice of the giver.

Philip wasn't the only one tested. The other disciples were tested as they saw the problem and looked for a solution.

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" John 6:8-9 (ESV)

Andrew said, "There is a boy here who knows everybody is hungry, and he is willing to share his lunch." Let me tell you about this boy. The word for boy can mean young man. Essentially, this guy is a teenager. You teens, listen closely; this is important. There were 20,000 hungry people and a teenage boy

came forward and said, “I don’t have much, but Jesus you can have my lunch to feed people who are hungry.”

That was a miracle in itself. A teenager willing to give up his lunch is almost unheard of. This past week, David went to the Taco House. In the refrigerator, he left a plate with a few nachos. I was scrounging the refrigerator for food on Sunday night when I saw the nachos, so I ate them. That was the wrong choice. On Monday at lunch time I received a text from David. He was angry. Apparently I ate his lunch. Growing teenagers don’t like giving up their lunches. I think the first miracle in the story is a teenager willing to give up his lunch.

His lunch was five barley loaves and two fish. This tells us something about the boy. Barley was known as the grain of the poor. If you had any money, you ate wheat bread. It tasted better and offered better nutritional value. Barley loaves were typically small. They were usually the size of Twinkies. The fish were either dried or pickled. It was a cheap source of protein for the poor. So we have 20,000 hungry people and a poor teenager giving up his bare subsistence lunch of cheap bread and dry fish. This is what I love. It was not much, but he wanted to give it to Jesus. I know on paper it didn’t solve the problem but he gave Jesus all of it. He would go hungry because somebody needed it more than he did.

Andrew brought the lunch to Jesus, but he also failed the test of faith. What did he say about the lunch? “What are they for so many?” He looked at

the kid and essentially said, “Nice try, but this won’t make a difference. Who cares that you gave up your lunch because it won’t make a dent in the problem.”

Had Andrew been around Jesus for the last year watching miracles? Yes. Had Andrew even participated in miracles of healing before this? According to Mark 6, it would seem he had.

Philip failed the test because all he could see were the resources in the disciple’s bank account, not the resources of Jesus. Andrew failed the test because all he could see is what was lacking, not what the teenage boy was giving.

There was only one person who passed the test of faith. It was the teenage boy! He was the hero. He gave what little he had, and that is all Jesus needed.

Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. 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. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. John 6:10–13 (ESV)

Jesus had everybody sit down. Jesus distributed the bread and fish. As he broke the food, they multiplied in his hands. Jesus kept multiplying this teenage boy’s small, but sacrificial, gift. Notice how this ended. Everybody had more than enough. Not only that, but the disciples picked up 12 baskets of leftovers. Every disciple got a doggy bag to eat for lunch that would last the entire week. This is a simple but amazing miracle.

As I thought about this, there are a number of lessons that rise to the surface.

Applications

1. **God will test us.** God will test us individually and corporately. God will put us in situations where, like Philip, we look at our pocketbook and there is not enough. He puts us in these testing situations beyond our ability to see how we handle the tests. God tests us to see where we will turn and who we will trust. Do we trust ourselves? Do we trust our bank account? Do we trust our talents or do we trust our God? The reason God puts us in these situations is to build our faith. Look at the promise we find in Scripture.

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19 (ESV)

The other thing to remember is the disciples. What amazes me is they watched Jesus work miraculously in the past, but when they were faced with a new challenge, they threw in the towel. If God was faithful in our past, why would he drop them as they face the future? The same is true for us. If God was faithful before in our lives, why would he not continue to be faithful?

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

2. **We are guilty of a scarcity mindset.** We tend to think about what we don't have at our disposal rather than what we do have at our disposal. We are by nature pessimists rather than optimists. As I was thinking about the story, I kept thinking of a song I used to sing at camp when I was a child.

He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the wealth in every mine; he owns the rivers and the rocks and rills, the sun and stars that shine. Wonderful riches,

more than tongue can tell --- he is my father so they're mine as well; he owns the cattle on a thousand hills --- I know that he will care for me. (John W. Peterson)

The song is based on Psalm 50:10. Let me show you what that Psalm says about adversity and tests.

“For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine ... call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” Psalm 50:10–15 (ESV)

In other words, God will put us through times of scarcity so we call upon him and tap into his resources. When God supplies our needs, we will come away with a story of how good and kind he is. So when we face times of scarcity, don't let it give us a scarcity mindset. The times of scarcity are there to teach us to rely on God and tap into our heavenly father's resources rather than ours. When we do, we get a story of how God supplies all of our needs.

3. **Ordinary people are the heroes in God's story.** This just comes screaming out of this text. The hero was not the disciples. They failed the test. The hero was not the guys with big names and statuses. The hero of this story was an unnamed poor teenage boy who cared enough about hungry people that he was, in faith, willing to entrust his lunch to Jesus. Teenagers, remember this. He gave all he had, which was a little. He had no idea how much God could do with the little he gave.

Folks, many of us here feel ordinary. Our names are not written in lights. We don't have a list of accolades. We are not rich and significant. We think that the little we give to Jesus is insignificant. We think the little bit of

money we put in the offering plate won't make a difference. We think the little bit we help at AWANA won't matter. We think that shaking somebody's hand or making coffee won't make a difference. We think running the video camera is an unimportant job. That is not true. It is the ordinary people who give their best that are the heroes in God's story. It may not look like much to everyone else, but when Jesus gets ahold of what ordinary people can give, he can multiply it beyond our wildest imaginations.

4. **(What I can give) + (What Jesus will do) = (Much more than I could have done).** This is so important. We need to understand the way divine math works. Jesus loves to take what we put in his hands and multiply it beyond anything we imagined.

This is not just financial. High school and junior high kids, when you help at Vacation Bible School, don't underestimate what Jesus will do with the little you can give. I am confident there are little kids who will take big steps of faith because of you. The same is true for AWANA leaders, small group leaders, those serving in hospitality teams and all the behind-the-scenes ministries. Don't underestimate what Jesus can do with the little we can give.

This miracle is about divine math. Don't be discouraged by the little we can give. God loves to multiply it and give us results beyond anything we expected.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for this miracle. Thank you first of all that the hero was not one of the disciples but it was an ordinary teenage boy who gave his best. That is a

great encouragement for us. Jesus, we also thank you for this divine math. Thank you for taking what little we can give and doing something amazing with it. Help us to remember that in the times we feel overwhelmed and insignificant.



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