
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read John 6.1-15. Jesus left Jerusalem and went up to Galilee, but John does not tell us how much time goes by. The “far side” of the sea in v.1 indicates the east side of the lake. Luke 9.10 tells us Jesus and his disciples went to Bethsaida, which we believe was on the northeast shore. The lake was sometimes called the Sea of Tiberias, because Herod had built the town of Tiberias on the southwest shore a few years earlier. Barley loaves were an inexpensive bread eaten by the lower classes. If this was the young man’s lunch, it probably was even smaller than we picture with the word “loaves”: it probably was small barley cakes and pickled small fish.

This is a miracle of provision for the Jews following Jesus: they ate until they were satisfied, and there was more left over than there was at the start! Jesus repeated this miracle later, for some Gentiles [Matthew 15.32-39; Mark 8.1-9]. In the Sermon on the Mount [not recorded in John], Jesus said God would provide all we need if we would live for him and make his work our primary concern [see Matthew 6.33]. Here Jesus gave an example of that promise. Jesus provided bread in a [grassy] wilderness, surely calling to Jewish minds God’s provision of manna [a bread-like substance] to Moses and the people when they wandered the [dessert] wilderness [Exodus 16], especially since Passover was near [v.4]. Perhaps this also helped them consider [v.14] the prophet Moses had prophesied would come [Deuteronomy 18.15-19].

Reflect: How well do you believe in God’s promise of provision? Notice, Jesus did not promise us a cushy life or that we would get all that we want. But he did teach that we could count on what we needed, *if* we were living for God instead of ourselves, pursuing God’s righteousness and seeking to live in submission to Christ. Do you think you sometimes short-circuit this provision by living for yourself or by your own standards? Is there a particular set of circumstances that make you vulnerable to self-reliance or selfishness?

Want more? This is the only pre-resurrection miracle recorded in all four gospels. Read the other accounts and see if you can pick up any more details: Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17. If you will only read one, read Mark.

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read John 6:1-15 again [maybe in a different translation!]. Jesus went up onto the plateau east of the sea [the Greek word means hill or mountain, but can refer to just a high place]. Crowds of people had hurried around the north shore of the lake to catch up with Jesus [Mark 6.33-35]. There were about 5000 men getting ready to eat [v.10]. There also were women and children there [Matthew 14.21]. How many people do you think were there in total? Feeding so many was a bewildering task in the minds of the disciples. Jesus teases them a little, testing their faith, when he asks how they are to buy enough bread to feed so many [vv.5-6]. Philip betrayed that they were still thinking only on the level of the material world [v.7]. It is perhaps endearing that Philip considers he could give up about eight months’ wages just to give each person a little bit.

Reflect: What do you think Jesus was teaching his disciples here? Perhaps it had to do with finding solutions in the spiritual realm by relying on his provision, instead of finding solutions in the material realm by relying on themselves. When you are doing ministry [or just generally helping people], how much do you rely on your own abilities, and how much are you turning to Jesus for help? What about with your family issues? Other issues? Is there a ministry passion that you should be pursuing by faith right now, but have been afraid it would reveal your inadequacy? Does this passage change your thinking about that? Read John 15.4-5: What does this teach you about reliance on Christ in all things?

Want more? Consider buying a harmonization of the gospels. This is a book that tries to use all four gospels to give us a more complete account of Jesus’ life in chronological order. One of the best is J. Dwight Pentecost’s *A Harmony of the Words & Works of Jesus Christ* [make sure you get the harmony, rather than the commentary which has a similar name].

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read John 6.10-11. Jesus had everyone recline on the grass [propped up on an elbow], because that was how people ate back then. This also would have quieted everyone so Jesus could pray. Before distributing his miraculous provision, Jesus gave thanks to God the Father. Note, Jesus does not ask God to “bless the food” as we sometimes do. He thanks God for the food which is a blessing. The common Jewish form was something like “Blessed are you, Yahweh our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.” The beginning in Hebrew is [read right to left!] בָּרֹךְ אַתָּה יְיָהוָה [bah-ROOK uh-TAH YAH-way], which could be interpreted as “Praise be to you, Yahweh!” So Jesus’ example is to thank and praise God, not to ask for further blessing on the food. [continued...]

We can learn from Jesus' example. He thanked God the Father for provision of the food. If we have no worries about providing food for each day, then we are blessed; blessed to live in a safe society, have wealth to buy food, have health enough to get it. No matter how our food gets to our table in the material world, it is still a blessing from God.

Reflect: Do you take a moment to thank God for his provision at least once a day? Mealtime is not the only time you could do this, but the family gathering around the table for supper is a great time. If you do not do this, consider starting. Right now, pray to thank God for his provision, not just of food, but of all the other blessings you enjoy.

Want more? Read John 6.12-13. Jesus collected more bread than he started with! What does that tell you? Also, Jesus bothered to collect the remnants, which was a Jewish custom: do you think that says something about frugality and wastefulness? What do you think we should take from these lessons?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read John 6.14-15. Moses had predicted that a greater prophet than he would come one day [Deuteronomy 18.15-19]. It being near Passover [v.4] and Jesus providing them with bread miraculously [vv.11-13], reminded the people of Moses' promise and led them to interpret this sign to mean Jesus was the "Greater Moses Prophet" [v.14]. John has shown us already that this prophet is the same as the Messiah/Christ. The people did not necessarily know of this connection. But, speaking of the time of the Messiah's deliverance of Israel, the prophet Jeremiah quoted God as saying people would be full with the good things he provided [Jeremiah 31.14].

Jesus realized the crowd was working itself up to carrying him off as king. Some of these people might have come to faith and hoped Jesus would establish the Messianic kingdom. Others perhaps remembered Moses had delivered the people out of bondage to Egypt, and so – when they identified Jesus as the "Greater Moses Prophet" – they assumed he would deliver them out of bondage to Rome. Others maybe were just euphoric over the miracles they had experienced and so would rashly start a revolution. Jesus knew he had to die to pay for our sins, and thus he knew it was not yet time to usher in his kingdom. He also did not want to create civil disorder: think of how much of a disturbance more than 10,000 people could create. Though not recorded in John, Jesus had accepted as final the rejection of the religious leaders when they accused him of being empowered by Satan instead of by the Holy Spirit [see Matthew 12.22-50; Mark 3.20-35], and so he in turn had rejected Israel until the time when he would return to establish his Messianic kingdom.

Reflect: How much do you think of God or Christ as a means of obtaining your prayer requests, and how much as the Lord of your life, whom you seek to follow and obey at all costs? They are not mutually exclusive concepts, but only one can be dominant in your approach to your relationship and only one can dominate your thinking. Pray about this, and confess if you have sometimes had the wrong approach.

Want more? Matthew 14.22 and Mark 6.45 say that Jesus sent away his disciples at this point, and some theologians wonder if he feared [or knew] that they would become infected by the enthusiasm of the crowd and try to crown him king. Some also wonder if Jesus saw in this situation temptation for himself, similar to what Satan had offered him in the wilderness. Others believe Jesus withdrew to prevent the crowd from creating a situation that was not sustainable and which would bring Roman intervention and Jesus' arrest prematurely. Mark 6.46 says Jesus went into the hills to pray.

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read John 6.16-21. The Sea of Galilee is about 600 feet below sea level, and the cool air rushing in to displace the warm and moist air over the lake can churn the water into a violent motion, but this is rare; perhaps the violence of the storm was part of the miracle. When Jesus appeared, the disciples had been rowing from sundown to almost dawn, yet had only gone about three miles, about half way to Gennesaret, where they eventually landed [Mark 6.48-53]. The storm did not impede Jesus at all. Jesus walked on water, stilled the storm [Mark 6.51], and finally brought the boat immediately to shore, all miraculously. God parted the Red Sea for Moses, now Jesus controls the sea.

Reflect: Obedience to Christ's will does not remove all obstacles; as the disciples did his work and lived his way, they would face obstacles beyond their means and have to turn to Jesus for help. In your life, when problems arise, do you immediately turn to Jesus [or God] in prayer or do you try to tough it out yourself? Which approach is more biblical, and why? Notice the disciples were persisting in faith and dependence during this trial, but they still needed Jesus to rescue them. What does that imply for your approach to life?

Want more? Read the account in Matthew 14.24-33. What is the difference you see between when Peter is walking on the water and when he begins to sink? What does that tell us about how we should approach life?