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Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring

John 6

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I'm sure many of you recognize the song that is being played—*Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*. It's composed by Johann Sebastian Bach as part of a cantata that he wrote. The individual who is playing the rendition you are hearing is one of the world's best classical guitarists, Christopher Parkening. Christopher Parkening began playing the guitar at the age of 11. He went on and studied under, arguably, the best guitar player who has ever lived, Andrés Segovia. Christopher Parkening became very proficient, became professional at classical guitar. Christopher had seen his father retire at the young age of 47 and Christopher decided that he was going to make it a goal of his to retire at the age of 30, so that he could devote the rest of his life to another one of his passions—fly fishing for trout.

Well, Christopher set out on an arduous concert schedule playing more than 90 concerts a year, and by the age of 30 he achieved his goal. He made enough money that he set aside his guitar and retired. He bought a ranch near Bozeman, Montana, that had a trout stream and he spent his time fly fishing for trout—his dream—the thing that he thought would fulfill him and satisfy him the most! But soon Christopher felt this hollow emptiness inside. What he thought would satisfy him ended up that it didn't—neither his guitar playing nor his fly fishing for trout—there was still that emptiness.

During a time he was in California, Christopher's friend invited him to go to church. There Christopher heard a message that so moved him that he gave his life to Jesus and became a follower of Jesus—and then Christopher found what he was ultimately looking for. He found what ultimately would bring permanent satisfaction and with his changed life, Christopher went back and picked up his guitar that he hadn't played for 4 years. He came out of retirement, but now he played for a completely different purpose—rather than to afford him the opportunity to fly fish for trout, he now played for the glory and honor of God. Christopher discovered that Jesus truly is the *Joy of Man's Desiring*. Christopher discovered the truth that we want to see in the passage this morning—that Jesus is the only One who satisfies.

Please take your Bible and turn with me to John, Chapter 6. Now you'll notice right away John, chapter 6 is a rather lengthy chapter and our time is rather short, so we don't have time to dig into all the details that we might like to dig into. Rather I want us to get the big picture. I think too often we take a big chapter like maybe John chapter 6, and we look at various parts. We will look at the feeding of the five thousand by itself. We will look at Jesus walking on the water by itself. We will look at what's often called the "Bread of Life" discourse. We will look at that by itself, and we fail to see the bigger picture and how John is connecting these.

I look at John much like an artist. He's painting a picture for us that he wants us to watch as he puts different elements into place and, hopefully by the time he is done, we will see this picture. Maybe you've had the opportunity at some point to watch an artist, maybe in person or on TV, and you watch him or her paint. You know they're putting colors here and there and shapes and figures and patterns, and before our eyes we see this picture develop. Well, I think that's what John is doing here in chapter 6. He's giving us certain elements of this painting he's creating, hoping that his readers in the end, will again come to understand what it is he is painting.

So with that in mind, let's look at John, chapter 6. I want us to begin actually in verse 4 because in verse 4 I think we get the backdrop, or we might say the canvas upon which John is painting his picture. In chapter 4, verse 6, we see that the Jewish Passover Festival was near. All the events that we see take place in chapter 6 are at this time when Passover is coming—the Jewish holiday of Passover that they observed when they remembered back when God brought their ancestors out of bondage in Egypt, brought them through the Red Sea under the leadership of Moses and into the wilderness where He provided for them, protected them, before then leading them into the land of promise. And this was a big festival—a big holiday—very important to the Jewish people. In fact for them the Exodus was like for us, the Cross. They looked at that as the moment that God had redeemed them. So it's in the context of it being at Passover season and people thinking about Passover—thinking about the Exodus and God redeeming them—that these events take place. And in the first four verses we see this first element that John applies to his canvas, to his painting:

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed Him because they saw the signs He had performed by healing the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with His disciples. The Jewish Passover Festival was near. (*NIV, John 6:1-4)

Now what at first appears like maybe some insignificant details to kind of set up the story, I think we should pay attention to the fact that John is recording Jesus climbing a mountain. Again, just like maybe a brush stroke here or there and an artist work in and of itself doesn't seem like much but once the other pieces come together, it makes a little more sense. So at this Passover season, John wants us to note that Jesus has climbed a mountain. The second element we find in verses 5 to 13, likely a familiar story to you of Jesus feeding the five thousand. Verse 5:

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for He already had in mind what He was going to do. Philip answered Him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, He said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. (Vs. 5-13)

So here we have Jesus feeding a multitude out in the countryside—may I say out in a wilderness-like setting—again, a large group of people—5000 men, likely more with the women and children who might have been there. But again, the picture is slowly taking shape. Again, at this Passover season with their minds on the Exodus, John records Jesus climbing a mountain, and Jesus feeding the multitude in a wilderness-type setting. And there's an interesting response from the people in verse 14:

After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make Him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by Himself. (Vs. 14-15)

Who is this **Prophet** that they are talking about? They're saying, "Surely Jesus is this Prophet who is to come." Well, I'm not going to tell you just yet. We're going to have to figure that out. We'll get that answer when we see the picture that John is painting, so we're going to come back to that in just a moment. Then we get another account that John gives us that we're likely familiar with—Jesus walking on the water. Verse 16:

When evening came, His disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed about three or four miles they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. But He said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." Then they were willing to take Him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading. The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with His disciples, but that they had gone away alone. Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor His disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. (Vs. 16-24)

So here we have Jesus again demonstrating His authority I think over the powers of evil, again by crossing a sea, bringing His followers safely to the other side. Again, in the Jewish mind the sea was the place and the presence and the origin of evil forces and for Jesus at the sea when a storm is coming, to walk on the water is showing His authority over that. But, again, He crosses the sea, bringing them with Him, leading His followers to safety on the other side. So, again, at Passover time when people are focused on the Exodus, Jesus here climbs the mountain; He feeds a multitude in a wilderness setting, and He crosses the sea, leading His followers safely to the other side. Is the picture starting to take shape for you? Well, let's continue. The next element in this picture that John is painting is Jesus claiming to be the *Bread of Life*. Verse 25:

When they found Him (that being Jesus) on the other side of the lake, they asked Him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for Me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval." Then they asked Him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent." So they asked Him, "What sign then will You give that we may see it and believe You? What will You do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' (Vs. 25-31)

So notice Jesus is telling them that, again, He has this bread that won't spoil but endures for eternal life, that He's come from God, God has sent Him, and that they're to believe in Him. His listeners want some proof. And because, again, I think that their minds are focused in this Passover season on the Exodus, they're remembering the time when their ancestors were in the wilderness, God had brought them out of Egypt, and had He brought them out there just to die? Well, No! God gives a sign of His provision and protection—sends manna, sends bread from heaven to provide for them, and the Jewish people said that was a sign from God that He would keep His promises, that He would provide and protect them. Okay, Jesus, what sign do You have to prove that what You say is true? Well, we get Jesus' answer in verse 32:

Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.” Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty.” (Vs. 32-35)

Now as you stop a moment, that should sound somewhat familiar to you if you are familiar with the earlier parts of the book of John. If you remember in chapter 4, Jesus meets up with the Samaritan woman at a well where He asks her to draw some water for Him, and then He offers her water—living water—where she would never be thirsty again. And her response is much the same as the individuals here. She said, “Give me this water.” Well, they’re asking Jesus to give them this bread that He’s talking about, and of course Jesus said, **“I’m that bread. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry. Whoever drinks or believes in Me will never be thirsty.”** And then Jesus continues:

But as I told you, you have seen Me and still you do not believe. All those the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I shall lose none of all those He has given Me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.” At this the Jews there began to grumble about Him because He said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can He now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?” “Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from Him comes to Me. No one has seen the Father except the One who is from God; only He has seen the Father. Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” (Vs. 36-51)

So Jesus says, “Here’s the sign. It’s Me. I’m the bread. I’m the manna from heaven!” And whereas the sign that you are pointing to back when your ancestors were in the wilderness, that manna from heaven was only temporary. Your ancestors weren’t permanently satisfied, permanently fulfilled. They ate of that bread and they died. But Jesus said, “I am the bread of life from heaven and if you eat the bread that I have, you will never go hungry. You will be fully and permanently satisfied. That’s the sign that I offer.” Again, look at the Jews response in verse 52:

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the

bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. (Vs. 52-59)

Now frankly, this sounds pretty grotesque, kind of repulsive; you might be a little bit embarrassed by this gross language. But what’s the point? I think we need to stop here and talk about this for a minute. Now I know that there are some theological traditions that use this passage to teach that at communion we are literally eating the bread or the body of Jesus and drinking His blood and so forth. I don’t think that is what Jesus is saying here—and to understand what Jesus is likely saying, we need to go back to a story in the Old Testament. You don’t have to turn there, but in 1 Chronicles 11 there is an interesting account when David is fighting the Philistines and the Philistines have taken over Bethlehem and they’ve garrisoned their troops there. David is in a cave near by and at one point David is thirsty and he says out loud, probably just, you know, one of these things you kind of hope for but you don’t really expect. He says, **“Oh, if someone would just bring me some of the water from the well in Bethlehem that I could drink of it.”** Well, some of David’s men heard him and three of them risked their very lives, and broke through the Philistine forces—the enemy lines. They went to the well near the gate of Bethlehem; they drew water from the well, again came back through the enemy lines and brought it to David for him to drink. And here was David’s response in 1 Chronicles 11:

But he, (David) refused to drink it. Instead he poured it out to Yahweh. “God forbid that I should do this!” he said. “Should I drink the blood of these men who went at the risk of their lives?” Because they risked their lives to bring it back, David would not drink it. (1 Chron. 11:18b-19a)

Because David knew the sacrifice involved in what these men did for him, he felt unworthy. Rather, he offered that to the Lord. But what’s David saying, that he wouldn’t drink their blood? I think the idea here that David is saying is he would not put himself in a place where he would benefit or profit from the sacrifice that his mighty warriors went to, to provide water for him. He just didn’t feel worthy enough. So the idea of drinking their blood, David wasn’t saying he literally would not do that, but that he wasn’t going to profit or benefit from their sacrifice. Well, now we go back to John 6. I think this is what Jesus is saying when He is talking about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. He’s talking about profiting or benefitting from His death. Those who profit or benefit from His death are the ones who receive this eternal life—this full life that is completely satisfying. And of course to benefit or to profit from that is to believe in Him. Already many times in our readings we’ve seen that—that Jesus wants the people to believe in Him, and in so doing, then they can benefit from His death. They can eat of His flesh, drink of His blood and in so doing, receive this fullness of life that Jesus promises, that will completely satisfy unlike the manna in the wilderness that was only temporary. Jesus Himself is this bread of life that fully satisfies.

So again, at this Passover season, John records Jesus climbing a mountain, feeding a multitude in a wilderness setting, crossing a sea leading His followers safely to the other side, and saying of Himself that He is the bread, the manna from heaven, but the manna that will completely and permanently satisfy.

Well, John has two more elements he wants to add to his painting to fill it out. We’ve already encountered this in our reading a bit earlier and we do so again in verse 61, but we see that the people to whom Jesus is talking begin to grumble. Look back at verse 41: **“At this the Jews there began to grumble about Him.”** Verse 43: **“Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered.** And then you look at verse 61: **“Aware that his disciples were grumbling…”**

So again at this Passover season Jesus climbs a mountain; He feeds a multitude in a wilderness setting; He crosses a sea leading His followers safely to the other side; He presents Himself as the manna, the bread that comes from heaven that will permanently satisfy, and yet the people grumble. And then lastly in verses 60 and following we see that many of the people turn against Jesus and they leave Him. Verse 60: **On hearing it many of His disciples...**(in this case when this word **disciples** is used, it means just all of those that were following Jesus; it's not a reference to the 12).

On hearing it, many of His disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that His disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, **"Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe."** For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray Him. He went on to say, **"This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled them."** From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed Him. **"You do not want to leave too, do you?"** Jesus asked the Twelve. (And then in one of my favorite verses in all of Scripture) Simon Peter answered him, **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."** (Vs. 60-69)

Now for all the grief that we give Peter sometimes for saying the wrong things and being cowardly and so forth, man, he nails it here! He understands that it's only Jesus and what He has to offer that will permanently satisfy, and despite the fact that many abandoned Jesus—leave Him, turn their back on Him—Peter says, "There's no where else we could go to find what ultimately satisfies—to find what ultimately fulfills."

So again at this Passover time of year, Jesus climbs a mountain; He feeds a multitude in a wilderness-type setting; He crosses the sea leading His followers safely to the other side; He presents Himself as the bread from heaven that fully satisfies. Many people grumble and they end up turning their back on Him, no longer following Him.

Do you get the picture? Do you see what John is trying to communicate to us? Jesus is the new Moses, only better. Just as Moses led the people out of Egypt through the sea and safely to the other side, brought them into the wilderness where God provided manna from heaven, where Moses climbed the mountain to receive God's Law, yet the people grumbled, complained, and many really stopped following Moses—rejected his leadership. And John is saying Jesus is the new Moses, only better. And again we need to go back to verse 14: Remember after Jesus had fed the 5000, the people were wondering...**Surely this is the Prophet.** Okay, what prophet were they talking about? The greatest prophet in the Jewish mind was Moses, and in Deuteronomy 18 Moses tells the people that there will come a time when God will send another prophet like him. And the Jews came to believe that in the last days God would send a prophet like Moses who would do for them what Moses had done for their ancestors. And John is saying, "Yes, you got it right, Jesus is this Prophet who is to come into the world. He's the new Moses but, unlike your ancestors, all that they received through Moses leadership and so forth—none of that was permanent. It never fully satisfied. But with Jesus, He brings fullness of life—full satisfaction—complete and permanent satisfaction.

We might stop and ask, "Well, why is it that only Jesus can completely and permanently satisfy?" Is this just something Christians say because we're supposed to say it, because Jesus is, you know, Jesus and so we've got to say this? Well, No! There's actually good reason why Jesus is the only

One who can satisfy, and it's because of this: Each one of us was created as part of our very nature to be in a relationship with God. That's our purpose. That's the end goal of our lives. But due to our sinfulness, we've messed up that relationship with the God of the universe. But God didn't give up on us. He loved us so much that He came in the person of Jesus to restore that relationship. He knows that's the only thing that will permanently and ultimately satisfy. And that's why only Jesus can do that. All the other things that, in our sinful state we try to find our permanent fulfillment and satisfaction in, simply won't do it because we were not created for those things. We were created for a relationship with the God of the universe. And it's through Jesus that we find that relationship again. That's why only Jesus can ultimately satisfy.

I don't know what your plans are for the new year...what goals you might have...what things that you think if you accomplish or acquire this year might give you the satisfaction that you're seeking. Maybe it's a new job or a promotion or a raise. Maybe it's finding that special someone to spend the rest of your life with. Maybe it's accomplishments or acquiring money or possessions you think something will make you satisfied, ultimately happy. But let me suggest that in all of that, if Jesus isn't your one ultimate desire, you like Christopher Parkening will find that when and if you ever achieve those goals, that satisfaction won't be permanent. You will be left empty, searching again and again for what ultimately satisfies. But if Jesus is what you ultimately pursue, you will find that permanent satisfaction that you've always longed for and in that, all the other things that you pursue and enjoy will take upon themselves meaning. Just as in Christopher Parkening's case, where a guitar seemed to be the means to an end to some other satisfaction that never quite did it. Once he found the fullness of satisfaction in Jesus, his guitar playing took up a different meaning again. That will be the case with you. Jesus is the only one who can ultimately satisfy and I think that we should heed the words of the new Moses: **"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty."** And I cannot think of a more appropriate response than that of Peter: **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."**

Father, again we're grateful for Your sending of Your Son Jesus, to not only take our sins away, but to give us fullness of life, to restore that relationship with You where we can find our ultimate and permanent fulfillment, where we will be satisfied forever, no longer having to search over and over and over for things that never quite do it. So, Lord, even in this year ahead, may we be mindful that Jesus truly is the Joy of Man's Desiring. It's in His name we pray. Amen