

In the sixth chapter of John, Jesus sets Himself forth as the source of eternal life. The flow of the story moves from a miracle of feeding 5,000 with barley bread to the revelation that Jesus is the Bread from heaven who gives life to the world.

**6:1 After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias).  
6:2 A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.**

“After these things” establishes a time sequence but not a tight chronology (Carson, 267); a number of events that are contained in the other gospels have transpired between 5:47 and 6:1. The “other side of the lake” was typically the eastern side since most Jewish activity occurred on the western shore.

The “Sea of Galilee” was the local name of the lake and the one used by Christians, but it was officially called Tiberias. It had derived its name from the town on its western shore which had been founded in 20AD by the Emperor Tiberias. It is unlikely that “Tiberias” was used much during the time of Jesus’ ministry, but since the Gospel of John was written between 85-90AD, John adds the parenthesis “or Tiberias” to clarify what he was talking about.

The importance of 6:2 is the use of the imperfect tense verbs which indicate past continuous action; people *were continuing* to follow Jesus because He was *continuing* to heal the sick. They were enamored with His miracles, not by what He had to say (Carson, 268).

**6:3 Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples.**

Jesus went up from the Jordan Valley into the high hills (“the mountain” can simply mean the hill country – Carson, 268) on the eastern side of the lake known today as the Golan Heights (Carson, 268; Bruce, 142). Mark 6:32 makes it clear that Jesus was intending to spend time alone with His disciples.

**6:4 Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near.**

This is probably the second Passover during Christ's ministry. The first Passover is mentioned in John 2 (verses 13 and 23), and the last Passover when Jesus is crucified is found in John 11:55ff. Each Passover event speaks of Jesus death. In John 2 Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn. 2:19). Then John explains, “But He was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken” (Jn 2:21-22). At the last Passover Jesus was crucified as the Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7). In John 6 Jesus is the Bread of life who gives life to the world.

**6:5 Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?"**

**6:6 This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.**

Mark adds that Jesus had been teaching the crowd all day, which explains Jesus' concern that they have food (Bruce, 143). Philip was the logical person to ask where to buy bread since he had lived in nearby Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44), however, John makes it clear that the purpose of asking Phillip was to test him, not because Jesus was stumped on what needed to be done (Carson, 269; Bruce, 143).

The passage reminds us of a number of OT passages. One passage is II Kings 4:42-44, where the servant of Elisha exclaims the impossibility of feeding 100 men with the 20 barley loaves and ears of corn in his sack. Elisha tells the servant that YHWH told him there would be enough and some to spare. Likewise, I Kings 17:16 tells of Elijah's miraculous increase in oil and meal. But considering the many parallels of John 6 to the Israelites' wilderness experience, perhaps the most significant is in Numbers 11. There a dialogue takes place between Moses and God where the progression is similar to that of John 6. Moses asked God, "Where am I to get meat to give to all these people?" (Nu. 11:13). Then he said there are 600,000 people . . . "Should flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to be sufficient for them? Or should all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to be sufficient for them?" (Nu. 11:21-22). Moses saw the numbers and the supplies and he reasoned that it was impossible to feed so many people with so little. This was the same conclusion that the disciples came to; there are too many people and not enough resources – it's impossible. But what Moses needed to learn is in verse 23. The LORD asked Moses, "Is the LORD'S power limited?" The challenge was if Moses could believe that God could do what seemed impossible. Did the disciples need to learn the same lesson? Could Jesus' test have been that He expected Philip to recall what God had done and act in faith?

**6:7 Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little."**

**6:8 One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him,**

**6:9 "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?"**

The denarius was the usual pay for a day's labor (Mt 20:2, 9, 13). (RWP), so 200 denarii would be about 7 months' wages. Considering that a day's wage was only enough to feed a small family for that day, 200 denarii would not even feed 800 people. Phillip's comment suggests how many people were there (Carson, 269).

Evidently, Andrew, knowing of Jesus' request, had gone on a reconnaissance mission to see what food he could muster up. The outcome was hopeless; all he could find were two small fish and five barely cakes that a young boy had with him.

Barley cakes were a small flat bread baked on a hot stone (Bruce, 144) and were considered to be an inferior sort of bread used by the poor (RWP, Carson, 270; Morris, 344). They were more the size of pita

bread than as a loaf of bread as we know it. Small, salted, dried fish were commonly eaten as a side dish or a relish with bread (Plummer, 149, Carson, 270; Bruce, 144; Morris, 344).

These minute details add to the fact that it is an eyewitness account (Plummer, 149). Andrew's point, of course, was that this tiny meal was ludicrously inadequate for the need. John mentions it to heighten the miracle (Carson, 270; Bruce, 144; Morris, 343).

***6:10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.***

In late March or April there would be much grass. After the Passover the summer heat would scorch it (Carson, 270; Bruce, 144). Mark 6:39-40 says that they reclined in groups of 50s and 100s. This arrangement would make it easy to count them (Plummer, 149).

***6:11 Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted.***

***6:12 When they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost."***

***6:13 So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.***

Despite the huge crowd and miniscule quantity of food, Jesus proceeds as usual without much concern. Jesus blesses God, not the food. A common prayer was "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth" (Carson, 270; Bruce, 145). He then had the disciples distribute the food.

The people got much more than a snack; they ate until they were satisfied and then there were leftovers (Mark says that the leftover fish was also gathered - Plummer, 150). This is the ample provision of the Lord who declares, "My people will be filled with My bounty" (Jer. 31:14).

All four gospels draw attention to the number of baskets. Of course, the number 12 fits the number of disciples who collected the fragments, but it is almost surely an allusion to the blessing that Messiah will bring to the 12 tribes of Israel and serves as a foretaste to the kingdom blessings.

***6:14 Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."***

***6:15 So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.***

Notably, the multiplication of the bread is called a sign. That is, it is something intended to make people inquire into the person of Christ and reveal something about Him.

“The prophet” they are referring to is the prophet like Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-19. By the first century some interpreted this passage messianically (Carson, 271). Moses was Israel’s redeemer from Egyptian oppression and a worker of miracles. It was a small step for people to make from that to a messianic deliverer who would free them from Rome. Jesus perceived what they were thinking and thus stopped the would-be-king-makers by withdrawing (Mk. Mk. 6:64) and sending the disciples away (Jn. 6:16 ff).

Some want to dilute this miracle by saying that it was the little boy’s generosity that generated a spirit of generosity among the people that resulted in the abundance of food being unpacked and shared. But the clear identification of the bread that was collected with the five barely loaves (v. 13) and the response of the people in verse 14 frustrates any attempt at trying to make this explainable by natural means.

***6:16 Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea,  
6:17 and after getting into a boat, they started to cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.  
6:18 The sea began to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing.***

The disciples, many of whom were fisherman and well acquainted with the sea, started across the lake, heading northwest toward Capernaum. Mark tells us that Jesus didn’t go with them, but instead went off to pray (Mk. 6:64). The Sea of Galilee is a large body of water. It is the lowest freshwater lake on earth (about 700’ below sea level) and is about 8 miles wide and 13 miles long, having a surface area of approximately 64 square miles. Its deepest point has been variously estimated between 140-200 feet. It is well known for the sudden and violent storms that occur when cooler air from the 3000 foot high south-eastern tablelands rush down and displace the moister air over the lake (Kostenberger, 204; Carson, 275). It had already become dark (Mark 6:48 sets the time near dawn) when the winds began to stir, making rowing the boat difficult.

***6:19 Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened.  
6:20 But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."  
6:21 So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.***

The disciples had rowed most of the way across the lake (Morris, 349) when Jesus came to them, miraculously walking on the water.

Some suggest that the disciples were hugging the shore as they were crossing and saw Jesus walking *by* the sea, not *on* it; although this is grammatically possible, it makes no sense in the context. If Jesus was just walking on the shore, there would have been no cause for fear nor reason to think that He was a ghost as Mark 6:47 tells us. Furthermore, Matthew and Luke place the boat “in the middle of the lake.”

Mark 6:51 adds, "Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped." With the wind abating, rowing was easy which explains how John could say, "and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going."

***6:22 The next day the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but that His disciples had gone away alone.***

***6:23 There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks.***

***6:24 So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus.***

Verses 22-26 are a little hard to piece together, but it can be done. The day after the events of verse 16-21, the people recalled that there was only one boat (that was available for Jesus to use?) and the disciples had taken it to cross the lake. They also knew that Jesus had not gone in the boat with them. Many then decided to go and look for Jesus; verse 24 describes this. Verse 23 is parenthetical and explains how the crowds got across the lake; namely, some boats from Tiberias (located about in the middle of the western shore) came to where the people were and provided transportation to Capernaum.

The following conversation may have taken place in a synagogue in Capernaum (Jn. 6:59), but it may have also taken place in stages and just concluded in the synagogue (Morris, 356).

***6:25 When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?"***

***6:26 Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled."***

The people naturally wondered how Jesus arrived so quickly in Capernaum since they knew that the disciples had left in the boat without Him and he couldn't have walked there that fast had He followed the shoreline. Jesus, in His typical manner, doesn't answer their question, but instead addresses what He sees as being wrong with their hearts (see 2:23-25; 3:3; 4:16-18); they were seeking Him for the wrong reasons. Instead of being interested in what He had to say about God, they wanted food for their stomachs and a leader to free them from Roman subjugation.

This is the third time the miracle was called a sign in John 6 (Jn. 6:2, 14, 26), but like so many who had seen Jesus' miracles, they did not grasp their significance. Mark 6:52 says that even the disciples "had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their hearts were hardened." The miracle should have caused people to think more deeply about who Christ was. First, eating and drinking were well known marks of prosperity and blessing in the OT (Ecc. 8:15; Deut. 8:9; 11:15; Neh. 9:36, Isa. 1:19; Ezra 9:12, Psa. 65:9-13, etc.); the lack of food was a sign of God's displeasure (Ecc. 6:2). They should have at least seen that Jesus is the channel of the blessings of God, and sought out His identity more thoroughly. But material blessing was also a characteristic of the Kingdom of God (Hos. 2:21-22; Zech.

8:12; 10:1; Isa. 30:23, etc.). Though some had already called Jesus “the Prophet” they did not connect the overabundance of Jesus’ supply with the abundant blessings of the Messianic Age.

“These people were crass materialists. They had not reflected on the spiritual significance of the sign they had seen. Instead of seeing in the bread the sign, they had seen in the sign only the bread. They came because their hunger had been satisfied. They were moved, not by full hearts, but by full bellies” (Morris, 358).

***6:27 "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."***

“Jesus bids them to set their labors on the right sort of food” (Morris, 359). The contrast between physical food and the food that Jesus offers is like the one between the physical water and the water He offered to the woman at the well in John 4.

Jesus is the One upon whom God has set His seal; that is, He is the One upon whom God’s approval rests and is the agent who is authorized to bestow the gift of eternal life (if the aorist tense verb “set His seal” is to be taken as a specific reference to a past event, Jesus could be referring to His baptism in John 1:32-34).

***6:28 Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"***  
***6:29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."***

When people heard Jesus tell them that they needed to work for the food that leads to eternal life, they interpreted Him as meaning that they had to do the works of the law, tasks for God to earn life. “They looked, as the natural man always looks, for salvation as a result of their own effort. . . . The present subjunctive denotes continuity: ‘What is to be our regular course of action?’” (Morris, 359). Jesus replaces their “works” (plural) with a singular work that they must do; what they needed to do was to place their faith in the One whom God had sent. The work of God is that which God requires of men, and faith in Christ is the sole work that men can do to be saved (Jn. 3:16; 5:24). The present tense of the word “believe” indicates a continual expression of belief, not a singular past event (Morris, 359).

***6:30 So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?"***

***6:31 "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'"***

In Judaism, a sign from heaven was considered to be one of the highest forms of legitimization. Jesus had demanded that they believe in Him. Now the crowd wants to know what work Jesus will do to warrant their belief. The assumption of the comment is that if He showed them a sign they would believe. However, according to verse 26 they had already missed the sign that Jesus had given. Their formula of “see and believe” demonstrates that they do not understand the nature of faith (Morris, 362).

One would think that feeding 5000 people with five loaves and two fish would have been sufficient enough of a sign to show that Jesus was from God and His word could be believed, but the people wanted more. Even though they were the recipients of a miracle, they persisted in their unbelief. It is amazing that they challenge Jesus with the words of Psalm 78:24: "He rained down manna upon them to eat and gave them food from heaven." The kind of sign that they wanted is illustrated by the manna in Moses' day (Morris, 362). Morris points out that Jesus gave bread on a single occasion, Moses fed the people for 40 years. Jesus fed 5000, Moses an entire nation. Jesus gave them ordinary bread that they ate every day; Moses gave them bread from heaven.

Ironically, what they fail to see is that the passage they use is a condemnation of the pitiful condition of their own hearts.

Psalm 78 is a Psalm that rebukes Israel for their rebellion and unbelief in spite of God's goodness being poured out upon them in a mighty display of miracles. When God had miraculously brought forth water from a rock, verse 17 says, "they still continued to sin against Him, to rebel against the Most High." Then in v. 22 it tells of the anger of God that burned against them because they did "not believe in God and did not trust in His salvation." Verses 23-31 reminded them of God's miraculous provision of food, including the giving of bread from heaven, but verse 32 concludes, "In spite of all this they still sinned and did not believe in His wonderful works." Verses 41-42 tell us, "Again and again they tempted God, and pained the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember His power. . ." Unknowingly, the Jews who doubted Jesus were following the very path that their forefathers did; the Goodness of God had appeared to them in Christ, and yet they were rebellious in heart and rejected God and the salvation He offers.

Some have rightfully observed that three elements tie this chapter to the Exodus account: (1) it is the Passover season; (2) Jesus is likened to Moses, and (3) there is mention of manna (Beasley – Murray, 88).

***6:32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven.***

***6:33 For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."***

Jesus confronts the people with their obsession with Moses and their misapplied emphasis on Moses as the source of the bread which came from heaven; it wasn't Moses, *but God* who gave them bread from heaven. But more than that, it was Jesus' Father, the same God of Moses, who offers them spiritual bread now.

Jesus is the true Bread of God who comes down from heaven (Jn. 3:13; 3:31; Eph. 4:9). He is the One who gives life to the world (Jn. 3:16). Though the crowd takes the words impersonally, the reality of what Jesus is saying builds and becomes clear.

Jesus' reply demonstrates His superiority to Moses, and the bread in the wilderness. He is the "true bread." By this He doesn't mean that the manna from heaven was false. "True" is used in the sense of perfect or complete. The manna from heaven was comparatively crude: it perished with time, and the people who ate it perished with time. Though it provided for the physical needs of the children of Israel, it pointed to something greater; it was a type of the true bread from heaven (Carson, 286-287). Secondly, Jesus is the bread that gives (present tense indicating a continual action) eternal life, and the bread He gives supplies more than a nation, it is enough for the whole world!

"Jesus did not come to bring manna or satisfy any other material expectation of the people. His discourse is a vigorous protest against unworthy views of messiahship. And a strong affirmation of the essentially spiritual character of the life He came to bring" (Morris, 364, 365).

***6:34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."***

"Lord" is probably better translated as "sir." The people responded as the Samaritan woman had when Jesus offered her living water: "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw." (Jn. 4:15). They cannot get beyond the physical dimension in their desires.

***6:35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst."***

Jesus must explain what He means. He tells them clearly and simply that He is the Bread that has come down from heaven. They must come to Him and believe to partake of the life He offers. He is the one who satisfies the soul's hunger and thirst.

Jesus fulfills the OT messianic expectations:

Isaiah 55:1-2: "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance."

Isaiah 49:10: "They will not hunger or thirst, nor will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; for He who has compassion on them will lead them and will guide them to springs of water."

John 6:35 parallels the more difficult words of Jesus in John 6:53-54: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

**6:36 "But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe."**

"But" introduces a strong adversative contrasting what Jesus had wished to see . . . His hearers saw Him but they did not appreciate what they saw (Morris, 366). Jesus had said to those in Jerusalem, "the very works that I do-- testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me. And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent" (Jn. 5:36-38). The words in John 6 reflect the same problem.

**6:37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."**

**6:38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."**

Salvation can be spoken of in many different ways; in this passage Jesus refers to it as coming to Him.

In spite of the disbelief, Jesus is confident that people will come to Him. Men's disbelief cannot frustrate the saving work of God. The Father's work in salvation is in perfect harmony with the Son. God sovereignly draws people to Himself, and all He draws will not be cast out, for Christ has come to do the Father's will. This is a repeated theme in John (see Jn. 6:39; 10:29; 17:2, 6; 18:9).

Jesus' descent from heaven is cast in the perfect tense, describing a settled condition (Kostenberger, 212). In other words, Jesus came down from heaven to do the Father's will and He remains like that.