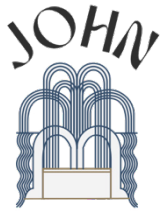


An Exposition of the
GOSPEL OF JOHN



“THE FEEDING OF THE 5,000”

John 6:1-15

Theme: The kindness of God in meeting our needs should stir our gratitude and worship.

Introduction: We live in a world where desires are endless and satisfaction is fleeting. From physical hunger to emotional longing, from financial strain to spiritual emptiness, humanity is constantly seeking something—something to fill, to heal, to satisfy. But in our restless pursuit, we often miss the One who not only meets our needs but does so with overflowing grace and compassion.

In John 6:1–15, we are brought to a familiar scene—the feeding of the five thousand. But beneath the miracle lies a profound revelation of God's character in Christ. Here we see Jesus not merely as a wonder-worker, but as the generous Shepherd who tends to His people with both power and tenderness. We see a God who cares for hungry bodies and wandering hearts—a God who is kind.

Yet the passage also presents us with a sobering reality: God's provision does not always result in worship. It can be twisted into selfish demands and worldly expectations. The same crowd that marveled at the miracle quickly turned from gratitude to manipulation, seeking to make Jesus a king on their own terms.

[Read Text]

As we explore this narrative today, we will consider three movements that call our hearts to a deeper response.

- I. **The Constant Demand For Gratification** (vv. 1–4) - reveals our natural tendency to pursue blessings while forgetting the Giver.
- II. **The Concerned Demonstration Of Grace** (vv. 5–13) - shows how Jesus meets real needs with divine abundance, pointing to His compassion and sufficiency.
- III. **The Carnal Despising Of Goodness** (vv. 14–15) - confronts how easily the heart can twist divine kindness into fleshly ambition.

The lesson is clear: ***God's kindness in meeting our needs is not meant to lead us to entitlement, but to worship.*** Let us come to this familiar story with fresh eyes, ready to see our Savior's compassion and to respond—not with demands, but with gratitude and reverence.

I. The Constant Demand for Gratification – 6:1-4

A. The Priority of the Public – vv. 1-2+

1. *“After these things”* once again denotes an agenda by our Lord as He worked toward the redemption of men.
2. A significant gap of time—possibly up to a year—exists between the end of chapter 5 and the start of chapter 6, as shown in v. 4: *“the Passover ... was near.”*

3. Jesus left those who were rejecting the clear demonstration of His authority in Galilee and *“went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias)”* – into the region known as Trachonitis on the east side of the Sea of Galilee.
4. This area was just on the other side of the Jordan River – close enough for the people who were the beneficiaries of His miracles to follow Him – *“A large crowd followed Him.”*
5. Their motivation for following Him is typical of many who start out following the Lord – *“because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.”*
 - a) *Interestingly, the miracles drew many to follow after Him, but only a few to Him.*
 - b) *These people were only interested in the physical, tangible benefits that following Christ brought them – similar to many today – asking, “What does Jesus have to offer me?” and then deciding whether to follow Him or not.*

B. The Patience of the Savior – vv. 3-4

1. It is interesting that Jesus seemed to never be able to escape the selfish demands of the public, who kept hounding Him for another miracle, benefit, or sign.
2. However, the Lord did need to have “personal time” – and demonstrates this to us here – *“Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples.”*
3. The occasion was that both He and the disciples needed some “downtime” to recover from various stresses.
 - a) *The disciples had just returned from their first “trial run” at missionary work and needed rest and an opportunity to be alone with Jesus – cp. Mark 6:30-32.*
 - b) *Jesus needed some time to recover from the sorrowful news that had just reached him of John the Baptist’s brutal decapitation – cp. Mark 6:25-29.*
4. The occasion for this event centered around the celebration of *“the Passover, the feast of the Jews”* – a celebration that foreshadowed the offering of Himself as the Lamb of God.
5. The miracle at hand is the only miracle recorded by all four Gospels—indicating the tremendous significance of what occurs.¹
6. The feeding of the 5,000 is in a unique class of miracles, along with

¹ The resurrection is also a miracle recorded in each of the Gospels, but that is post-cross and is attributed to both the Father and Holy Spirit as well as to Christ Jesus.

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turning water into wine, because it is a direct act of creation (not just restoration, like healing) and symbolizes what will become symbols of the limitless resources in Christ's sacrifice — the wine and bread of the Lord's Table.

II. The Concerned Demonstration of Grace – 6:5-13

A. The Savior's Awareness of Our Need – vv. 5-6

1. Jesus, attempting to be alone with His disciples, demonstrates His tremendous compassion for sinners - *“lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him ...”*
2. Jesus knew the motives of the *“large crowd”* following Him were shallow; nonetheless, His mercy and compassion recognized what they needed even though they did not; their superficiality became an opportunity for Him to display His love for them.
3. Instead of attempting to avoid them, He demonstrates tremendous awareness of their need for His grace – cp. *Mark 6:34*.
 - a) *Although the crowd's focus was on their hunger and the ability of the “Messiah” to satisfy it, Jesus sees their hunger as little more than a symbol of the deeper spiritual need they have—the desire for eternal life.*
 - b) *Jesus saw this as the perfect opportunity for an object lesson on what He truly had to offer – cp. v. 6b.*
 - c) *Consequently, even as Jesus used the healing of the paralytic to demonstrate spiritual realities of His authority, He uses the feeding of this crowd as a demonstration of the spiritual realities involved in salvation, that is, the unlimited resource to meet our need – cp. vv. 26-59.*
4. As the crowd gathered, the disciples began to worry about what would happen at mealtime, and everyone grew hungry.
5. Jesus decided to test Philip's faith by asking, *“Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?” He said this to test him because He already knew what He was planning to do.”*

B. The Shallow Assessment Due to Our Limitations – vv. 7-9

1. Philip's response to Jesus demonstrates his camaraderie with the rest of us who stumble at the power of Christ Jesus.
2. In essence, He said: “The situation is beyond hope – there are about 20,000 people here (counting women and children) and it would take a whole lot more money than we have to feed them” – *“Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.”*

- a) *“Two hundred denarii”* was about 2/3 of a year’s salary for an average worker on that day. (At \$62,038² annual salary, this would equal about \$40,945.)
 - b) *“For everyone to receive a little”* – he didn’t even shoot high – just for each person to get a morsel, it would cost them too much – roughly \$2.05 per person in today’s dollars.³
- 3. A companion of Philip’s – *“Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother said to Him, ‘There is a lad here who has five barely loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?’”*
- 4. Once again, these disciples focused their assessment on their own resources rather than on the supernatural resources available to support them – *Mark 10:27.*
- 5. This is the most common reason that most people remain lost – even those who are religious.
 - a) *Instead of turning to the power of God and accepting the free gift of grace, they feel that they must somehow find the resources needed to atone for their sin.*
 - b) *However, it is only when we face honestly the limitation of our own abilities and turn to the power of God in Christ Jesus that we can receive the “bread of life,” that is, eternal life.*

C. The Supply Available in the Power of God – vv. 10-13

- 1. Notice the incredible solution that Jesus provides: *“Jesus said, ‘Have the people sit down.’”* – an indication that the provision He would give them is not the result of the people’s efforts, but that they would need to be passive and simply receive the benefit from His hand.
- 2. John emphasizes the tremendous number of people that were present – approximately 20,000, counting women and children: *“Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.”* – cp. *Matthew 14:21.*
- 3. Jesus then performs this tremendously powerful miracle: *“Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish.”*
 - a) *Jesus sets the perfect example – giving glory and thanks to the Father for the miracle-working power that is available through Christ Jesus.*
 - b) *He took the tiny sack lunch of a poor boy (“barley loaves”) and met the need of every single person who had obediently been seated and waited*

² According to ZipRecruiter’s June, 2025 data for all occupations.

³ This is \$40,945 / 20,000 people.

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to receive what Christ Jesus had to offer them.

- c) *It is likely that some of the crowd believed this was impossible and walked away to look for whatever they could find.*
- 4. Notice the degree of supply that was furnished by the Lord – *“as much as they wanted.”*
 - a) *The amount of grace available to us from God is often limited only by our faith in His willingness to grant it.*
 - b) *Too often, we come to God with a pint-sized container when He desires to give us gallons or more.*
- 5. We are told that they were free to enjoy this provision of loaves and fish until they were filled: *“When they were filled ...”*
- 6. Jesus then demonstrated that His provision was so exact that after the 20,000 people had had their fill – as much as they wanted – there was just enough to reward each of His disciples who had labored to gather one basket apiece for themselves: *“He said to His disciples, ‘Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost.’ 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.”*

III. The Carnal Despising of Goodness – 6:14-15

A. The Misunderstanding of the Goodness of God – v. 14

- 1. The people display in this verse their spiritual dullness – *“When the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.’”*
- 2. This response demonstrates a common approach people take to the Lord – they want a “Christ” who requires nothing from them but gives them everything.
- 3. *“The Prophet”* is a reference to the one who was promised who would speak to them from the Lord and deliver them from the oppression and tyranny of the Gentiles – cp. *Deuteronomy 18:15; Matthew 11:3; John 1:21.*
- 4. Whereas the purpose of the provision of this “Messianic Prophet” was to lead the people in their relationship with God, the people were only interested in the physical provisions they could gain from Him.
- 5. They defined the goodness of God as consisting of physical provision and deliverance and failed to see the goodness of God as leading them toward a spiritual repentance – cp. *Romans 2:4-5.*

B. The Misuse of the Goodness of God – v. 15

1. They had gained a taste of the benefits of God's gracious goodness and then decided that they would demand further gratification.
2. God recognized their hardened hearts and *“perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.”*
3. Instead of gratitude, they demanded gratification. Instead of giving thanks, they took advantage. Instead of humbling themselves before God, they attempted to force His hand.
4. How should we respond to God's goodness? Do we enjoy it silently while our bellies are filled with delicacies, wallets overflow with dollars, families are filled with delight, or jobs come with successes from His hand, but then complain if these things are restricted or absent?
5. May each of us search our hearts and see the value of the grace and goodness of God in our lives – understanding the purpose is to cause worship of Jesus Christ as the true God for all of His provisions – especially for the need for the forgiveness of sin.

So What?

1. How do I typically respond when my resources or abilities feel inadequate to meet a need?
2. In what ways have I seen God provide for me when I turned to Him?
3. What significance does it hold for me that Jesus saw the crowd coming and already knew how He would meet their needs?
4. How should this account of Jesus' compassion shape my worship and gratitude toward Him in both times of abundance and need?

Theme: The kindness of God in meeting our needs should stir our gratitude and worship.