



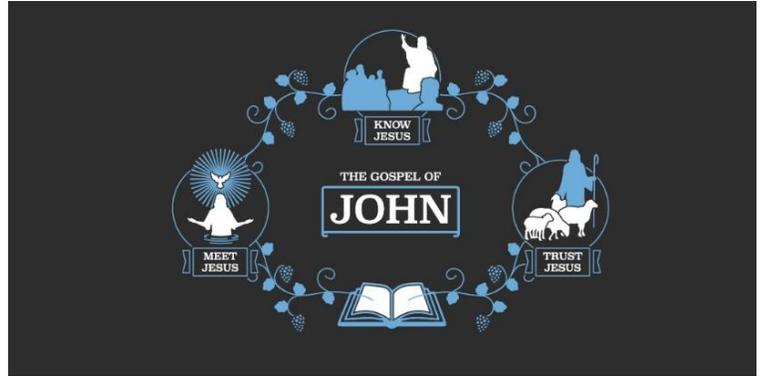
VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Seconds, Anyone?

The Gospel of John

John 6:1–15

Tim Badal | November 14, 2021



We're in a series titled "The Gospel of John," looking through the eyes of Jesus' best friend, the apostle John, at the life and ministry of Jesus. We find ourselves in John 6 this morning.

This chapter contains one of the most famous of all the miracles Jesus did—the feeding of 5,000 people.

Now, I have to be honest with you. This is one of my favorite passages of Scripture. First of all, there's a practical reason. Many of you know that not only do I pastor the church here, but I also have a second job as a caterer. So this story is right up my alley—Jesus catering to thousands of people. I've been there, done that and can tell you—based on the inventory of what Jesus had from a caterer's perspective—this is indeed a miracle. As a caterer, I can tell you also, there have been many times when I have prayed that this very miracle would be repeated by my own hands, when I've seen people take more food than I expected. I've never prayed over loaves and fishes, but I have prayed over pork chops and chicken. I have to tell you, however, it's never worked for me. So when I see my Savior do this, it proves to me that Jesus has way more power than I have in my finiteness.

There's a second reason why I love this story. It's so apropos for where I find myself and I know this is true for many followers of Jesus. What we're going to learn is that the disciples were at a low point. They were struggling for a whole lot of reasons we'll get to in a moment. They wondered if they had chosen the right horse. In other words, in agreeing to follow Jesus, were they getting the rewards that the risks merited? They were tired. They were bewildered, wondering if Jesus truly was all He claimed to be.

This miracle will be a comfort to every bewildered, hurting, burdened, harassed and struggling Christian. It will demonstrate not only that Jesus is enough, but that He is able to give you everything you need, not only to make it through the day, but more than you could ever ask for or imagine. What an encouragement this passage brings us.

When we look at verse one of this chapter, we see two words we might easily jump right over, but we need to stop because they can bring "seasoning" to what we're dealing with here. These words are "*After this...*" The question then becomes, "*After what? What's going on? What's the context?*"

If you've been with us over the last few weeks, you'll recall that John tells us in chapter five about two things that take place. First, Jesus healed a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. Then as a result, He had a confrontation with the religious establishment, who then wanted all the more to see Jesus dead. Their reasons were that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, that He had commanded the man to pick up his mat and walk, which broke the man-made Sabbath rules, then Jesus had spoken of God in heaven as being His Father, implying that He was equal to God. In response, Jesus laid down the gauntlet. "I am God, and because of that, you have a choice. Enter into fellowship with Me, let Me lead you and do as I say, and you will experience blessings in both this life and in the life to come. Or if you reject My claim that I am God's Son Who has come to save sinners, then you will meet up with Me again on the judgment day. On that day, in My wrath I will consign you to hell."

Jesus knew what He told them was true. He knew the beginning from the end. He knew when they were going to arrest Him because one of His disciples would betray Him. He knew when He would go to the cross, He knew He would rise from the dead

three days later. All these things were foregone conclusions because Jesus knows all things. He even knows the thoughts and hearts of every person. Remember that Jesus was speaking these words in the presence of His disciples. They heard what seemed like blasphemous statements. They weren't yet sure that Jesus was all He was claiming to be. They had already seen Him do some pretty amazing things and had heard Him teach with incredible clarity and confidence, but now Jesus was getting a lot of heat from the religious leaders.

I can imagine the disciples might have begun to feel as though they were co-conspirators with Him. Just as the Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus, they might have realized, "They're going to kill us too." They might have had thoughts of getting away.

As we look at this miracle today, we're going to learn that John isn't the only one who writes about it. In fact, this miracle is the only miracle that is also recorded in all the other Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke. In each of the other accounts, this passage comes on the heels of a really big event: the death of John the Baptist. We know that some of Jesus' disciples had been disciples of John the Baptist. So some of these men were grieving over the loss of their former teacher. John had been beheaded at the command of Herod, who was the king of Israel. It was a testimony to anyone who messed with the Jewish establishment that they too would be killed. So when we read the words, "After this..." we're aware that this group of disciples were despondent and fearful, concerned about what their future might bring. They might even have been unsure of Jesus Himself.

Jesus had taken them away to a place near the Sea of Tiberias, which is the Sea of Galilee. There He told them...nothing. When they needed a word of encouragement, Jesus didn't say anything. Rather, He allowed the pressure to build. Notice what we read in verse one. "After this..."—that is, after the confrontation with the Jews in which they wanted to kill Jesus, after John the Baptist was killed—"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."

In the other Gospels, we are told the disciples encouraged Jesus to leave and dismiss the crowds. "Tell them to get lost. We don't have time for them." Let's face it. When you're hurting or struggling, the last thing you want to do is serve and care for other people and their problems. These men were tired and possibly angry. But Jesus looked at the crowd, and as we read in the other accounts, He had compassion on them. We're told that they numbered 5,000. They had followed Jesus "because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick." Verse three says, "Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples."

We then read, "Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand." John, why are you bringing this up? Why does it matter that Passover was there? John was writing to a larger audience than simply Jews. It included Greeks and Romans then, and of course we know his Gospel would be read by many other people in the years to come. So why do we need to know about the Passover? John wanted to connect the works of God in the Old Testament to the works of Jesus in the New Testament. He's basically saying, "See? What God did in the Old Testament are the very things Jesus is doing in the New Testament. Therefore Jesus' statement to the religious establishment about His equality with God is true."

Just as God, after the Passover, led the people of Israel into the wilderness and then helped them when they were hungry by showering manna down from heaven, so Jesus would provide for a hungry group of people in His day. He too would give them bread pretty much out of nothing. Later Jesus would tell those people that He Himself was the bread of life. We'll learn about that two weeks from now.

John is making a clear connection here. He wants us to know that Jesus was like His Father in heaven. Both of them were in the catering business and specifically in the bread business. This corroborated Jesus' claim that He was doing the same work His Father had done. This brings us to the crux of the story:

⁵Lifting 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?" ⁶He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little."

What can we learn here? We have 5,000 people, which may not have included the women and children. They're hungry. We're told in the other Gospels that there's no place near there to find food. We have tired, hurting and bewildered disciples, who were also on empty and have nothing to contribute. Yet the people were pressing upon them.

I want us to look at two observations and three opportunities from our story today.

With Jesus, no problem is too improbable or impossible to solve.

The disciples had 5,000 people with them. They had no food and no energy. They wanted to push this problem away. Their compassion was zero. "Let's get them out of here, Jesus." Jesus did not respond by preaching a message. Rather, He would show by His actions that there was no problem His disciples faced that He could not solve.

We read in verse five that He asked a question specifically to Philip: "*Where are we to buy bread?*" Why did He choose Philip? If you aren't aware, Philip was in what we might call the "second tier" of Jesus' disciples. The first tier includes John, who is the author of this book, James, John's brother, and Peter. Those three were the closest to Jesus. They were His "inner circle." Then the second tier included Philip, Andrew and possibly Judas. Then in the third tier were the disciples we barely know anything about—Thaddeus, Bartholomew, Simon, James the Lesser, Rodney and Randy and...no, I'm just kidding. They're not in there. See, you wouldn't even have known, right?

So Jesus here chose this middle tier guy. It's not because He didn't love him any more or any less, but there will be significance in this story line of what's taking place. Philip is asked the question, "Hey, what are we going to do?" Scholars speculate on why Jesus chose Philip.

One reason is we know from other passages is that Philip was from this area, so if anybody would have known where the local Costco, Sam's, Jewel or Aldi were, Philip would have been the guy. Secondly, I think Jesus chose to ask this of an individual rather than the whole group, so each of them would have to work this out in their own faith.

Maybe you're like Philip this morning. Philip pulled out his pocket calculator and started counting heads. "Let's see. We have 5,000 and the running rate for bread is..." He was doing what Tim does in the catering business. "Okay, we'll need this amount of food."

His conclusion? "Number one, Jesus, there's no place to eat. Number two, my numbers—carry the one—come up to 200 denarii." That would have been about a year's salary for the average workman in that day. So Philip responded, "There's not only no food," which Jesus also knew, "but it's going to cost us 200 denarii. We don't have that kind of money here."

Philip was trying to answer a supernatural issue—that is, a problem so big only God could deal with it. Not only did they not have food; they didn't have enough money to buy food. Isn't that what we do as well? We compound our problems with our manmade solutions. Philip realized there was no way he could come up with the food or money to take care of these people. It was an impossible situation.

Time out. I'm going to imagine in a group this size that some of you are dealing with problems that are really, really big. From a human standpoint, they seem impossible to solve. It's the kind of problem we wake up thinking about, our days are filled with ruminating on it, then when we go to bed, our last thoughts are about this concern. We try to throw every earthly solution at it. We get out our calculator, but our money can't pay for it. We try to figure out how we can spend our time to fix it, but that doesn't work either. We keep coming back to the realization that this is an impossible situation.

The feeding of the 5,000 is a reminder for us that with Jesus, our problem too—no matter how big or difficult from an earthly perspective—is also something Jesus can address. We have to believe this. We have to believe in our hearts that whatever we're struggling with today, Jesus is able to address it.

Notice in verse six that Jesus has a reason for asking Philip this question. "*He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.*" Underline those last five words. This did not come as a surprise to Jesus, nor is our problem a surprise to Him either. Whenever the problem we're facing reared its ugly head, God did not look down from heaven and think, "Oh, my goodness. Godhead, did you see what Tim is dealing with? What's he going to do? We don't have any way to deal with that."

Hogwash. Jesus responds, "I know the problem and I can address it." We all need to remember that no matter what we're facing, Jesus knows our problem and He has a way to solve it. Right there we should give an awesome "Amen." Jesus is saying, "I have a plan to grow you in character, perseverance and endurance. I'm going to take that which someone may have intended for harm and use it for your good." That's what He did in Joseph's life (Genesis 50:20).

Jesus allows all things to happen for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes (Romans 8:28). The promises God has declared in His Word are the anchor for our souls when we encounter problems that are too hard for us to solve. We need to lay them at the feet of Jesus.

With Jesus, no person is too inadequate or insignificant to serve.

We see that there is no problem that is too improbable or impossible for Jesus to solve. Observation number two is this: There is no person who is too inadequate or insignificant to serve when Jesus is involved. So enter Andrew. He's the people person. Andrew is the networker. He was aware of the problem, but Andrew didn't work with calculators; he worked with people. He started milling around the crowd to see what he could find.

We need to know something about Andrew. He was always bringing people to Jesus. So he found a little boy. John tells us that Andrew presented this boy to Jesus, saying in verse nine, *"There is a boy..."* The word "boy" here literally means little kid. He wasn't a teenager or a young adult. It's the same word used of the nobleman's son. This wasn't the sort of boy you could wrestle with; he was a boy you could hold on your lap. He might have been grade school age. Andrew then told Jesus that this boy had brought a little lunch with him. *"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish."*

This was a poor kid's lunch. Barley was used to feed poor people and animals. So we get the sense this was a pathetic little boy with a pathetic little meal. He had loaves that animals might eat, along with two little fish. Now, don't be thinking about the beautiful trout or salmon that might be served in a fine restaurant. These are more like two little sardines, probably pickled like beets. They would be salty and not especially appetizing, but when you're poor, you're grateful to have anything to eat. So we can give Andrew an A+ for networking, but then he follows that with, *"But what are they for so many?"*

Isn't that what we do with God? We present something to the Lord. "God, we think we have something You can work with here, but who am I? What are my meager attempts going to amount to? How are my insignificant abilities going to matter in the face of this big problem?" Jesus wants us to know that no matter how inadequate or insignificant we think we are, when we place ourselves into His hands, look out. Let me say that again. I think a lot of you might be thinking, "Who do you think I am? Why do you think I could be of use? I'm just a middle-class person. I don't have many gifts or abilities. I have an average intellect and looks." We dumb ourselves down, forgetting that in the Master's hands, Jesus can do a miracle through you and me—and He does.

Jesus took the food from the little boy and He began to expand it. He asked the people to sit down, so they did. He took the bread and fish, prayed over them, then He began to break it apart—again and again and again and again. It served 5,000—or maybe 15,000 or 20,000.

Listen. I know the food business. I've been in the food business longer than I've been in the church world and I will tell you to feed 5,000 or 10,000 people takes a whole lot more room. This last year I did an event that served well over 10,000 meals in a week. I had to have a semi-truck for all the provisions. We had to bring in extra food.

Jesus produced tons of food. He kept breaking it up and breaking it up. Then notice what the text says. John wants to make something abundantly clear. It wasn't that everybody got a little bit. There was actually more than enough.

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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.

So clearly, these people were fed well. John repeats this in verse 12, *"When they had eaten their fill..."* Everyone had had firsts, seconds and thirds if they wanted them. "Hey, everybody. Before we close the buffet lines, does anyone want any more?" Then after this, Jesus turned to the disciples with another instruction:

¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost."

¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"

When the people realized what had happened, they wanted to make Him king.

What are we to take away from what we observe in this miracle? I see three opportunities here.

Opportunity #1 – Don't struggle alone; go to Jesus when troubles arise.

The first opportunity has to do with you and me in our times of suffering. When trouble comes, we need to remember we should never struggle alone. Rather, we should go to Jesus. When the troubles of our lives arise on a random Tuesday, the first thing we should do is not pull out our calculators and figure out what the problem is going to cost us. Nor should we go to other people to help alleviate the problem. What we are to do is run to Jesus. Sadly, far too often, I hear from people in my own church how they're struggling alone, without giving their problem to Jesus. This morning the Holy Spirit wanted you to hear a truth. Long before Pastor Josh was aware of what I was going to be preaching on, he picked a song that says, "You are not alone." You're not alone, so stop struggling alone. As a child of the most-high God, God is with you.

Earlier in this service we recited the verse, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5). If you walk away with anything today, realize that in your problems and troubles, you as a Christian are not alone. So don't feel abandoned or isolated. Jesus is here. He knows your problems and He has the solution. He says, "Get close to Me and watch what I do." We need to draw close to Him, then with great joy, we can watch as He addresses the problems in His proper timing and way.

Opportunity #2 – Don't be stingy; instead, be generous with what you have.

After we stop struggling alone, here is our second opportunity. We learn this truth from the little boy: You and I cannot be stingy. We need to be generous with what we have.

Let's change the scenario for a moment. "So Andrew went out into the crowd asking, 'Anybody got any food? Hey, anybody bring their lunch today? Little kid, I'm Andrew. I'm with Jesus. He needs your lunch.'" The boy yells, "Stranger danger!" and runs off. Or maybe he doesn't run away in fear, but when Andrew says, "Hey, I'm with Jesus and Jesus needs your food," the boy says, "But it's my food. My mom gave it to me so I would have lunch. If I give it away, then I won't have lunch and will be left hungry. So I'm going to keep it for myself."

There's an incredible truth in this story. This little boy took that which was his and gave it to Jesus. That's a model for us: taking what we have and giving it to Jesus. Now let's work through this scenario. Had the boy kept his lunch, his belly would have been full. He would have been satisfied, but in the world around him there would have been need. Think of it this way. When you are stingy with your possessions, when I'm stingy with my possessions, we might be satisfied, but the world around us will still be in need. Our bellies are full, but there are many people who need the very thing we have.

What the boy realized was, "If I give my meal to Jesus, I'm going to trust that He knows my needs. Whatever He's going to do, He will be able to take care of my needs plus the needs of those around me." So with open hands he said, "Here's my meal. Jesus, I'm trusting You that at some point I'll have my hunger taken care of and maybe others will as well."

Notice how the math worked out. The boy not only was fed, but everyone else was fed as well. His meal not only took care of him, but in the hands of Jesus, it was multiplied to become a blessing to a great multitude of people. That's why we encourage you to be part of the grace of giving. It isn't so much to keep the lights on or so we can remodel the place. It's so you, like the little boy, might open your hands and say, "My possessions are what God has given to me. I'm going to put them back in His hands. I know my God will supply all my needs according to His riches. When I put what I have into God's hands, He then multiplies it."

Don't miss the great blessing this little boy received. He was able to sit there and watch the miracle of his meal being multiplied and multiplied and multiplied, 5,000 times over. He got to go home and tell people, "My little meal did that in the hands of Jesus." When you give to the Lord's work, you get to say, "My meager donation accomplished great things in the hands of Jesus." You get to watch your little gift become a whole lot more. It's like dropping a little stone into water; the ripple effect of your giving will go way beyond anything you could have asked for or imagined.

So what are you doing with your money? What are you doing with the good things God has given you? Are you stingy with them, holding them for yourself? Or are you saying, like the boy did, "Here's what I have, Jesus. Do with it whatever You will"? If you do this, you'll get to watch not only how He meets your needs, but also the ripple effect, as your little gift is used in the hands of Jesus to do great things. If we would get hold of this, it would change the way we look at all God has given us and it will give us a bird's

eye view of how He wants to use what we have to bless a great number of others. Don't be stingy. Instead, be generous like this little boy was.

Opportunity #3 – Don't avoid serving or you won't be able to gather the leftovers.

Finally, the third opportunity is that we should not avoid serving; that's where the disciples were. They wanted to get away from the crowds, not serve them. They wanted to rest because they were hurting. Jesus said, "I have a job for you. I need you to distribute the food." So the twelve guys go out and feed the 5,000. They're tired. They're burdened. But they go and, in that moment, there is some solace. First was the look on people's faces as they were being fed. Word was getting out that Jesus had taken this little boy's lunch and was multiplying it. People were excited to taste the results of what Jesus was doing. So the disciples got to be the buffet servers of that incredible meal. It was encouraging to them. Jesus was demonstrating that His words were true, that He actually was God.

Then at the end, after everyone had gotten their fill and was satisfied, including the little boy and the disciples themselves, Jesus gathered His disciples back together and told them, "Now go get whatever is left over." "Jesus, we're tired. We just fed everybody. Can we take a break now?" Jesus said, "Not yet. Go get the leftovers."

¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost."

¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

How many baskets? Say it like you mean it. How many baskets? [12] How many disciples? [12] Aha! What an encouragement. They were overflowing. Jesus knew His disciples were hurting. So He wanted them to know that when they were willing to serve Him, He would provide leftovers for them. There was a basket for each one of them, for the next day and the day after that. There was more than enough to feed them for some time to come.

As followers of Jesus Christ, I want you to hear this. When you serve the Lord and you're tired and spent, God doesn't just give you what you need in the moment. When you're faithful with the little things God has given you, He will give you more, including what you need for the days to come. I know there are many people here today who are tired and hurting; all you want is a break. I want you to know that in this moment, Jesus may call you to even more ministry. He may call you to more service. Don't be stingy; be generous with your time, talents and treasures. As you do, Jesus will take care of your daily needs and those in the days to come.

Here's what I've learned in my 20 years of ministry: this is exactly true. Right when I think I can't give any more, right when I feel I'm so tired that all I want to do is give up, Jesus begins to multiply the little things I've given Him and makes them much, much more. When you serve and give to God in this way, you get to be part of the miracles God is doing around us. That's why I love this story. It gives us so much hope and encouragement, showing us how our heavenly Father and His Son, Who loves us so much, when we are hurting, doesn't just preach a message to us. Rather, we get to see with our own eyes how the little, insignificant and inadequate things we give to Him can become great in the hands of the Master.

Village Bible Church | 847 North State Route 47, Sugar Grove, IL 60554 | (630) 466-7198 | www.villagebible.org/sugar-grove

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