

All Signs Point to Jesus

Session 4

March 23, 2025

The Sign of His Provision

The Point: Jesus meets the needs in our lives.

Session Passage: John 6:1-15

Connection to the Point. Jesus saw the need of the people.

After this (v. 1). After what? In the preceding chapter John recorded how Jesus healed a disabled man at the pool called Bethesda. The religious leaders overlooked the miracle of healing and instead focused on the violation of Sabbath law. They believed Jesus's act of mercy was illegal on the Sabbath, but apparently overlooked their act of vengeance against Him on the Sabbath (5:16). This persecution brought about a long discourse (vv. 17-47). Jesus chided the leaders for their unbelief and foretold the resurrection of the dead at the end of the age (vv. 28-29).

The Sea of Galilee (v. 1). The sea, also known as the **Sea of Tiberias**, a Roman name honoring the second emperor who was on the Roman throne at the time. The sea is located near the city of Capernaum, the center of Jesus's ministry for a time. Capernaum was the hometown of Simon Peter and Andrew (Mark 1:29). Luke called the body of water the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1).

The Sea of Galilee is approximately thirteen miles from north to south and eight miles wide at its widest point. The Jordan River flows into it, and out of it to the Dead Sea. The fishing industry flourished in the Sea of Galilee. Peter, Andrew, James and John are identified as fishermen in the area.

The signs (v. 2). John didn't use the word *miracle* as the other Gospel writers did, preferring to use *signs*. John understood the mighty acts of Jesus to be signs pointing to a greater reality. Jesus followed the healing at Bethesda with other healings in the area. John didn't specifically record the greater reality revealed by these physical acts of healing, other than they, no doubt, displayed the power of God at work in the ministry of Jesus, the Messiah.

Went up a mountain (v. 3). The Sea of Galilee nestles between three mountain ranges. It's unclear which mountain this was. Perhaps John wished to communicate that Jesus sought solace from the press of the crowds who followed Him because of the healings. Matthew seems to suggest the same idea when Jesus went to the mountain to teach His disciples in what we call the Sermon on the Mount. But this private time was interrupted. As Jesus taught, the crowds discovered where He was and began to filter in and to listen (Matt. 5:1; 7:28). Even the Son of God needed rest and release at times from the demands of ministry, though it was hard to get away from the crowds.

The Jewish Passover . . . was nearing (v. 4). The Passover commemorates the deliverance of the Hebrew slaves from the terrors of the tenth plague—the death of the firstborn in Egypt. (Ex. 12). John seems to have referred to three Passover events (John 2:13,23; 6:4; 11:55 and following), roughly corresponding to the three years of Jesus's earthly ministry. John didn't record any reason for mentioning this approaching feast other than for chronology, but he may have wished to highlight the significance of

the season and the eagerness of the people to seek and to worship God. This may indicate why the crowds were so intent on finding Jesus. With the approaching holy season, they were more eager than usual to see His miracles and to hear His teaching.

Philip (v. 5). Philip was from Bethsaida, another coastal town bordering the Sea of Galilee. Jesus invited Philip to follow Him. Philip did, and found his friend, Nathanael, and told him to “come and see” the prophet Moses foretold (1:43-46). Though Judas is identified later as keeping the apostles’ money (12:6), Philip might have held that role at some point. If so, it would have been natural for Jesus to approach the treasurer when money was needed to **buy bread**.

Bread (v. 5). This word in Scripture often includes food other than bread, though bread seemed to be the basic meal item for most people. In this case *bread* also included fish a young boy had brought. The term here underscores the meagerness of what was available at that moment.

What the disciples wanted to do with the crowd. Matthew 14 records that the disciples asked Jesus to send the people away so they could find food for themselves. Their logic was that the area was deserted, and the hour was late (Matt. 14:15). Luke also recorded the disciples wished to send the crowd away (Luke 9:12). Mark had already added a unique caveat: Jesus “had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd” (Mark 6:34). Thus, the practical concern of the disciples is contrasted with the compassion of Jesus for the needs of the people.

John 6: 6-11

Connection to the Point. Jesus met the need of the people in a miraculous way.

Test him (v. 6). Jesus knew already what He would do but wanted to *test* Phillip. This is not to be understood in the sense of temptation, as Satan would do, but a testing intended to lead Philip to further and deeper commitment as a follower of Jesus. Philip would grow in his understanding of the power of God demonstrated in the miracles of Jesus. He and his friends would see the power of God many times as they followed Jesus.

Two hundred denarii(v. 7). Literally, “two hundred denarii.” A denarius, or a “penny,” was a typical day’s wage (Matt. 20:2). Philip’s objection was that it would take more than six months of labor to earn enough to feed this multitude. The disciples may have had some money for their needs, but hardly this amount. And there were no resources for food nearby even if they had sufficient funds.

Andrew (v. 8). Andrew is often identified as the “soul-winning disciple” since he brought people to Christ at least three times. He was a disciple of John the Baptist and began to follow Jesus, introducing his brother Simon (Peter) to Jesus (1:40-42). Here he brought the lad and his lunch to Christ, and later he brought some inquiring Greeks to meet Jesus (12:20-22). Andrew is named along with Peter, James and John when they pressed Jesus further about the destruction of the temple (Mark 13:3-4). Tradition claims Andrew was crucified on a cross in the form of an X, now known as a St. Andrew’s cross, and that he may

have been tied to the cross rather than nailed, at his request, believing he was unworthy to die in the same way Jesus had.

A boy (v. 9). Andrew may have been seeking to discover what food was available. He surely met with disappointment, for there was only a small portion of food. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all wrote about the meager food supply, but don't mention the boy. Only John identified who had the food. It's often implied that the lad brought his lunch to Jesus, but John records that Andrew was the one to offer it to Jesus, but seemingly did so with a shrug: **“But what are they for so many?”**

Five small barley loaves, and two small fish (v. 9). *Barley* was commonly grown in Palestine and identified in the Old Testament (Ruth 3:15,17) as a food for the poor. It was also used to feed livestock. Some believe the fish mentioned here was pickled fish, or perhaps more like a relish or topping. The point is the utter hopelessness of feeding anyone more than this young boy with such a meager lunch.

The men numbered about five thousand (v. 10). Jesus asked the disciples to arrange the people in an orderly fashion for serving, and perhaps for numbering. Mark and Luke mentioned specifically companies of fifty (and hundred for Mark). John just gave a total count of men. Matthew mentioned men “besides women and children” (Matt. 14:21). Thus, the awesome display of God's provision is multiplied when realizing the crowd was larger than initially thought. It's been speculated that the actual crowd may have been in excess of ten thousand.

Giving thanks (v. 11). This story is remarkably similar to the account of the last supper during Holy Week. Before going to the Gethsemane Garden where He prayed and where He was betrayed, Jesus took bread, gave thanks to God for it and distributed to those around Him. Giving thanks acknowledged God as the Giver of all things. He gives in response to our request for “daily bread,” as expressed in the Lord's Prayer. Martin Luther identified the meaning of “daily bread” with scores of things, including a good marriage, obedient children, a good home, and other matters. Christians are commanded to offer thanks to God for all the blessings of life, and to acknowledge that all blessings come from His hand.

Breaking bread. The other three Gospels specifically mentioned Jesus breaking the bread after giving thanks. This may either mean that the bread on the mountain that day was baked in loaves that needed breaking before sharing, or that the breaking was part of a common ritual after giving thanks. The apostle Paul on his final journey to Rome urged the passengers in the storm-tossed vessel to eat and gain strength in their time of peril. Luke recorded, “After he said these things and had taken some bread, he gave thanks to God in the presence of all of them, and after he broke it,” (Acts 27:35). It is not uncommon yet today that we invite others to “break bread” with us—that is, to share a meal with us.

John 6: 12-15

Connection to the Point. The satisfaction Jesus brought to the people led them to expect more from Him.

Collect the leftovers (v. 12). All the Gospels record the disciples collecting the remaining food

Twelve baskets full (v. 13)—no doubt underscoring the awesome power of God on display in caring for the multitude and providing for them in abundance. The people received more than they needed. Jesus commanded the disciples to gather the remaining fragments, though the Gospel writers did not tell us the specific reason for gathering what was left. Would the food be used by the disciples over the next few days? Twelve baskets might be taken by the 12 apostles on their journey the next day. Or was the remaining food to be given to others who came to hear Jesus and who might have hungry family members at home? It's not uncommon today when congregations have fellowship meals for church members to think of others who might enjoy some of the food that remains. The gift of food is usually a welcomed gift, and a way to express love for others. "Waste not" is a common refrain. But regardless of the reason, Scripture is clear regarding Jesus's instruction to retrieve what remained.

Some have used this story as an ecological reminder that we are stewards of all God has given and that we must care for His gifts. We're given property and possessions to use in trust according to Genesis 2, and we must exercise care and not wantonly waste or abuse what God has given. Whereas the first two explanations for the twelve baskets might be more pertinent to this particular incident, it is true that we should honor God for all He's given and strive to see that **nothing is wasted**, including the gift of planet earth.

The Prophet (v. 14). Some Bible scholars believe this reference to *the Prophet* points back to the promise of Deuteronomy 18:15: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. This was Philip's explanation to Nathanael (John 1:45). Moses is remembered as the instrument God used to send bread (manna) to the wandering Hebrews in their long journey to the promised land. The next verse in John 6 shows that the people wanted to make Jesus their king immediately after this miracle, prompting His departure from them. The time for such a position had not yet come.

Subsequent verses show the disciples spent the night crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat (vv. 16-21). Jesus encountered the multitudes the following day and chided them for their willingness to follow because He fed them (vv. 22-27). Some in the crowd accentuated the promise of Moses when they spoke about Moses providing manna in the same way Jesus provided bread (vv. 28-31). Jesus exhorted the multitude that their spiritual ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, but they died (vv. 32-49). Physical bread can't ensure life for more than a short time.

In the midst of his dialogue with the crowd, Jesus spoke another of the great "I am" statements recorded in John's Gospel: "I am the bread of life" (v. 48). Jesus's teaching that day reminded all that life is more than the physical and temporal. Those who believe and trust in Him will have eternal life. The one who eats this spiritual bread "will live forever" (v. 58).

Take him by force (v. 15). Perhaps the approaching Passover fanned the fervor of the people for the Messiah to appear. Orthodox Jews yet today leave a door open when they celebrate the Passover in the event Elijah appears to announce the Messiah (Mal. 4:5). The multitudes, no doubt, believed Jesus's

miracles proved He came from God and were eager to join His army. In the final Passover Jesus spent in Jerusalem—during what we now call Holy Week or Passion Week—He was welcomed by crowds as Messiah with great adulation on Sunday, but then crowds, perhaps including some of the same 9:12 PM people, shouted “crucify him” on Friday. In the end, Jesus had not fulfilled the common expectation of a military messiah. Independence from Rome might have been a worthy political goal, but Jesus had not come for political purposes. He came at this moment to fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy of the Suffering Servant (Isa. 53). The kind of king the Jews wanted wasn’t Jesus’s mission. He came, as John the Baptist announced, to be the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29).