

November/December 2009

SMALL GROUP SERIES:

7 Signs of Jesus

Discussion Guide
Sign #4
Jesus Feeds the 5000

Sign #4: Jesus Feeds 5,000 People

John 6:1-15; 25-27

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

¹Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ²and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. ³Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴The Jewish Passover Feast was near.

⁵When 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?" ⁶He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

⁷Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages^[a] would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

⁸Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, ⁹"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

¹⁰Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. ¹¹Jesus 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.

¹²When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." ¹³So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

²⁶ 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. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

Facilitator's Guide

Helpful Background Information for the Passage:

After speaking of Moses (5: 45-47), Jesus goes on to perform a sign that might be expected of a new prophet like Moses (Deut 18: 15): providing manna.

6:1-2. Those thought to be wonderworkers drew large followings in the ancient world, but most wonderworkers in this period did not emphasize teaching over miracles, in contrast to Jesus (6: 26-27).

6:3-4. If the events of chapter 5 took place at the Feast of Tabernacles (see comment on 5:1) and those of this text occur at Passover, and if this section of John is in chronological order, half a year has elapsed between these chapters.

6:5-6. Teachers quizzed their disciples with questions, and they occasionally tested their resolve or understanding of a matter by posing a difficult situation.

6:7. The bread needed to feed the crowd would cost two hundred days' wages for a peasant or unskilled laborer; although fishermen could have earned the same amount faster, it still represents a substantial sacrifice to the disciples' communal treasury (12: 6; 13: 29).

6:8-9. The "barley" loaves are reminiscent of 2 Kings 4: 42-44, where Elisha multiplies such loaves. Philip's and Andrew's skepticism also mirrors that of Elisha's prophet disciples (2 Kings 4: 43). (Some scholars also point to the presence of Elisha's assistant in 2 Kings 4: 38, 41; the LXX there uses the same word for "lad" as Andrew does here.) Fish and bread were basic staples; few people could afford meat.

6:10. Grass would flourish especially around Passover season (cf. 6: 4); it would also make the ground more comfortable for sitting. John numbers five thousand "men" (the Greek term here is gender-specific, and only men were usually numbered); the whole crowd, including women and children, may have been four times that number. Thus Jesus addresses a crowd nearly as large as the seating capacity of the theater for the citizen assembly of a major city like Ephesus, and at least four times the seating capacity of the theater in Sepphoris, a major Galilean city; to address such a crowd was no small feat.

6:11. The head of the Jewish household customarily gave thanks before (and normally after) the meal. Miracles of multiplying food appear in the Old Testament (cf., e.g., 1 Kings 17: 16; 19: 8) and occasionally in Jewish tradition (cf. the oil in late traditions about the Maccabees) and Greco-Roman texts; the background here is 2 Kings 4 (see comment on Jn 6: 8-9) and especially the manna of Exodus 16 (see comment on Jn 6: 31-33).

6:12. Greco-Roman moralists and Jewish teachers abhorred waste; although the extra bread has been provided miraculously, its provision is not to be taken for granted and squandered.

6:13. The leftovers are considerably more than they started with. It was a Roman custom always to have some food left over after a meal to indicate more than adequate provision. Jesus reveals himself as the ultimate host.

6:14. "The Prophet" implies the prophet like Moses of Deuteronomy 18: 15-18. In Moses' day, God had miraculously provided bread from heaven, manna. At Passover season (Jn 6: 4) hopes for deliverance ran high, because the Jewish people rehearsed how God had delivered them from their oppressors by the hand of Moses.

6:15. Some other first-century leaders gathered large followings in the wilderness who believed that they could perform signs like Moses or Joshua and overthrow the Romans; see comment on 6: 14. The crowds wanted a worker of earthly miracles and an earthly leader like Moses (some Jewish traditions- Philo, the rabbis, etc.-viewed Moses as a king; cf. Deut 33: 4-5); but this was not Jesus' mission (6: 63). Perhaps threatened by the earthly emperor's claims to authority (see the introduction to Revelation), John's readers may have taken warning from this passage.

Notes For Reflection:

Jesus Feeds 5,000

START IT

- Share with others a time of your life when you felt truly happy and content. What were the circumstances? What made you feel happy?
- Have you ever tried to share an important message to someone, but they got your message wrong? How did you feel? What kept them from understanding your message?

STUDY IT

- Read through the passage (John 6:1-15, 25-27). As you read, make notes in the margins of any observations that you think are important. Now, close your eyes for a couple of minutes and visualize the passage you just read. Then, share with the group what feelings and thoughts you gain from visualizing this passage. Did it remind you of any scripture from the Old Testament i.e. Psalms?
- What is Jesus' teaching technique in this Scripture and what is its significance? What is the message Jesus wants to convey to his disciples and the multitude through the multiplication of the bread and the fish?
- Read verses 5-8 again, what was Jesus trying to test Philip on? What do you think kept him from "passing the test"?
- What connections do you see between the first part of the story (vs. 1-15) and vs. 26 and 27?
- What is Jesus trying to convey when he stated "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to *eternal life*, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval"(vs.27) (italics added)?

LIVE IT

- In what ways is Jesus "testing" you? Do you expect Jesus' amazing power to be evident in your life?
- What keeps you from believing that Jesus can multiply your "two fish" and "five loaves"?
- Are you working for the food that "spoils" or for the food that endures forever? How does that look like in your life?
- How can we apply Jesus' teaching techniques of asking intentional questions to those He puts under our spiritual care?

PRAY IT

- For ourselves: That Jesus would help us put our eyes on Him rather than what the world offers.
- For the Church: That we would be intentional with those who need to hear the message of Jesus.