

The Greater Moses John 6:1-34

Some of my fondest memories involve experiences revolving around food, and water – and perhaps you would say the same?

- Some **meals** are unforgettable: Wedding Reception, Birthday parties, Thanksgiving dinner, special date nights... **that 2am burrito at Taco Bell?**
- Some experiences at the **ocean, and times at swimming pools**, are also unforgettable: the first time you went off the diving board... the first time we took your kids to the ocean, a family get away... **The first time we took our kids swimming, at a neighbor's pool, he jumped in the deep end without knowing how to swim! Another thought you were supposed to strip down entirely and jump in! We had to correct that.**

Israel celebrated two unforgettable experiences associated with food and water: (1) **passing through Red Sea**, and (2) **being sustaining with manna for 40 years in the wilderness**. Both were associated with Moses' leadership in the Exodus. (cf., 77:11, 16, 19-20; 78:12-13, 23-25)

We are reading of two events here that would have been unforgettable to those in Jesus' presence: (1) **the feeding of the multitude**, and (2) **Jesus walking on water**.

John is presenting Jesus as **the Greater Moses**.

John 5 - Last week we considered the Christ-centered nature of the Scriptures; how all of Scripture is pointing to Jesus, and should give us a love for Jesus.

- He said “you actually don't understand Moses if you don't believe in me because Moses wrote of me.”
- They set their “hopes on Moses,” but Jesus says, “Moses set his hope on Me.”
- We mentioned a few ways this was true, particularly through (1) the overall story of Scripture, but also in (2) the law, and (3) the promises of Gen 3:15, and Gen 12. (4) He also wrote of the serpent raised up on a pole, and more.

In the Gospels, we see many **echoes of the Exodus**.

One of the passages that has strong echoes is here in **chapter 6**.

- **We see it in the “two miracles” – feeding a multitude, and controlling the seas, and in the sermon on “true manna.”**
- Jesus is the Greater Moses; a greater shepherd; a greater mediator, leading a greater Exodus. Moses was viewed as kind of an ideal Messiah.
- But Jesus is the Messiah we need:
 - He's the Shepherd who leads us, feeds us, and satisfies us.
 - He's the Sovereign Lord who walk on water, and brings us peace.
 - He's the Savior who gives eternal life to those who believe.

Stories of food and water are often bound together for Israel as stories about faith.

- Paul puts them together in **1 Cor 10:1-4**.
- John ties the **feeding and the walking on water together**, as does Matthew and Mark.
- For John, this is the **fourth and fifth “sign.”**
 - (Luke doesn’t tie them together, probably due to his Gentile audience).

John’s account prepares us for the long discourse on the bread of life to follow.

Here’s a dominant application from John 6:

Spiritual hunger is universal, and finding satisfaction is possible ... but only in Jesus.

Let’s look at the one who can satisfy the hunger of our hearts...

#1: Jesus Feeds the Multitude (6:1-15)

This is the only miracle of Jesus that’s recording in all four gospels.

All of them have echoes of the Exodus account, but John is probably the most explicit.

The Context (1-4)

1: Unspecified time. The Sea of Galilee is the same as the Sea of Tiberius (also called Gennesaret). It’s really a lake.

- This probably takes place on the barren hillside on the east side of the lake, in a wilderness.

2: The crowd was willing to follow him anywhere, including this barren place because they were impressed with the signs.

3: On a high mountain, Jesus sits down with his disciples.

- Jesus frequently chose a mountain for important ministries, like the sermon on the mount, times of prayer, discussion with the disciples, the Transfiguration, etc.
- Mountains were significant places of God’s work in Israel’s history: the sacrifice of Isaac, Mount Sinai, Mount Carmel, etc.

4: The Passover. This is the first clear reference to the Exodus and Moses.

- This is **the important context.**
- The traditional Passover ceremony retells the Exodus events, and the liturgy involves (among other things) remembering: **(1) the Lord’s control of the sea, and (2) the feeding of manna.**
- The Passover liturgy focuses not just on the Passover lamb, but the whole exodus rescue, where God delivered His people from slavery, **rescued them from the waters, and then fed and sustained his people in the wilderness.**

One more point about context: You have to remember **this is not the industrialized world, but an agrarian world, in a relatively poor area.**

We don't think about food the way most of the people in history have thought about food (Carson).

- Ask a five year old, "Where food comes from? They may say "the grocery store," or "my fridge." Rarely, will you hear, "The Farm." Or "Plants and animals."
- Or if someone says, "What's the staple diet of those in Raleigh?" How would we answer? We have so many options! A different genre every night! In many parts of the world, it's very simple: rice and beans. Chicken and rice. Bread and fish.
- Or, "What happens if there's a draught?" We would say, "The prices go up." We don't think about starvation! We may ask, "Where is the draught?" We think we can just import our oranges from somewhere else in the world, if Florida has a draught.
- Or, "Why do we work?" – "Well, to buy things." Most of us do not think, "We work in order to have enough to eat today."
- Or, "What is your favorite snack food?" Many around the world don't have a category for that.

We need to remember the context here: this is not an industrialized world.

- All the themes pop up here.
- Bread and fish were the staple food items.
- One worked to eat!
- Food was not a snack item; it's what sustains life, and without it you starve.

i. The Question: "What's for lunch?" (5-9)

5-6: Jesus sees this large crowd (5,000 plus women and children – 15-20 thousand people – an incredibly large gathering!) and tests Philip ("Do you really believe I'm the Messiah?")

7: Philip is good at math and gives Jesus an answer.

- Rather than seeing Jesus' question as being more of a question about Jesus' identity, Philip breaks out the mental calculator, and gives Jesus a **hopeless** answer: It would take about 8 months of salary to feed them.

8-9: Andrew has another idea. He begins to look for some Slim Jims, or other food supplies.

- He finds this little boy has a **bit of bread and two small fish.**
 - Barley loaves – the bread of the poor.
 - Only John includes the bread being "barley."
 - Loaf is too generous; it's really little cakes.
 - Fish – These would be two small, dried or pickled fish.
 - Thus his answer is also **hopeless.**

Here in this barren place, among a multitude, Jesus will feed this crowd miraculously, not with manna and quail, but with this bread and fish.

ii. The Meal (10-11)

10: Despite the hopelessness of the situation, Jesus tells the disciples to tell everyone to prepare for lunch, by sitting down.

- Mark says they are divided into groups, like Ex 18:21, 25
- He's the Good Shepherd. Notice also the mention of "grass." The Shepherd leads them beside green pastures. (Ps 23)

11: Giving thanks, being satisfied.

- Jesus gives thanks (*eucharistein*, a foretaste of the Lord's supper), and distributes the food (11a).
- Jesus presides over the meal like a Jewish Father" (Edwards)
- Unlike the wilderness feedings, this crowd is **satisfied**, not **complaining** (11b)
- "They took **as much as they wanted.**"
 - Baseball w Dad, "Son, get whatever you want. We only come once a year."
 - Jesus is lavish in his dispensing of good gifts to the hungry.
 - He fully satisfies us.
 - He will make this point on a spiritually plane in the Bread of life discourse.
 - He not only **gives** bread, but he **is** the bread.
 - **Only Jesus can satisfy the hunger of our hearts.**
- Not like flying on an airplane, starving, and getting 12 pretzels!

Notice something else here: God can multiply things!

- Your 20 bucks, or your time in a particularly ministry may not seem like much, but just give it to the Lord.
- The little boy didn't say, "These are my fish sandwiches! Why don't you find someone in the crowd who owns a bread store and have him underwrite this thing." No, he says, "Okay, you can have it."
- Five loaves and two fish were nothing, but he gave it, and the Lord used it to satisfy others

iii. The Leftovers (12-13)

12-13: Unlike the wilderness feedings, leftovers are gathered up.

- The manna couldn't be eaten later.
- The abundance of food displays endless bounty of Jesus' grace and mercy.
- There's actually more leftover than they started with.
- Jesus can satisfy the twelve disciples/twelve tribes of Israel?

Some try to explain this miracle away. There have been a number of failed attempts:

1. "Jesus had a secret stash of food hidden away. He stood at the entrance of a cave where bread was hidden." This is ridiculous.
2. "Rich and pious ladies brought more food."
3. "A miracle of sharing."

- This is the dumbest explanation. 15-20,000 people sharing 2 fish sandwiches and a piece of bread. **What did they do, lick it?**
4. Still others suggest **the number of people was exaggerated.**
- There's no reason to believe this.
 - Everything in the text suggest a great number of people, including the echoes of the Exodus, and verse 15 that suggests a political revolution being afoot.

No, this is what we see: **a miracle.**

- We see Jesus as greater than Moses, or Elijah or any other.
- Only God can feed people in the wilderness like this.
- William Temple was the son of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and early on, he struggled to believe the miracles in Scripture. He eventually changed his mind, and would follow in his father's footsteps. In his commentary on John's Gospel he said this, regarding the feeding of the multitude:

What actually happened? It is clear that every Evangelist supposed our Lord to have wrought a creative act; and for myself I have no doubt that this is what occurred. This, however, is credible only if St. John is right in his doctrine of our Lord's Person. If the Lord was indeed God incarnate, the story presents no insuperable difficulties. But of course such a creative act is quite incredible if He is other or less than God incarnate.

Well, that's the question isn't it? **If you believe He's God incarnate, then there's no problem at all accepting this account!** It's not hard to believe them if God incarnate is behind them. If you don't believe He's God incarnate, then of course they're absurd.

iv. The Response (14-15)

14: The people recognize the "sign" and make a confession: "This is indeed the Prophet who has come into the world!" They interpret this event as Messianic. "Jesus has just recreated the miracle of Moses!" (Burge)

- The people think he's a great prophet (Moses prophesied about him, **Deut 18:15 Acts 3**).
- Others also thought Jesus was Elijah, the miracle-working prophet.

15: There were apparently some political activists in the crowd, who wanted to make Jesus a King, but Jesus gets away from the crowd.

- Jesus is the King of Kings, but he was not a King like anyone expected.
- He's the King who would die for sinners, rise from the dead, and promise to return to set up His unending kingdom.

#2: Jesus Walks on Water (6:16-21)

This famous story appears in Matthew, Mark, and John.

John doesn't go into as much detail and Matthew and Mark – there are no contradictions, just additional details provided by Matt/Mark – primarily because John is concerned with what is coming next: the long bread of life discourse.

16-17: It's evening or "dark" (17)

- "Darkness" as we've seen in John is not always about time of day, but is used theologically, as a means of instruction.
- Here it certainly has to do with the time of day, but it's also symbol laden (as Carson and others have pointed out, Jn 3:2, 13:30).
- They are alone on the sea at night away from Jesus.

18: They are crossing the sea without Jesus, and encounter a storm.

- The storm isn't as ferocious as the time in which Jesus told the storm to "be still," but it was still tough night!

19a: The wind is so strong they've only covered 3-4 miles.

19b: They see Jesus walking on water coming near the boat!

- The disciples were **"frightened."** You think?
- Matthew/Mark record the disciples thinking that Jesus was a **ghost**. That makes sense. **They have two options: Rabbi is walking on water or it's a ghost!** If you've never seen anyone walking "on" the water, then a ghost makes about as much sense!
- Mark adds that Jesus **"meant to pass by them"** (Mark 6:48)
 - That's an interesting note.
 - **Did Jesus try to sneak up behind them and shake them? Was it a little prank?**
 - **Was he just going to wave as he walked by, like someone riding a jet sky?**
 - **Does he mean to not get in the boat, just go by them, but then change his mind when seeing them in distress?**
 - **There's a better explanation:** The verb *parerchomai* ("to pass by") when connected to divinity refers to **an epiphany**. It's a deliberate identification of Jesus' deity.
 - This statement **echoes Exodus 33-34 and 1 Kings 19:11-12.**
 - The Lord "passes by" Moses, when Moses wants to see God's glory, and reveals to Him something of his glory. And in 1 Kings 19:11-12, after a time of discouragement, God reveals His glory to Elijah.
 - Likewise, **Jesus is revealing His transcendent majesty to these disciples in order to reveal his identity to them.**

20: All 3 accounts include Jesus reassurance: "It is I, be not afraid."

- **The coming of Jesus into the world means you don't have to be afraid anymore.**
- If you are in Him, if you believe in Him, you can have peace.
- The God who delivered His people through the Red Sea, has come down in Jesus Christ, and is walking on water, and now saying to us, **"It is I, don't be afraid."**

- I love the **simplicity** of the words, “Do not be afraid.”
- He **doesn’t give a great lesson on the mysteries of the universe.**
- Like a parent saying to their child after they have a bad dream, “Don’t be afraid.”

App: You don’t have to be afraid because of *who is with you!*

The Greek behind “It is I” is literally “**I am**” (*ego eimi*) – hence the footnote in some of your Bibles.

- He says, “**I Am, don’t be afraid.**”
- Again, you can’t miss the Exodus symbolism, **Exodus 3:14.**
- Moses, an ordinary guy, was being called to an assignment greater than himself, and he was scared, but God reassured him by revealing His identity to Moses.
- “You don’t have to be afraid, I Am is with you.”
- **Jesus is not merely a successor to Moses; He’s God!**
- **The One who parted the Red Sea, walks on water.**
- **Jesus talks like God talks, and walks like God walks.**
- **Jesus isn’t trying to pull a stunt; He’s revealing His glory.**
- **He’s saying to these future leaders of the church, “The most important thing about your ministry going forward is Me.”**

Many try to explain this miracle away also....

- “**He was walking on a sandbar.**” No, these disciples knew this lake well.
- “**He was walking along the shoreline.**” Why would that astonish them?!
- Both miss the whole point of the story too, and doesn’t take into account the Exodus echoes.

21: He got in the boat, and they’re happy about that!

- “**Jesus, Get in the boat! Sit here.... Don’t go walking around... And Don’t fall asleep!**”
- They arrive at their destination *immediately* (21b).
 - The immediacy denotes divine activity.
 - Psalm **107:23-30** – the Lord brings us out of the stormy sea into safe havens.

Mark and Matthew add that the “wind ceases” (Matthew after the account of Peter gives the water walking a go!).

- And both writers say that disciples were utterly **astounded**.
- Matthew adds that those in the boat **worshiped him** as the Son of God.
- This is big time amazement! Not: “You rock, Jesus.” “Rabbi be killin it.”
- But a “**We’ve never seen anything like this.**”
- **If a guy makes a shot at half court blindfolded – that’s astonishing. But what would be really astonishing is if he starts flying with his arms after making the shot– that’s a “Okay, I’m leaving.”**
- **Jesus has graduated to a whole new level of astonishment.**

Mark also ties the feeding into the event in **Mark 5:42.**

- ⁵¹ And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.
- **They hadn't really grasped the significance of the feeding of the five thousand.**
- **They marveled at the miracle but missed the point of the miracle.**
- **The miracle was intended to point them to the identity of the miracle worker!**
- And it is to that, that John now goes, continuing his theme: of believing Jesus is the Christ and having life in his name.
- Jesus declaring, "I am" is a perfect set up for the sermon, "I am the Bread of Life."

#3: Jesus Is the True Manna (6:22-34)

At the end of this discourse, we are told that Jesus said these things in the synagogue at Capernaum (that is, right off the shore of the sea. You can still visit this wonderful site today). But we're not sure what part of this discourse happened there, perhaps all of it.

{Read}

23: John ties the feeding miracle with the sermon to come.

26: Jesus has attracted a large crowd because they are enamored by the signs (26).

This sets up the sermon.

Jesus Doesn't Just Give Bread, He is the Bread (27-34)

26-27: "Truly, Truly." Underline it. This is important: Here's what you should be pursuing.... bread that endures for eternal life.

- Groceries perish.
 - **We have five kids, and we can't keep them. Kimberly comes home from Sam's with a Suburban full of groceries, and soon you hear, "There's nothing in this house to eat.**
- Food vanishes. It also spoils.
- But not Jesus. He's the True Bread.

27b: The Son of Man will give it to you – He has been authenticated by the Father.

28: What must we do?

29: Jesus doesn't answer them the way they anticipate; it's not with **labor, but belief.**

- You **cannot earn acceptance with God by working for it.**
- What's required is true belief.
- **Jesus already did the work!**
- It's grace.
- It's counter-cultural, counter-intuitive. **When someone pays for our meal, we often say, "You don't have to do that. I'm no freeloader. Here's a \$20." Or, "I'll pay the next time."**
- Jesus paid it all. Believe in him.
- **The bread that endures for eternal life is freely given by Christ, and by faith, we**

receive it.

30: They don't like Jesus' answer, so they ask for proof of his claim.

31: The Jews point back to a “Mosaic sign,” that of Manna in the desert, to say, do another sign for us so that we may believe.

Carson: Later rabbis argued that the Messiah, the ‘latter Redeemer’, would call down manna from heaven, as did the ‘first redeemer’ (*i.e.* Moses; see notes on v. 14). ... If this is what the synagogue crowd means, it is a demand that Jesus prove his messianic status by duplicating or surpassing the miracle of the manna.

Well he doesn't do another sign, that's not the pattern of Jesus – doing a miracle at the demand of others. But he goes beyond that to say, **“I am the Bread.”** I just don't “give bread, I am the bread.”

32-33: Jesus begins to unpack the good news.

32: “Another “truly, truly”

32: Correction: It wasn't Moses, **but the Lord** who provided bread from heaven (32)

33: And the Father who was at work in the past, was at work in their midst, as now He has sent the True Bread from heaven to give life to the world.

34: Sadly, they miss the point, and insist on filling their bellies with physical bread (cf., Jn 4:15).

And it's this misunderstanding that prepares the way for John's first “I am discourse” which we will look at next week.

The one who fed the multitude with a sack lunch, who was born in Bethlehem, the house of bread, is the bread of life.

Conclusion

Jesus is the Greater Moses, indeed the divine Son of God, the true bread from Heaven, who has come into the world. See Him and believe.

He's the Shepherd who leads us, feeds us, and satisfies us.

- He is the compassionate Shepherd who provides for our needs.
- He is the miracle-working Shepherd, who takes our little lunch and multiplies it.
- He is the lavish, generous Shepherd, who gives us an abundance of good gifts.

He's the Sovereign Lord who walks on water, and gives us peace.

- Do you find yourself afraid today?

- Hear his word to you, “It is I Am, Don’t be Afraid.”

He’s the Savior who gives eternal life to those who believe.

- Your greatest need is not financial or physical, but spiritual.
- And only Jesus can give it to you: eternal life.
- He came from heaven to earth to give you life.

This Savior/Shepherd/Lord satisfies those who trust in Him now and forever, and He does so by having his body torn like bread, and his blood poured out like wine.

Apart from Christ, nothing fully satisfies.

- C. S. Lewis said, “I cannot find a cup of tea which is big enough or a book that is long enough.”
- The finest things in life won’t full satisfy.
- But Jesus will.
- Spiritual hunger is a universal, and satisfaction is possible – in the Bread of Life, Jesus.

Magnificat – he satisfies the hungry but sends the rich (the self-satisfied) away empty (Lk 1:53) -- those who think they don’t need him.

- To be satisfied in Jesus, all you need is *need*. You need to admit that nothing else can save and satisfy, and believe on him.
- Let us remember Him now – the one who will save us from the flood waters of judgment and will sustain us until the end, through his death, resurrection, ascension and return.