

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 20

CHRIST FEEDING THE MULTITUDE

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Transcript

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John 6:1-13

Of all the miracles performed by the Lord Jesus the feeding of the five thousand is the only one recorded by each of the four Evangelists. This at once intimates that there must be something about it of unusual importance, and therefore it calls for our most diligent study. The Holy Spirit has—if we may reverently employ such language—described this miracle in the most matter-of-fact terms. No effort is made to emphasize the marvel of it. There is an entire absence of such language as an uninspired pen would naturally have employed to heighten the effect on the reader. And yet, notwithstanding the simplicity and exceeding brevity of the narrative, it is at once evident that this incident of the feeding of the hungry multitude was a signal example of Christ's almighty power. As Bishop Ryle has noted, of all the wonderful works which our Savior did none was quite so public as this, and none other was performed before so many witnesses. Our Lord is here seen supplying the bodily needs of a great crowd by means of five loaves and two small fishes. Food was called into existence which did not exist before. To borrow another thought from Bishop Ryle: In healing the sick and in raising the dead, something was amended or restored which already existed; but here was an absolute creation. Only one other miracle in any wise resembles it—His first, when He made wine out of the water. These two miracles belong to a class by themselves, and it is surely significant, yea most suggestive, that the one reminds us of His precious blood, while the other points to His holy body, broken for us. And here is, we believe, the chief reason why this miracle is mentioned by all of the four Evangelists: it shadowed forth the gift of Christ Himself. His other miracles exhibited His power and illustrated His work, but this one in a peculiar way sets forth the person of Christ, the Bread of Life. Why, then, was this particular miracle singled out for special prominence? Above, three answers have been suggested, which may be summarized thus: First, because there was an evidential value to this miracle which excelled that of all others. Some of our Lord's miracles were wrought in private, or in the presence of only a small company; others were of a nature that made it difficult, in some cases impossible, for sceptics to examine them. But here was a miracle, performed in the open, before a crowd of witnesses which were to be numbered by the thousand. Second, because of the intrinsic nature of the

miracle. It was a creation of food: the calling into existence of what before had no existence. Third, because of the typical import of the miracle. It spoke directly of the person of Christ. To these may be added a fourth answer: The fact that this miracle of the feeding of the hungry multitude is recorded by all the Evangelists intimates that it has a universal application. Matthew's mention of it suggests to us that it forshadowed Christ, in a coming day, feeding Israel's poor—cf. Psalm 132:15. Mark's mention of it teaches us what is the chief duty of God's servants—to break the Bread of Life to the starving. Luke's mention of it announces the sufficiency of Christ to meet the needs of all men. John's mention of it tells us that Christ is the Food of God's people. Before we consider the miracle itself we must note its setting—the manner in which it is here introduced to us. And ere doing this we will follow our usual custom and present an Analysis of the passage which is to be before us:— 1. Christ followed into Galilee by a great multitude, verses 1, 2. 2. Christ retires to a mountain with His disciples, verse 3. 3. Time: just before the Passover, verse 4. 4. The testing of Philip, verses 5-7. 5. The unbelief of Andrew, verses 8, 9. 6. The feeding of the multitude, verses 10, 11. 7. The gathering up of the fragments, verses 12, 13. "After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias" (John 6:1). "After these things": the reference is to what is recorded in the previous chapter—the healing of the impotent man, the persecution by the Jews because this had been done on the Sabbath day, their determination to kill Him because He had made Himself equal with God, the lengthy reply made by our Lord. After these things, the Lord left Jerusalem and Judea and "went over the sea of Galilee." It is similar to what was before us in John 4:1-3. The Son of God would not remain and cast precious pearls before swine. He departed from those who despised and rejected Him. Very solemn is this, and a warning to every unbeliever who may read these lines. "And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased" (John 6:2). How completely these people failed in their discernment and appreciation of the person of Christ! They saw in Him only a wonderful Magician who could work miracles, a clever Physician that could heal the sick. They failed to perceive that He was the Savior of sinners and the Messiah of Israel. They were blind to His Divine glory. And is it any otherwise with the great multitude today? Alas, few of them see in Christ anything more than a wonderful Teacher and a beautiful Example. "And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased." How sadly true to life. It is still idle curiosity and the love of excitement which commonly gathers crowds together. And how what we read of here is being repeated before our eyes in many quarters today. When some professional evangelist is advertised as a 'Faith-healer' what crowds of sick folk will flock to the meetings! How anxious they are for physical relief, and yet, what little real concern they seem to have for their soul's healing! "And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples" (John 6:3). This may be regarded as the sequel to what we read of in verse 2, or it may be connected with verse 1, and then verse 2 would be considered as a parenthesis. Probably both are equally permissible. If we take verse 2 as giving the cause why our Lord retired to the mountain with His disciples, the thought would be that of Christ withdrawing from the unbelieving world. The miracles drew many after Him, but only a few to Him. He knew why this great multitude "followed him," and it is solemn to see Him withdrawing to the mountain with His disciples. He will not company with the unbelieving world: His place is among His own. If verse 3 be read right on after verse 1, then we view the Savior departing from Judea, weary (cf. Mark 6:31) with the unbelief and self-sufficiency of those in Jerusalem. "He went up into a mountain into another atmosphere, setting forth the elevation with the Father to which He retired for refreshment of spirit" (Malachi Taylor). Compare John 6:15 and John 7:53 to John 8:2 for other examples in John's Gospel. "And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh" (John 6:4). This seems introduced here in order to point again to the empty condition to Judaism at this time. The Passover was nigh, but the Lamb of God who was in their midst was not wanted by the formal religionists. Yea, it was because they were determined to "kill him" (John 5:18), that He had

withdrawn into Galilee. Well, then, may the Holy Spirit remind us once more that the Passover had degenerated into "a feast of the Jews." How significant is this as an introductory word to what follows! The Passover looks back to the night when the children of Israel feasted on the lamb; but here we see their descendants hungering! Their physical state was the outward sign of their emptiness of soul. Later, we shall see how this verse supplies us with one of the keys to the dispensational significance of our passage. "When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" (John 6:5). While the multitude did not know Christ, His heart went out in tender pity to them. Even though an unworthy motive had drawn this crowd after Christ, He was not indifferent to their need. Matthew, in his account, tells us "And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them" (Matthew 14:14). So also Mark (Mark 6:34). The absence of this sentence here in John is one of the innumerable evidences of the Divine authorship of Scripture. Not only is every word inspired, but every word is in its suited place. The "compassion" of Christ, though noted frequently by the other Evangelists, is never referred to by John, who dwells upon the dignity and glory of His Divine person. Compassion is more than pity. Compassion signifies to suffer with, along side of, another. Thus the mention of Christ's compassion by Matthew tells us how near the Messiah had come to His people; while the reference to it in Mark shows how intimately the Servant of Jehovah entered into the sufferings of those to whom He ministered. The absence of this word in John, indicates His elevation above men. Thus we see how everything is most suitably and beautifully placed. And how much we lose by our ungodly haste and carelessness as we fail to mark and appreciate these lovely little touches of the Divine Artist! May Divine grace constrain both writer and reader to handle the Holy Book more reverently, and take more pains to acquaint ourselves with its exhaustless riches. It would be a delight to tarry here, and notice other little details mentioned by the different evangelists which are omitted from John's account—such as the fact that Matthew tells us (before the miracle was performed) that "it was evening," and that the disciples bade their Master "send the multitude away"—but perhaps more will be accomplished if we leave the reader to search them out for himself. "When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great multitude come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do" (John 6:5, 6). In reading the Scriptures we fail to derive from them the blessings most needed unless we apply them to our own hearts and lives. Unlike all others, the Bible is a living book: It is far more than a history of the past. Stript of their local and incidental details, the sacred narratives depict characters living and incidents transpiring today. God changes not, nor do the motives and principles of His actions. Human nature also is the same in this twentieth century as it was in the first. The world is the same, the Devil is the same, the trials of faith are the same. Let, then, each Christian reader view Philip here as representing himself. Philip was confronted with a trying situation. It was the Lord who caused him to be so circumstanced. The Lord's design in this was to "prove" or test him. Let us now apply this to ourselves. What happened to Philip is, in principle and essence, happening daily in our lives. A trying, if not a difficult, situation confronts us; and we meet with them constantly. They come not by accident or by chance; instead, they are each arranged by the hand of the Lord. They are God's testings of our faith. They are sent to "prove" us. Let us be very simple and practical. A bill comes unexpectedly; how are we to meet it? The morning's mail brings us tidings which plunge us into an unlooked-for perplexity; how are we to get out of it? A cog slips in the household's machinery, which threatens to wreck the daily routine; what shall we do? An unanticipated demand is suddenly made upon us; how shall we meet it? Now, dear friends, how do such experiences find us? Do we, like Philip and Andrew did, look at our resources? Do we rack our minds to find some solution? or do our first thoughts turn to the Lord Jesus, who has so often helped us in the past? Here, right here, is the test of our faith. O, dear reader, have we learned to spread

each difficulty, as it comes along, before God? Have we formed the habit of instinctively turning to Him? What is your feebleness in comparison with His power! What is your emptiness in comparison with His ocean fulness? Nothing! Then look daily to Him in simple faith, resting on His sure promise, "My God shall supply all your need" (Phil. 4:19). Ah! you may answer, It is easy to offer such advice, but it is far from easy to act on it. True. Yea, of yourself it is impossible. Your need, and my need, is to ask for faith, to pray for grace, to cry unto God for such a sense of helplessness that we shall lean on Christ, and on Him alone. Thus, ask and wait, and you shall find Him as good as His word. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (Ps. 43:5). The birds without barn, Or storehouse are fed; From them let us learn To trust for our bread.

His saints what is fitting Shall ne'er be denied, So long as, 'tis written "The Lord will provide."

When Satan appears, To stop up our path, And fills us with fears, We triumph by faith:

He cannot take from us, Though oft he has tried, The heart-cheering promise, "The Lord will provide."

"Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little" (John 6:7). Let us see in Philip, once more, a portrait of ourselves. First, what does this answer of Philip reveal? It shows he was occupied with circumstances. He was looking on the things which are seen—the size of the multitude—and such a look is always a barrier in the way of faith. He made a rapid calculation of how much money it would require to provide even a frugal meal for such a crowd; but he calculated without Christ! His answer was the language of unbelief—"Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little." Fancy talking of "a little" in the presence of Infinite Power and Infinite Grace! His unbelief was also betrayed by the very amount he specified—two hundred pennyworth. Nowhere in Scripture are numbers used haphazardly. Two hundred is a multiple of twenty, and in Scripture twenty signifies a vain expectancy, a coming short of God's appointed time or deliverance. For example, in Genesis 31:41 we learn how that Jacob waited twenty years to gain possession of his wives and property; but it was not until the twenty-first that God's appointed deliverance came. From Judges 4:3 we learn how that Israel waited twenty years for emancipation from Jabin's oppression; but it was not until the twenty-first that God's appointed deliverance came. So in 1 Samuel 7:2 we learn how that the ark abode in Kirjath-Jearim for twenty years, but it was in the twenty-first that God delivered it. As, then, twenty speaks of insufficiency, a coming short of God's appointed deliverance, so two hundred conveys the same idea in an intensified form. Two hundred is always found in Scripture in an evil connection. Let the reader consult (be sure to look them up) Joshua 7:21; Judges 17:4; 1 Samuel 30:10; 2 Samuel 14:26; Revelation 9:16. So the number here in John 6:7 suitably expressed Philip's unbelief. How surprising was this failure in the faith of Philip. One would have supposed that after all the disciples had witnessed of the Lord's wonder-working power they had learned by this time that all fulness dwelt in Him. We should have supposed their faith was strong and their hearts calm and confident. Ah—should we? Would not our own God-dishonoring unbelief check such expectations? Have we not discovered how weak our faith is! How obtuse our understanding! How earthly our minds and hearts! In vain does the Lord look within us sometimes for even a ray of that faith which glorifies Him. Instead of counting on the Lord, we, like Philip, are occupied with nature's resources. Beware, then, of condemning the unbelief of Philip, lest you be found condemning yourself too. How often has the writer thought, after some gracious manifestation of the Lord's hand on his behalf, that he could trust Him for the future; that the remembrance of His past goodness and mercy would keep him calm and confident when the next cloud should drapen his landscape. Alas! When it came how sadly he failed. Little

did we know our treacherous heart. And little do we know it even now. O dear reader, each of us need the upholding hand of the Lord every step of our journey through this world that lieth in the Wicked one; and, should that hand be for a single moment withdrawn, we should sink like lead in the mighty waters. Ah! nothing but grace rescued us; nothing but grace can sustain us; nothing but grace can carry us safely through. Nothing, nothing but the distinguishing and almighty grace of a sovereign God! "One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?" (John 6:8, 9). Unbelief is infectious. Like Philip before him, Andrew, too, seemed blind to the glory of Christ. "What are they among so many?" was the utterance of the same old evil heart of unbelief which long ago had asked, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" (Ps. 78:10). And how the helplessness of unbelief comes out here! "That every one may take a little," said Philip; "What are these among so many?" asked Andrew. What mattered the "many" when the Son of God was there! Like Philip, Andrew calculated without Christ, and, therefore he saw only a hopeless situation. How often we look at God through our difficulties; or, rather, we try to, for the difficulties hide Him. Keep the eye on Him, and the difficulties will not be seen. But alas! what self-centered, skeptical, sinful creatures we are at best! God may lavish upon us the riches of His grace—He may have opened for us many a dry path through the waters of difficult circumstances—He may have delivered us with His outstretched arm in six troubles, yet, when the seventh comes along, instead of resting on Job 5:19, we are distrustful, full of doubts and fears, just as if we had never known Him. Such frail and depraved creatures are we that the faith we have this hour may yield to the most dishonoring distrust in the next. This instance of the disciples' unbelief is recorded for our "learning"—for our humbling and watchfulness. The same unbelief was evidenced by Israel in the wilderness, for the human heart is the same in all ages. All of God's wonders in Egypt and at the Red Sea were as nothing, when the trials of the wilderness came upon them. Their testings in "the wilderness of sin" (Ex. 16:1) only brought out of their hearts just what this testing brought out of Philip's and Andrew's, and just what similar testing brings out of ours—blindness and unbelief. The human heart, when proved, can yield nothing else, for nothing else is there. O with what fervency should we daily pray to our Father, "Lead us not into temptation [trial]"! "And Jesus said, Make the men sit down" (John 6:10). How thankful we should be that God's blessings are dispensed according to the riches of His grace, and not according to the poverty of our faith. What would have happened to that multitude if Christ had acted according to the faith of His disciples? Why, the multitude would have gone away unfed! Ah! dear reader, God's blessings do come, despite all our undeserving. Christ never fails, though there is nothing but failure in us. His arm is never withdrawn for a moment, nor is His love chilled by our skepticism and ingratitude. To hear or read of this may encourage one who is merely a professing Christian to continue in his careless and God-dishonoring course; but far otherwise will it be with a real child of God. The realization of the Lord's unchanging goodness, His unfailing mercies—despite our backslidings—will melt him to tears in godly sorrow. "And Jesus said, Make the men sit down." How patient was the Lord with His disciples. There was no harsh rebuke for either Philip or Andrew. The Lord knoweth our frame and remembers that we are dust. "Make the men sit down" was a further test; this time of their obedience. And a searching test it was. What was the use of making a hungry multitude sit down when there was nothing to feed them with? Ah! but God had spoken; Christ had given the command, and that was enough. When He commands it is for us to obey, not to reason and argue. Why must not Adam and Eve eat of the tree of knowledge? Simply because God had forbidden them to. Why should Noah, in the absence of any sign of an approaching flood, go to all the trouble of building the ark? Simply because God had commanded him to. So, today. Why should the Christian be baptized? Why should the women keep silence in the churches? Simply because God has commanded these things—Acts 10:48; 1 Corinthians 14:34. It is indeed blessed to note

the response of the disciples to this command of their Master. Their faith had failed, but their obedience did not. Where both fail, there is grave reason to doubt if there is spiritual life dwelling in such a soul. Their obedience evidenced the genuineness of their Christianity. "If faith is weak, obedience is the best way in which it may be strengthened. 'Then shall ye know,' says the prophet, 'if ye follow on to know the Lord.' If you have not much light, walk up to the standard of what you have, and you are sure to have more. This will prove that you are a genuine servant of God. Well, this is what the disciples seemed to do here. The light of their faith was low, but they heard the word of Jesus, 'Make the men sit down.' They can act if they cannot see. They can obey His word if they cannot see that all fulness dwells in Him to meet every difficulty. So they obey His command. The men sit down, and Jesus begins to dispense His blessings. And thus by their act of obedience, their faith becomes enlightened, and every want is supplied. This is always the result of walking up to the light we have got. 'To him that hath shall more be given.' That light may be feeble, it may be only a single ray irradiating the darkness of the mind; nevertheless, it is what God has given you. Despise it not. Hide it not. Walk up to it, and more shall be added. "And we may notice here how all blessings come down to us through the channel of obedience. The supply for every want had been determined beforehand in the Savior's mind, for 'he himself knew what he would do' (verse 6). Yet though this were so, it was to flow through this medium—so intimately and inseparably is the carrying out of all God's purposes of grace toward us connected with obedience to His commands. This is the prominent feature in all God's people. 'Obedient children' is the term by which they are distinguished from those who are of the world. 'He became obedient' was the distinguishing feature in the character of the divine Master, and it is the mark that the Holy Spirit sets upon all His servants. Obedience and blessing are inseparably connected in God's Word. 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.' 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him'" (Dr. F. Whitfield) "And Jesus said, Make the men to sit down." But why "sit down"? Two answers may be returned. First, because God is a God of order. Any one who has studied the works of God knows that. So, too, with His Word. When His people left Egypt, they did not come forth like a disorderly mob; but in ranks of fives—see Exodus 13:18 margin. It was the same when they crossed the Jordan and entered Canaan—see Joshua 1:14 margin. It was so here. Mark says, "They sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties" (John 6:40). It is so still: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). Whenever there is confusion in a religious meeting—two or more praying at the same time, etc.—it is a sure sign that the Holy Spirit is not in control of it. "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Cor. 14:33). "Make the men sit down." Why? Secondly, may we not also see in this word the illustration of an important principle pertaining to the spiritual life, namely, that we must sit down if we would be fed—true alike for sinner and saint. The activities of the flesh must come to an end if the Bread of life is to be received by us. How much all of us need to ask God to teach us to be quiet and sit still. Turn to and ponder Psalm 107:30; Isaiah 30:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:11; 1 Peter 3:4. In this crazy age, when almost everybody is rushing hither and thither, when the standard of excellency is not how well a thing is done, but how quickly, when the Lord's people are thoroughly infected by the same spirit of haste, this is indeed a timely word. And let not the reader imagine that he has power of himself to comply. We have to be "made" to "sit down"—frequently by sickness. Note the same word in Psalm 23:2—"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." "Now there was much grass in the place" (John 6:10). How gracious of the Holy Spirit to record this. Nothing, however trifling or insignificant, is unknown to God or beneath His notice. The "much cattle" in Nineveh (Jon. 4:11) had not been forgotten by Him. And how minutely has the Word of God recorded the house, the situation of it, and the name and occupation of one of the Lord's disciples (Acts 10:5, 6)! Everything is before Him in the registry of heaven. God's eye is upon every circumstance connected with our life. There is nothing too little for Him if it

concerns His beloved child. God ordered nature to provide cushions for this hungry multitude to sit upon! Mark adds that the grass was "green" (John 6:39), which reminds us that we must rest in the "green pastures" of His Word if our souls are to be fed. "So the men sat down, in number about five thousand" (John 6:10). This is another beautiful line in the picture (cf. the five loaves in verse 9), for five is ever the number which speaks of grace, that is why it was the dominant numeral in the Tabernacle where God manifested His grace in the midst of Israel. Five is four (the number of the creature) plus one—God. It is God adding His blessing and grace to the works of His hand. "And Jesus took the loaves" (John 6:11). He did not scorn the loaves because they were few in number, nor the fish either because they were "small." How this tells us that God is pleased to use small and weak things! He used the tear of a babe to move the heart of Pharaoh's daughter. He used the shepherd-rod of Moses to work mighty miracles in Egypt. He used David's sling and stone to overthrow the Philistine giant. He used a "little maid" to bring the "mighty" Naaman to Elisha. He used a widow with a handful of meal to sustain His prophet. He used a "little child" to teach His disciples a much needed lesson in humility. So here, He used the five loaves and two small fishes to feed this great multitude. And, dear reader, perhaps He is ready to use you—weak, insignificant, and ignorant though you be—and make you "mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:4). But mark it carefully, it was only as these loaves and fishes were placed in the hands of Christ that they were made efficient and sufficient! "And Jesus took the loaves." He did not despise them and work independently of them. He did not rain manna from heaven, but used the means which were to hand. And surely this is another lesson that many of His people need to take to heart today. It is true that God is not limited to means, but frequently He employs them. When healing the bitter waters of Marah God used a tree (Ex. 15:23-25). In healing Hezekiah of his boil He employed a lump of figs (2 Kings 20:4-7). Timothy was exhorted to use a "little wine for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities" (1 Tim. 5:23). In view of such scriptures let us, then, beware of going to the fanatical lengths of some who scorn all use of drugs and herbs when sick. "And when he had given thanks" (John 6:11). In all things Christ has left us a perfect example. He here teaches us to acknowledge God as the Giver of every good gift, and to own Him as the One who provides for the wants of all His creatures. This is the least that we can do. To fail at this point is the basest ingratitude. "He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down" (John 6:11). Here we are taught, again, the same lesson as the first miracle supplied, namely, that God is pleased to use human instruments in accomplishing the counsels of His grace, and thus give us the inestimable honor and privilege of being "laborers together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9). Christ fed the hungry multitude through His disciples. It was their work as truly as it was His. His was the increase, but theirs was the distribution. God acts according to the same principle today. Between the unsearchable riches of Christ and the hungry multitudes there is room for consecrated service and ministry. Nor should this be regarded as exclusively the work of pastors and evangelists. It is the happy duty of every child of God to pass on to others that which the Lord in His grace has first given to them. Yea, this is one of the conditions of receiving more for ourselves. This is one of the things that Paul reminded the Hebrews of. He declared he had many things to say unto them, and they were hard to be interpreted because they had become dull (slothful is the meaning of the word) of hearing, and unskilled in using the Word. Consequently, instead of teaching others—as they ought—they needed to be taught again themselves (Heb. 5:11-13). The same truth comes out in that enigmatical utterance of our Lord recorded in Luke 8:18: "for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." The one who "hath" is the believer who makes good use of what he has received, and in consequence more is given him; the one who "seemeth to have" is the man who hides his light under a bushel, who makes not good use of what he received, and from him this is "taken away." Be warned then, dear reader. If we do not use to God's glory what He has given us, He may withhold further blessings from us, and take

away that which we fail to make good use of. "He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down." One can well imagine the mingled feelings of doubt and skepticism as the twelve left the Savior's side for the hungry multitude, with the little store in their baskets. How doubt must have given place to amazement, and awe to adoration, as they distributed, returned to their Master for a fresh supply, and continued distributing, giving a portion of bread and fish to each till all were satisfied, and more remaining at the close than at the beginning! Let us remember that Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday and today and for ever," and that all fulness dwells in Him. By comparing Mark 6:41 it will be found that there the Holy Spirit has described the *modus operandi* of the miracle: "He looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave to his disciples." The word "brake" is in the aorist tense, intimating an instantaneous act; whereas "gave" is in the imperfect tense, denoting the continuous action of giving. "This shows that the miraculous power was in the hands of Christ, between the breaking and the giving" (Companion Bible). He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down." What a lesson is there here for the Christian servant. The apostles first received the bread from the hands of their Master, and then "distributed" to the multitude. It was not their hands which made the loaves increase, but His! He provided the abundant supply, and their business was to humbly receive and faithfully distribute. In like manner, it is not the business of the preacher to make men value or receive the Bread of life. He can not make it soul-saving to any one. This is not his work; for this he is not responsible. It is God who giveth the "increase"! Nor is it the work of the preacher to create something new and novel. His duty is to seek "bread" at the hands of his Lord, and then set it before the people. What they do with the Bread is their responsibility! But, remember, that we cannot give out to others, except we have first received ourselves. It is only the full vessel that overflows! "And likewise of the fishes as much as they would" (John 6:11). "Precious, precious words! The supply stopped only with the demand. So, when Abraham went up to intercede with God on behalf of the righteous in Sodom, the Lord never ceased granting till Abraham had ceased asking. Thus also in the case of Elisha's oil; so long as there were empty vessels to be found in the land, it ceased not its abundant supply (2 Kings 4:6). Likewise also here, so long as there was a single one to supply, that supply came forth from the treasures of the Lord Jesus. The stream flowed on in rich abundance till all were filled. This is grace. This is what Jesus does to all His people. He comes to the poor bankrupt believer, and, placing in His hand a draft on the resources of heaven, says to him, 'Write on it what thou wilt.' Such is our precious Lord still. If we are straitened, it is not in Him, but in ourselves. If we are poor and weak, or tried and tempted, it is not that we cannot help ourselves—it is because we do not ('All things are yours', in Christ, 1 Corinthians 3:22 A.W.P.). We have so little faith in things unseen and eternal. We draw so little on the resources of Christ. We come not to Him with our spiritual wants—our empty vessels—and draw from the ocean fulness of His grace. "'As much as they would'. Precious, precious words. Remember them, doubting, hesitating one, in all thy petitions for faith at the throne of grace. 'As much as they would.' Remember them, tried and tempted one, in all thy pleadings for strength to support thee on thy wilderness way. 'As much as they would'. Remember them, bereaved and desolate one, whose eyes are red with weeping, bending over the green sod, beneath which all thy earthly hopes are lying, and with a rent in thine heart that shall never be healed till the morning of resurrection—remember these words as thy wounded and desolate spirit breaks forth in mournful accents on a Savior's ear for help and strength. And, guilty one, bowed down with a lifetimes load of sin, traversing the crooked bypaths of the broad road to ruin; a wilful wanderer from thy God; as the arrow of conviction penetrates thy soul, and as thine agonizing voice is heard crying for mercy—remember these precious, precious words, 'as much as they would'. 'Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out'" (Dr. F. Whitfield). "When they were filled" (John 6:12). God gives with no niggardly hand. "When they were filled"—what a contrast is this from the words of Philip, "That every one of them may take a little"?

The one was the outpouring of Divine grace, the other the limitation of unbelief. Christ had fed them from His own inexhaustible resources, and when He feeds His people He leaves no want behind. Christ, and He alone, satisfies. His promise is, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). Do you know, dear reader, what it is to be "filled" from His blessed hand—filled with peace, filled with joy, filled with the Holy Spirit! "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost" (John 6:12) All were filled and yet abundance remained! How wonderful and how blessed this is. All fulness dwells in Christ, and that fulness is exhaustless. Countless sinners have been saved and their souls satisfied, and yet the riches of grace are as undiminished as ever. Then, too, this verse may be considered from another angle. "Gather up the fragments." There was abundance for all, but the Lord would have no waste. How this rebukes the wicked extravagance that we now behold on every hand! Here, too, the Holy One has left us a perfect example. "Gather up the fragments" is a word that comes to us all. The "fragments" we need to watch most are the fragments of our time. How often these are wasted! "Let nothing be lost"! "Gather them up"—your mis-spent moments, your tardy services, your sluggish energies, your cold affections, your neglected duties. Gather them up and use them for His glory. "Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten" (John 6:13). How this confirms what we have said about giving out to others. The loaves were augmented by division and multiplied by subtraction! We are never impoverished, but always enriched by giving to others. It is the liberal soul that is made fat (Prov. 11:25). We need never be anxious that there will not be enough left for our own needs. God never allows a generous giver to be the loser. It is miserliness which impoverishes. The disciples had more left at the finish than they had at the beginning! They "filled twelve baskets," thus the twelve apostles were also provided with an ample supply for their own use too! They were the ones who were enriched by ministering to the hungry multitude! What a blessed encouragement to God's servants today! In closing, let us call attention to another of the wonderful typical and dispensational pictures which abound in this Gospel. The passage which has been before us supplies a lovely view of the activities of God during this dispensation. It should be carefully noted that John 6 opens with the words, "After these things." This expression always points to the beginning of a new series—cf. John 5:1; 7:1; 21:1; Revelation 4:1, etc. In John 4 we have two typical chapters which respect the Gentiles—see the closing portions of chapters 15 and 16. Hence John 5 begins with "After this." John 5 supplies us with a typical picture of Israel—see chapter 17. Now as John 6 opens with "After these things," we are led to expect that the dispensational view it first supplies will respect the Gentiles again and not the Jews. This is confirmed by the fact that the remainder of the verse intimates that Christ had now left Judea and had once more entered Galilee of the Gentiles. Further corroboration is found in that Philip and Andrew figure so prominently in the incident which follows—cf. John 12:20-22 which specially links them with the Gentiles. In the remainder of the passage we have a beautiful view of Christ and His people during the present dispensation. Note the following lines in the picture:— First, we behold the Lord on high and His people "seated" with Him (John 4:3). This, of course, typifies our standing; what follows contemplates our state. Second, we are shown the basis of our blessings: "And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh" (verse 4). The Passover speaks of "Christ our passover sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). But note, it is not only "the passover" which is mentioned here, but also "the passover, a feast" (note the absence of this in John 2:13!), which beautifully accords with what follows—typically, believers feeding on Christ! But we are also told here that this "passover" was "a feast of the Jews." This is parallel with John 4:22—"Salvation is of the Jews." It is a word to humble us, showing our indebtedness to Israel, cf. Romans 11:18: "Thou bearest not the root, but the root thee." Third, the people of God, those who in this dispensation are fed, are they who "come unto Him" (verse 5)—Christ. Fourth, Christ's desire (verse 5) and purpose (verse 6) to feed His own. Fifth, His

saints are a people of little faith (cf. Matthew 8:26), who fail in the hour of testing (verses 5-9). Sixth, His people must "sit down" in order to be "fed." Seventh, Christ ministers to His people in sovereign grace ("five loaves" and "five" thousand men, (verses 10, 11) and gives them a satisfying portion—"They were filled" (verse 12). It is beautiful to observe that after the great multitude had been fed, there "remained" twelve full baskets, which tells of the abundance of grace reserved for Israel. This also gives meaning to, "A feast of the Jews was nigh" (verse 4). Let the following questions be studied with a view to the next chapter:— 1. Why did Christ "depart"? verse 15. 2. Why were the disciples "afraid"? verse 19. 3. What spiritual lessons may be drawn from verses 17 to 21? 4. How harmonize the first half of verse 27 with Ephesians 2:8, 9? 5. What is meant by Christ being "sealed"? verse 27.

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