

Lesson 8 Notes

John 6:1-21

Focus Verse

“When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. **But he said to them, ‘It is I; don’t be afraid.’**” (John 6:19-20)

Outline

- Jesus Feeds the 5,000 – John 6:1-15
- Jesus Walks on Water – John 6:16-21

Engage

This world is a stormy place—hardly a place of calm and peace. Seemingly insurmountable needs in our communities, churches, and workplaces create persistent pressure. Families experience hopeless situations with elusive solutions. **Unrelenting stress challenges our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.** Weary and overcome, we often feel we don’t have enough to give. Where can we turn when the waves of this world overwhelm us?

Jesus purposefully engaged with a variety of people throughout His ministry. He met and provided for physical needs that people recognized **and revealed greater spiritual needs they did not understand.** Whether offered to an inquisitive Pharisee in the dark of night, a desperate woman at a well in Samaria, or a hungry mountainside multitude, **the help Jesus put forward was more than enough.** He poured out words of truth, admonition, and wisdom. **With compassion, He healed the sick and helped the lame to walk.** The One who was “in the beginning” put His heavenly sovereignty on full display. **Jesus has the power to meet any human need.**

Jesus’s Sabbath healing of a lame man had angered the religious leaders in Jerusalem. **They recognized Jesus’s claims of deity and plotted to have Him killed.**¹ In stark contrast, “some time after this,” Jesus interacted with a crowd of curious people on a hillside rather than those who opposed Him. The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) offer additional details of the miracles recorded in chapter 6. **John focuses on Jesus’s power over creation and His compassion for human needs.**

1. Persecution: John 5:16-18

✦ Jesus Feeds the 5,000 – John 6:1-15

The feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels.²

The Setting – 6:1-4

Jesus and the disciples "went up on a mountainside," which probably means the hill country on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. News spread quickly among the people who saw Jesus leave Capernaum with His disciples. Many chasing after Jesus were sick and hoping to receive healing. From the other Gospels, we know they eagerly "ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead" of Jesus's boat.³

The weight of deep compassion alongside the constant press of the gathering crowds and news of John the Baptist's death surely left Jesus and His disciples tired and weary.⁴ Upon disembarking, Jesus took His disciples up on the mountainside and sat down. **Jesus knowingly continued to invest in His inner circle—the disciples needed to recognize Jesus's divine power and authority as Messiah.**

John records that Passover (which occurred during springtime in Israel—usually in April) was drawing near. His inclusion of such time markers outlines the three years of Jesus's public ministry. John's references to Passover, a time of nationalistic aspirations, may imply that the crowd focused on Jesus's messianic claims with hope of liberation from Rome. Jesus, now in Galilee and some distance from the temple, apparently determined that He would not go to Israel's capital. The growing opposition toward Jesus in Jerusalem likely influenced His decision. **The divinely orchestrated timing of Jesus's ministry moved forward to accomplish God's eternal plan.**⁵

The Need – 6:5-9

The Question Jesus Posed – 6:5-6

Despite His weariness, Jesus felt profound compassion for the approaching people. The weight of their burdens, their lack of true shepherds, and their persistence in seeking Him moved Jesus to action. Jesus knew only He could give them what they needed most.⁶ Always in tune with His Father's heart, Jesus laid aside His own desire for solitude to meet the needs of the desperate and distressed.⁷

Jesus recognized an opportunity to train His disciples while providing for the gathering crowd. He asked Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Jesus did not ask this question to gain information. He already knew what He was going to do.

Jesus's question represented a test—an opportunity to recognize that He could and would provide. **Everything Jesus said and did throughout His earthly ministry meant more than His onlookers realized.** The Father, the Son, and Spirit constantly work together to accomplish

2. Feeding of 5,000: Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17

3. Eager to see Jesus: Mark 6:32-33

4. Need for rest: Matthew 14:13; Mark 6:30-32

5. Jesus's timing: John 7:1, 8, 30; 8:20

6. Sheep without a shepherd: Mark 6:34

7. Unity of Father and Son: John 5:19

far deeper purposes than people recognize.⁸ We barely comprehend a fraction of all that God is doing in the world. Jesus met physical needs to demonstrate His unlimited power and generous compassion. His miraculous signs and authoritative words united His divine, eternal agenda with His earthly steps.

The People Jesus Challenged – 6:7-9

Philip – 6:7

More than once, Phillip found himself the first to verbalize the difficulty the disciples faced.⁹ In this case, Jesus led him to quickly quantify and bluntly state that the need of the crowd far exceeded the resources available. Philip did the math. He determined that offering every person in the crowd just one bite would require half a year's wages. From Philip's perspective, the situation appeared impossible. **God often allows His children to recognize the hopelessness they face apart from His intervention.** In wisdom and brilliance, Jesus used moments of dire need to prepare His disciples to notice His handiwork. He does the same for us today.

Jesus needed no help in carrying out His miracle. He could have fed the thousands that day without human assistance or the meager lunch the disciples gathered. However, Jesus included others as His coworkers and allowed them to experience the wonder of His power. **Jesus's disciples and the people in the crowd needed more than a meal—they needed a Savior.**

Andrew – 6:8-9

Each time John spotlights Andrew, we see him bringing someone to Jesus.¹⁰ Andrew previously brought his brother Simon Peter to meet Jesus; this time he brings an unnamed boy. Later, we will witness Andrew leading a group of Greeks to Jesus before His crucifixion. **However, instead of considering Jesus's unlimited power, Andrew focused on the inadequacy of resources.** The five barley loaves and two fish Andrew discovered represented a meager lunch for a young boy and, most certainly, an insufficient meal for a burgeoning crowd. **As if to underline the hopeless situation, Andrew looked at the rations and asked, "How far will they go among so many?"**

Both Philip and Andrew attended the wedding in Cana where they witnessed Jesus's first miraculous sign.¹¹ They saw Jesus's miracle unfold and drank the wine He provided. Since that day, they had watched Jesus heal countless people. They saw a disabled man in Jerusalem obey Jesus, stand, and walk.¹² But now, these disciples saw only a problem that seemed too big for Jesus to handle. Undaunted, Jesus persistently developed the faith of the men He had chosen to change the world. **Jesus's disciples had much to learn, but in grace He continually revealed that He could be trusted completely with every need.**

An Unnamed Boy – 6:9

Jesus allowed a young boy to witness His power in an extraordinary and personal way. The five barley loaves would have been small, round flatbread, like pita or pancakes. Little dried fish would have been included to flavor the bread. **Yet, when given to Jesus, this small gift blessed thousands.**

8. Working together: John 5:17

9. Philip: John 14:8

10. Andrew: John 1:40-42; 6:8-9; 12:20-22

11. Wedding at Cana: John 2:1-11

12. Lame man walks: John 5:1-9

This boy simply gave what he had to Jesus. What did he think or feel in the moment he entrusted his lunch to Jesus and His disciples? Did he expect to go hungry himself? **Whatever he thought, this boy could not have guessed how Jesus would use his sacrificial gift.**

The Answer – 6:10-13

Organization and Expectation – 6:10

Jesus told the disciples, “Have the people sit down.” **He brought order and anticipation to the large crowd.** John records that 5,000 men were on this mountainside. Matthew adds that the crowd numbered 5,000 men, “besides women and children,” suggesting the group was much larger.¹³

What did the people seated on the grass that day expect? **This meal came a day after Jesus taught truth, healed the sick, and revealed God’s love.** Instilled with hope and confidence, the entire crowd looked to Jesus, **likely wondering what He would do.**

Prayer and Provision – 6:11

Jesus took the loaves into His hands and offered a prayer of thanks. **Jesus intentionally turned the crowd’s attention to His Father—the source of miraculous provision and power.** The people received the food. They ate as much fish and bread as they wanted. While the other Gospels emphasize Jesus including the disciples in distributing the meal,¹⁴ **John focuses on the Lord Jesus. Once again, Jesus displayed His compassion and power.**

Satisfaction and Abundance – 6:12-13

Everyone in the crowd “had enough to eat.” This translation reflects an understatement. **Literally, the people were “filled” or “fully satisfied.” They ate until they could eat no more. Jesus’s provisions more than meet our needs and reveal the abundance of His unlimited resources.**¹⁵ **Regardless of what we long for, satisfaction apart from Jesus Christ does not exist.**

Generosity and frugality go hand-in-hand. While Jesus provides lavishly, He wastes nothing.

Despite the plentiful supply of food, He commanded, “Let nothing be wasted.” Jesus instructed His disciples to gather the leftovers. Jesus not only gave the disciples food, He provided an opportunity to trust Him, recognize His provision, **and exercise wise stewardship. God calls churches and Christian ministries today to do the same.**

Obediently, and no doubt in continued amazement, the 12 disciples collected exactly 12 baskets of leftovers generated by a mere five barley loaves. **All 12 disciples held tangible evidence of Jesus’s overflowing provision in their hands.** A basket for each disciple visibly attested to Jesus’s divine power and care for their needs. Always true to His nature, the Lord gave more than people asked or imagined.¹⁶ **Only in Jesus can needy people experience true abundance.**

Jesus's provisions more than meet our needs and reveal the abundance of His unlimited resources. Regardless of what we long for, satisfaction apart from Jesus Christ does not exist.

13. **Matthew’s count:** Matthew 14:21

14. **Disciples distributed:** Matthew 14:19; Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16

15. **Jesus gives more:** Isaiah 64:4; 1 Corinthians 2:9

16. **More than we imagine:** Ephesians 3:20-21

The Response – 6:14-15

So often, humans misinterpret God’s intended plans by focusing on their own agendas. **The enormous crowd who enjoyed Jesus’s miraculous meal misunderstood His purpose.** Their response revealed a lack of understanding, which led them to act with self-serving motives.

Is Jesus the Promised Prophet? – 6:14

The people sought to explain the astounding miracle they had witnessed. **So near to Passover, the crowd could have easily connected this event to Moses, the greatest prophet, leader, and deliverer of the Old Testament.**¹⁷ During the time Moses led Israel in the wilderness, God fed His people with manna—“bread from heaven.”¹⁸ Moses foretold that one day, God would send His people another prophet. Their recent mountainside experience with the divine provision of food led the recently fed crowd to say, “Surely this is the Prophet.”¹⁹ **Was this the prophet promised centuries ago? Could this be the Messiah who would reign from Jerusalem—the One through whom Israel would lead the nations of the world?**

God’s own Son certainly came to earth as the prophet Moses predicted. Jesus is rightfully King of heaven and earth. He is the Messiah who came to save the world.

Let’s Make Jesus Our King! – 6:15

Jesus knew that the recently satisfied crowd intended to forcefully make Him king. In a sense, the crowd was right about Jesus’s identity. God’s own Son certainly came to earth as the prophet Moses predicted.²⁰ Jesus is rightfully King of heaven and earth.²¹ He is the Messiah who came to save the world.²² **Jesus was, is, and always will be sovereign over all creation.**²³

However, a failure to comprehend their greater spiritual needs motivated the crowd’s response. They wanted a king who would serve them and provide for their temporal, physical needs. The Lord recognized the crowd’s fickle enthusiasm and quietly put an end to their plans. Jesus remained fully committed to His Father’s purpose and His divine mission on earth.

Jesus would later tell Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.”²⁴ **Until He died and rose again, Jesus’s only crown on earth would be woven from thorns.**²⁵ **Jesus’s time to reign had not yet come.**²⁶ As night closed in, Jesus sent the crowd away. He sought time alone with His Father.²⁷ **Our Lord received the daily bread of His spiritual nourishment through intimate communion with His Father.**

17. **Greatest prophet:** Deuteronomy 34:10-12

18. **Manna:** Exodus 16:4; Psalm 78:24-25

19. **Promised Prophet:** Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; John 1:21

20. **Prophet:** Mark 6:1-4; Acts 7:37-38

21. **Jesus the King:** Matthew 1:1; 28:18; Romans 1:1-3; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 19:16

22. **Messiah:** Matthew 16:16; Mark 1:1; John 4:25-26; 11:27

23. **Eternally sovereign:** John 1:1-5; Ephesians 1:1-14; Philippians 2:5-11

24. **Heavenly, eternal kingdom:** John 18:36

25. **Crown of thorns:** John 19:2, 5

26. **Jesus’s time:** John 7:6-9

27. **Time with the Father:** Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46

God's Rightful Rule as King of Creation

The Doctrine of the Sovereignty of God

God is sovereign. This means God alone controls everything. He rules every sector of the universe He created.¹ God's decrees govern history.² God's sovereignty includes the calling of those who will be saved by Him.³ God determines the outcome of all things according to His wise purposes. God controls and guides all events for His glory and our good.

Like their ancestors centuries earlier, the people of Israel desired a king.⁴ They recognized Jesus's authority and correctly speculated about His identity. However, they wanted a king who ruled on their terms and satisfied their desires. They stood before eternity's sovereign King seeking to mold His agenda to meet their demands. Because of humankind's inherited sinful nature,⁵ we long to exercise sovereignty that belongs only to God. People long to control what only God controls. We desire autonomy more than submission. God rules rightly, justly, compassionately, and eternally. His sovereignty remains steadfast despite our rebellion and utter failure to understand His character and purposes.

Without a proper understanding of God's absolute rule over time, history, and every earthly event, we flounder in uncertainty. People's whims, the world's constantly changing landscape, and our own lives seem to careen randomly forward. Certainly legitimate questions arise as we attempt to interpret the chaos around us. However, failure to recognize God's present purposefulness leaves us without the rudder we need to direct our lives.

The truth about God's sovereignty stabilizes our thinking in many ways. We do not need to fully comprehend what God expressly controls. When our understanding fails to grasp all that God is doing, we trust the infinite perfections within His character. Knowing that God will one day eradicate evil, end injustice, and reign without rival offers hope when current events trouble us.⁶ **Recognizing God's right to reign over everything helps me relinquish my own desire to rule what I cannot control or to mold God to fit my image of Him.** Surrendering to the Sovereign God who rules time and eternity is always right. How will you find comfort today recognizing God's wise rule over this world and your life?

-
1. **God's authority:** 1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Psalm 47:7
 2. **God governs history:** Daniel 4:34-35; Acts 2:23; 17:24-27
 3. **God's call:** Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:2
 4. **Israel's desire for a king:** 1 Samuel 8:4-5
 5. **Sinful nature:** Genesis 3; Isaiah 53:6; 59:12-13; Romans 7:14; 8:7
 6. **God's eternal rule:** Revelation 21-22



Jesus Walks on Water – John 6:16-21

The Storm – 6:16-21

The Disciples' Departure – 6:16-17

Jesus intentionally sent His disciples back toward Capernaum on a boat while He sought solace with His Father.²⁸ The feeding of the 5,000 trained them to serve, but strengthening their faith remained foremost in His mind. **Jesus sent His disciples straight into a trial that would test their faith.** They boarded a boat and waited for their Lord to rejoin them. Jesus would indeed come to them, but not before giving them another opportunity to trust Him more.

The Disciples' Fear – 6:18-19

An inland freshwater lake fed by the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee sits almost 700 feet (more than 200 meters) below sea level. The surrounding hills rest at about 2,000 feet (600 meters) above sea level, with peaks beyond rising even higher. **After nightfall the changing temperature of air currents around and above the Sea of Galilee could create sudden storms.** Fierce winds can whip up waves strong enough to swamp a small boat. The disciples found themselves in this situation.

Many of the disciples were fishermen and familiar with traveling across water. They understood the danger of sudden storms. Mighty winds and rough waters buffeted the disciples, who frantically rowed for miles. **Upon seeing a figure walking toward them on the water, defying the laws of physics, the disciples understandably found themselves racked with fear.**

The Disciples' Comfort – 6:20-21

Jesus understood the emotional state of His friends. Like a Good Shepherd calling to His sheep, He spoke gentle and comforting words.²⁹ Jesus said, "It is I; don't be afraid." **At once, the disciples welcomed their Lord, their Comforter, into their boat.** They immediately reached their destination.

John offers a more concise record of this incident than the other Gospel accounts.³⁰ He focused on Jesus's words and presence during this tumultuous scene. **Jesus had not forgotten His disciples but remained keenly aware of their struggle.** **At precisely the right time, Jesus came to the disciples.** His calming presence, words, and almighty power relieved their fears.

Then and now, Jesus's disciples never escape His notice. Jesus remains steadfast in His intimate and loving concern for His own. He exercises His sovereignty because of His love for His people and on behalf of His people. This miracle reminds us of Jesus's sovereign control over everything that troubles us. **When the waves of life threaten us, Jesus remains *with* us and works *for* us.** **Jesus has the power to meet any human need.**

28. On the boat by Jesus's command: Matthew 14:22-23; Mark 6:45

29. Shepherd's voice: John 10:3-5

30. Gospel accounts of this event: Matthew 14:22-34; Mark 6:45-53

✦ Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Jesus sought the lost and needy. Crossing the Sea of Galilee, the sick, hungry, and broken-hearted pursued Jesus. People who desired hope and help flocked around Him. Their earth-bound hearts looked to Jesus to fulfill their dreams. **However, the Savior of the world came to provide much more than a meal ticket for the physically hungry.** The miraculous multiplication of five loaves and two fish pointed to Jesus's sovereignty and **represented another example of His pursuit of their hearts.**

Jesus's care for people runs deep and wide. He served and displayed His divine power to a field of people ripe for His spiritual harvest. Jesus tenderly and wisely tended to His inner circle of disciples—the foundation upon whom He would build His Church. Jesus involved them in serving the multitude, then came to them amidst strain and turmoil on the stormy Sea of Galilee. Jesus eased His disciples' fears with His words and presence. **He calmed the storm and led them to their destination.**

Apply It

A crowd of thousands—seeking comfort, food, and even a king—surrounded Jesus. Their overwhelming need and the obvious lack of human resources presented an opportunity for Jesus to display His power. A young boy gave Jesus what he had and saw his meager lunch miraculously multiplied. **Today we frequently face challenges that outstrip our limited human strength and means.** In gracious love, God often allows us to quantify what we lack so we will understand our need for His unlimited power. How often do you feel like the resources you have to navigate life are not enough? What situation are you facing today where your energy, finances, influence, or answers are clearly inadequate? **When you offer the Lord what you have, He will supply what you need.** When God does what He alone can do, He receives glory. **We can offer little because our God is so big.** How is He calling you to trust Him today?

How often are you surprised when life becomes unexpectedly difficult? While we might criticize the pressing crowd who sought Jesus for personal gain, we often find ourselves disillusioned when God's path proves challenging. Jesus knew His disciples needed to realize their limited solutions **and row for hours in an unrelenting storm for their faith to grow.** **God loves us too much to let us believe that an easy path confirms His care.** **We need regular reminders that our strength is small, our needs are great, and our God is powerful.** Jesus's presence in the storm, power over the storm, and purposefulness through the storm matters. **Jesus can conquer whatever conquers us.** He measures our struggles in faith-building ways and dispenses His grace abundantly. What is God teaching you in your current storm? In what ways has Jesus come to you while you are rowing frantically and getting nowhere? Invite Jesus into your storm-tossed boat. **Trust God with what you cannot control.** Recognize your delusion and desire for sovereignty that belongs only to God.

Most often, we **do not recognize** God's greatest work and highest purposes in the world and our lives. The freshly fed crowd wanted a king who would meet their needs and fulfill their

purposes. A provision-craving, power-hungry world desires to “package” Jesus and fashion a god it can leverage to their own advantage. Human beings do not have the right or capacity to handle or manage their Creator. Nor should we desire to control a God who is infinitely good and loving. **The proper response to Jesus's sovereign control is trust.** How will you trust God with what He provides *and* what He does not provide? How willing are you to let God call the shots, set the agenda, and lead you? In many ways, we often equate God’s faithfulness with the fulfillment of our dreams. If God’s path for you does not meet your expectations, how willing are you to surrender to His plan? We can trust God with everything, even what we do not fully understand. Our limitations never limit God. Everything He does is right, good, and perfectly timed to accomplish His purposes. What will you surrender to Him today?

