

Group Study Outline

LAUNCH QUESTION

What things do you need in life?
How do you work out what you really need and what you just want?
Where would Jesus rank in that list? In the world's version of that list?

THE SIGN

READ John 6:1-13

What is the problem that Jesus is presenting Philip with in 5?
How does John underline how impossible it would be to feed them?
How does Jesus deal with the problem? How does He do it?!
How much food does Jesus provide? (12-13)

What is our reaction to this miraculous sign?
What would we have thought if we'd been there?

THE EXPLANATION

READ John 6:14-15

What did the people who *were* there think of this sign?
Who did they think Jesus was in 14? (cf Deuteronomy 18:15-19)
Were they right?
If they were right, what should they do according to Deuteronomy?

Who do the crowd think Jesus was in 15?
Were they right?
If they are right, why does Jesus run away from them?

We find out a bit more when the crowd find Jesus again the next day...

READ John 6:26-35, 47-51

In 26, what does Jesus say is the reason they are interested in Him?
What should they be interested in getting?
What do they need to do in order to get the eternal life-giving food? (29)
What are they challenging Jesus to do in 30-31?

What is Jesus' response to their demand for life-giving bread?
What does it mean that Jesus is the bread of life?
How important is Jesus claiming to be?
Do we really think we need Him like this says we do?
Do we really think our friends and neighbours need Him like this?

If He's the better Moses/prophet, how should we respond to Him?
If He's the better bread, how should we respond to Him?
If Jesus is our biggest need, what difference should it make to know that our biggest need has been met?

PRAY

John 6:1-15



John at a glance

'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.' (John 20:30-31)

This is the stated purpose of John's Gospel; to show us the signs (his word for Jesus' miracles) so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ and have life.

We're looking at each of the signs in John's Gospel this term, to see what we can learn about how Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, so that by believing we might have life, and so that we might be witnesses to others as well.

Where this passage fits in...

This is the fourth sign and the most public so far. Jesus has just been arguing with the Jewish leaders in chapter 5 about His authority to do what He does and say what He says. He says He's doing what God the Father sent Him to do. They claim to love God and obey the Bible but they don't really. In fact Moses, their hero on paper, condemns them because he was writing about Jesus and they reject Him (5:45-47). The feeding miracle of chapter 5 shows in what ways Jesus fulfils and exceeds Moses' ministry.

Theme Sentence

Jesus is the one we must listen to and believe in to have life.

Application

- Recognise who Jesus is.
- Listen to Him and believe in Him.
- Keep on listening to Him and believing in Him.

Commentary

- 1-4 Jesus is back on His home turf getting some time with His disciples. The crowds have seen the 'signs' Jesus did and they are chasing Him, presumably for more of the same. We're told it was nearly the Passover, not so we can imagine the time of year but for thematic reasons. The Passover story looms large of this feeding miracle.
- 5-9 There's a huge crowd and Jesus suggests feeding them. He knows what He'll end up doing (6) but He wants to know whether His disciples even think of leaning on His amazing power to do the job. Philip tells him it'd take 8 months wages for everyone to have just a nibble! Andrew mentions there's a little boy with a packed lunch but that's hardly enough for everyone! The point is being driven home; there is a big need and scant resources.
- 10-13 Jesus gets the crowd to metaphorically sit up at the table even though there is no food. We're dealing with 5000 men. Some suggest it could be double that number including the women and children! What will He do? He gave thanks for the loaves and fish and started dishing them out. Incredibly, the food never ran out! Everybody ate their fill, getting that Christmas afternoon stuffed feeling. What's more, when they gather up the leftovers (waste not, want not) there are twelve big basketfuls of scraps – waaaaay more food than they started with. This is a truly astonishing miraculous sign.
- 14-15 What is the response? The modern response is not to believe it. Secular people say it couldn't happen, failing to grasp that the impossible actually happening is kind of the definition of a miracle. Liberal Christians also say it didn't happen but instead when the crowds saw the little boy willing to share his lunch, they all brought out the sarnies they'd been hiding. Nonsense.

How do the people who were there respond? In 14 they say that Jesus is "the Prophet who is to come into the world!" They are referring back to Deuteronomy 18:15-19 where their beloved Moses promised in his deathbed sermon to Israel that one day God would raise up a new prophet like him. He would say would God told him to say and "it is to him you shall listen." There are grave threats to anyone who *won't* listen to this new prophet. The people recognise in Jesus this new Moses. He is the great prophet and people must listen to Him.

They also would like Jesus to be king (15). We know that Jesus *is* the King, the Christ, the Son of God. That's what the whole big is trying to persuade us of. So why does Jesus run away when they try to make Him king then and there? Presumably it's partly to do with what kind of king He is, i.e. not about politics and overthrowing the Romans. And it's partly to do with the timing, i.e. the kingdom will be established through His death and resurrection. But also because the people who are about to storm to the city for a coup are going for the wrong reasons. We see that as we investigate Jesus' interactions with the crowds on the following day...

- 25-27 Jesus has just walked on water across to the far side of the lake. (More on that next week!) And the crowds noticed something funny so they chase Him round to meet Him on the other side. Jesus seems less than pleased to meet them! He rebukes their motives. He says they aren't there because they saw the sign and are understanding what the sign points to about Him. They just enjoyed the free lunch and are after seconds. They need to be less preoccupied with their bellies and more about the food which lasts for eternal life. He starts using picture language here and it goes way over their heads!
- 28-31 The people want to know what God wants them to do to get this food. The answer is stark – believe in him whom he has sent. "Go on then," they say. "Give us a miracle so we can believe in you. Back in the day, Moses fed the people with bread in the desert. Top that!" (Errrr, feeding the five thousand, anyone?!)
- 32-35 Jesus makes an audacious claim. He says Moses' miracle in the wilderness wasn't the big thing. It's *God* who gives bread from heaven. And that bread is a person come down from heaven, giving life not just to one nation of people but the whole world. The crowd says yes please to that. And then Jesus hits them with the truth – "**I** am the bread!!!" It's *Jesus* who they must believe in.
- 36-46 The problem is that the people don't believe in Jesus even though they've seen Him in action first hand. But it's ok because all of God's true people *will* believe in Him. They will all come to Him and He'll never send them away. He came to give life, life which goes beyond death and through to final resurrection on the last day. The people grumble, just as Israel always did even when fed with bread. "How can he say he's from heaven? He's from Nazareth! We know his mum and dad! Who does he think he is?!" Again Jesus counters their rejection of Him by saying that the people who God is calling and teaching will be shown by the way they *do* come to Jesus.
- 47-59 He makes His point very clear. He is the bread we need, better than Moses' bread. Without Him, we'll die. With Him we'll live forever. Then He gets even more explicit that the bread He gives is His flesh. When they complain about this, He goes further – it's His flesh and His blood, i.e. it is in His death that He gives Himself to us. We must feed on Him and drink from Him. Jesus is not teaching about the Lord's Supper here. He just uses the same imagery to refer to His death. Eating and drinking the bread and wine of communion does not give life. Feeding here is explained as believing in Him. Communion is a way of expressing that faith but it is faith which is being called for here.
- 60-71 This is all too much for some of the disciples so they stop following Him (60, 66). Peter on the other hand gets it in 68, "Where else can we go? You have the words of eternal life." Jesus is the better Moses, speaking God's Word to us, so we must listen to Him. Jesus is the better bread, giving eternal life to us, so we must believe in Him. And go on believing Him. He really is all that we need.