

Spiritual Tests — The Feeding of the Five Thousand

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Main Scripture: John 6:1–14

All Scripture is from the NASB unless otherwise indicated

John 6:1–14

*1 After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). 2 And a great multitude was following Him, because they were seeing the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. 3 And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. 5 Jesus therefore lifting up His eyes, and seeing that a great multitude was coming to Him, *said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?" 6 And this He was saying to test him; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. 7 Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." 8 One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, *said to Him, 9 "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" 10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11 Jesus therefore took the loaves; and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. 12 And when they were filled, He *said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost." 13 And so they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, which were left over by those who had eaten. 14 When therefore the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is of a truth the Prophet who is to come into the world."*

I. Location

Verse 1 of chapter 6 informs us that Jesus had left Jerusalem where we see Jesus in chapter 5. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is seen going to Jerusalem for many of the appointed feasts where His ministry was viewed by devout Jews from all over (See ch. 4 v. 35). However, this usually stirred things up a bit with the scribes and Pharisees. Not being the appointed time for Him to die, Jesus would often leave Jerusalem when this happened and go to Galilee, especially the area near the Sea of Galilee, where His message was more accepted and got more results. Jesus did 18 of His 33 recorded miracles and taught most of His teachings there.

A. Other names for the Sea of Galilee

1. Sea of Chinnereth (Hebrew for harp-shaped, the lake's outline)
2. Lake of Gennesaret (fertile plain that lies to the northwest)
3. Sea of Galilee
4. Sea of Tiberias (association with Herod Antipas' capitol city)

B. Neighboring cities

1. Bethsaida (home of Phillip, Andrew, Peter and perhaps James and John)
2. Tiberias
3. Capernaum
4. Gennesaret

C. Miscellaneous facts about area

1. Sea of Galilee is about 60 miles north of Jerusalem
2. Sea is 13 miles long and 8 miles at widest point
3. Regional geography causes sudden violent storms
4. Thriving fishing industry

II. Multitudes followed Him

The miraculous signs and the healings that Jesus did drew large crowds that would follow Him. Unfortunately, these signs drew many after Him, instead of being drawn to Him. Signs and wonders can be a great boost to faith, but are not to be the foundation of it. The scribes and Pharisees, wanted signs. Take a look at how Jesus responds to them:

Matthew 12

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." 39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; 40 for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 "The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. 42 "The Queen of the South shall rise up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

A. Jesus goes up on the mountain seeking solitude, but crowds followed

1. Jesus often went up on the mountains to pray (Matthew 14:23, Mark 6:46, Luke 6:12 and 9:28) Note in v.5 He lifted up His eyes. He was either praying or deeply engaged in conversation with His disciples.
2. The news of John the Baptist death had just reached Jesus. (Matthew 14:12–13)
3. The Jews observed the approach of the Passover thirty days in advance, and knowing Jesus would soon depart for Jerusalem created an urgency to spend time with Him.
4. Jesus felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. (Mark 6:34)

III. Spiritual Tests

Notice that Jesus personally addressed Philip and asked where they could buy food for all these people approaching, even though Jesus knew what He was about to do.

A. Why Phillip?

1. **Practical knowledge of the area** — Philip was from the area, (Bethsaida) and would know where the baker's are, as well as the cost of the food. In fact he states the cost of about eight months wages and even that would allow everyone to have only a little.
2. **Was passionate** — Philip was the first evangelist, He brought Nathaniel to Jesus, (John 1:45) and wanted to see the Father. In John 14:8 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."
3. **Witnessed proof of Christ's creative miracles** — Philip was among the first disciples and had witnessed all of Jesus' miracle up to this point, most notably the water into wine in Cana. He had seen Jesus' creative power to provide in a situation where people lacked.
4. **Preparing him for a purpose** — Philip later was used by God as an apostle and evangelist. God often tests whom he wishes to use greatly. (Peter was tested as well, was also greatly used of God.)

B. Methods of Spiritual Tests

1. By demanding great sacrifices (Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, Genesis 22:1-2)
2. By leading in a difficult way (Forty years in the wilderness, Deuteronomy 8:2)
3. By giving choices (God asks Solomon what he wants, 1 Kings 3:5)
4. By proposing seemingly impossible tasks (As with Philip, John 6:5-6)
5. By permitting suffering when in the path of duty (Paul and Silas beaten and imprisoned, Acts 16:23-24)
6. By permitting temptation (Consider it joy, produces endurance, James 1:2-3)

C. Examples of faith tested

1. By a strange plan (March around Jericho, Joshua 6:3)
2. By reducing an army (Gideon's 300 from 32,000, Judges 7:7)
3. By requiring dependence (Elijah depends on a widow, 1 Kings 17:9)
4. By demanding the last bit (Elijah has the widows last bread, 1 Kings 17:13)
5. By requiring what appeared to be useless work (Trenches for water, 2 Kings 3:16)
6. By requiring extensive preparation without a blessing in sight (Collect jars for oil, 2 Kings 4:3)

D. Andrew tells of boy who has something, although very little.

1. Barley bread was the bread of the common people
2. Andrew realized he may go hungry, but wanted it to go as far as it could

E. Jesus instructs His disciples to have the people sit down.

1. The disciples suggested sending them away to buy food (Matthew 14:15),
2. Instead, Jesus had them make themselves comfortable, in a place where there was much grass.

Psalm 23

1 (A Psalm of David.) The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.

3. Five Thousand men only, not counting women and children.

F. Jesus gave thanks and then gave away.

1. Jesus gave thanks for five barley loaves and two fish. Not enough for over 5,000 people. He was thankful for what he had.
2. After giving thanks He took what was not enough and gave it away.
3. When finished, Jesus had provided not "just enough", but an abundance.
4. His disciples had gathered twelve baskets of "more than enough". Had they been looking out for their own interest, each would have had a small bite, instead of a basketful.

IV. Facing Spiritual Tests

B. Our Response

1. Praise and thanksgiving. We need to give thanks in all that we have. We must learn contentment and be able to praise God in our current circumstances before we ask or expect for more.

Acts 16

22 And the crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them, and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. 23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; 24 and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; 26 and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened.

2. Absolute trust in God

Psalms 55

22 Cast your burden upon the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.

3. Obedience to His Word and will.

Romans 16

25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

4. We must distribute what we have in faith, what little it may be, we must turn it over to Jesus.

Luke 16

10 "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.

5. Make your goal one that can't possibly be achieved without God. (Elijah soaks the altar of the Lord with water and calls down fire from heaven. 1 Kings 18:21-39)