

John 6:1-17a

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[0:00] Yeah, amen. Please join me in your copy of God's Word in John chapter 6. Amen.

Verse 17. Note that it begins with a crossing of the sea and it ends with the crossing of the sea. What's that called?

Chiasm. Thank you for asking. This sea, the Sea of Galilee, the region in which it is located, or the Sea of Tiberias, a city on its southwestern shore, is a long way from Jerusalem where we found Jesus teaching in chapter 5.

The after this of verse 1, therefore, could read at some point after this. So it's chronological, but it's not immediately chronological.

A journey has happened between these places. I bring this to your attention to highlight that John, under the Spirit of Christ's inspiration, is doing something clever, as I have said and will continue to say with the literary structure of this gospel account.

[1:38] It is chiastic in nature. You are likely familiar with the story before us today. It has made the pages of every children's storybook Bible, and it runs in the ethos of our cultural understanding of Jesus.

If you ask somebody who knows the name of Jesus, and you ask them a miracle he has performed, they would likely point you to one such as this.

But there is so much more happening here that we may have read right past, and I'm really eager to set aside the varied troubles of this week, as it has been a troubled week, for just a few moments with you, and see what John means to show us of Jesus Christ in these 17 and a half verses.

It's good for the church to be together this morning and to fix our gaze on Jesus. So before I read it, let me pray for our following time together.

Father God, we would ask this morning that you would help us as we take up this text together. We recognize humbly that it was inspired by you.

[2:55] It's breathed out by you. And so it's inerrant, and it's authoritative, and we should want to listen to it and rightly understand it.

We know that we need your help to do this. Help us believe its promises and obey its commands and have affection for you, its author. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

John 6, beginning in verse 1. After this, Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias.

And a large crowd was following him because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples.

Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes then and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, Where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?

[3:56] He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?

Jesus said, Have the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number.

Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated, so also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told the disciples, Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.

So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, This is indeed the prophet who has come into the world.

[5 : 01] Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum.

Now John sets the stage for the totality of chapter 6 with a sign or a miracle that is made necessary because of other signs.

Notice verse 2, A large crowd is following him. Why? Why is it that this large crowd has followed him? to a rather desolate place on the eastern coast of the sea.

It's because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. He's performing many miracles, relieving the temporary trouble of the world that he was in.

Signs anywhere that they are observed in gospel accounts are always meant to point us not toward the sign itself, but toward the Savior.

[6 : 12] The one performing the sign. They're affirming actions that Jesus is doing. People miss this. Again and again in the scripture, people concern themselves with the signs.

Look at what this man can do for us, they say. And they fail to look at who this man is. Hear him.

Understand who he is. Signs point to the Savior. And that's what I want to help us do this morning. Don't focus on the miracle.

It is miraculous. Focus on the miracle worker. And so we'll do that with a three-point outline. The first point will be Jesus, the bread of life.

The second, Jesus, the new and better Moses. And the third, Jesus, the now and forever king. First, Jesus, the bread of life.

[7 : 16] We see this across the text. This is the primary thing happening here in the setting up of chapter 6. So verses 3 through 9 and then 11 through 13.

Jesus is merciful. He is concerned with the temporal suffering of people. He does not neglect in this text or in our day today that we are embodied souls who live in a cursed world.

He cares more deeply than we can comprehend about our present condition. Whatever it is that you may suffer, Jesus knows more than even you do how hard that is.

He knows the tragedy of our suffering keenly. Notice in our text that he is performing miracles on the sick in verse 2. And then the miracle on display serves this crowd's temporal need for food.

They followed him out to a desolate place and they don't have a way to eat. He cares about the body. But, but, he cares ultimately about the soul.

[8 : 37] He serves temporal needs so that people will come to him to have their spiritual needs met. So Jesus in verse 3 goes up on the mountain and you could read this differently because my mind went, what mountain are we talking about?

Some significant things happen on mountains. But more, more readily you could read the mountains to a region out there that's east of that sea.

So up to the mountains. Not a particular spot, but a region. A place where he could go off with the disciples. And the Passover is at hand.

A time when the Jews took time to consider the mercy of God to them. And we find them coming to Jesus because of these miracles that are being performed.

And he says to Philip, as a test to Philip, where are we to buy bread so these people may eat. But he already knew what he was going to do.

[9 : 42] This phrase is significant. He himself knew what he would do. The whole stage is being set up for all that Jesus is going to teach in chapter 6.

Philip answers him, 200 denarii, 200 days wages worth of bread would barely be enough for these people to eat. And then Andrew offers that there's a young boy with five barley loaves and two fish.

How could that possibly feed this crowd? Now I want to be clear, the point of this text is to not be like this boy and offer what you have to Jesus. Although, you might want to derive some lesson from this little boy willing to give up his lunch.

But it is not the focus of this narrative at all. There is a legitimate need for food for these people. Jesus is not unsympathetic toward that need.

However, we will just miss the point if we reduce this text to him meeting this need. This text does not call us to a particular social agenda.

[10 : 56] This text is not about feeding the poor. We can go other places to find teaching about that. We should not reduce it to just that.

He does meet the need. And he meets the need miraculously. And he meets the need abundantly to be sure. Verse 11, we see that he takes these loaves and he gives thanks and he distributes to those who were seated.

And notice that the emphasis is on the bread. He takes the loaves and he distributes and John adds for us so also the fish. He did it with the fish too and they had as much as they wanted.

Everybody was fully satisfied. Verse 12 says, when they had eaten their fill. They are no longer hungry anymore.

He has them go and gather up all of the leftovers. There's 12 baskets with fragments of the loaves gathered up.

[12 : 06] Notice, not the fish. The loaves are gathered. Many make this passage an apologetic for abundant temporal living.

Take passages like this and make Jesus a miracle worker who's going to meet all of your temporal needs beyond your wildest imagination. The point of the text is that he's going to give you stuff in high order.

This is a great error. A massive error. And there's so much teaching in this regard. We often call it the prosperity gospel.

And I think all of us see the prosperity gospel in its greatest forms and know that it's error. We get that the private jet is not the point of the gospel.

But I wonder if sometimes we get confused down on a lower level. Why do I not have the things that I perceive I need?

[13 : 14] I am being faithful to Jesus. Why am I not being blessed the way I think I should be blessed? Haven't I done such and such?

Don't I faithfully read the word and pray and go to church and etc. etc. etc. etc. We make such an error when we make the gospel about the things we get here and now.

Does Jesus provide for our temporal needs? He most certainly does. but we must read on what's being taught to us here.

John's narrative means for us to read on to go beyond this story and set it in its context. Beyond this miracle we will see Jesus walk on water and then beginning in verse 26 Jesus presents himself as the bread of life and he does so to the end of the chapter.

That's the major thing going on in chapter 6. Jesus presents himself as the bread of life. That thing necessary for sustenance.

[14:32] We have to spend more time on this than we have this morning. We're going to unpack chapter 6 over quite a few weeks. All that it means for Jesus to be the bread of life.

But notice the way that he begins that discourse in verse 26. He says there, truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

The temporal bread. Your tummies were full, and that's why you're coming to find me. You're coming to me, he says, in essence, because of what I gave you, not because you want me.

I'm the bread of life, he'll go on to say. He'll spend the rest of the chapter making this very point. Humanity's greatest need is not to have their stomachs satisfied, satisfied, but to have their souls satisfied.

It's perhaps one of the greatest trials to have no trials at all. We are such a comfortable, comfortable people.

[15:52] I don't want to make light of the things that trouble you, or the things that trouble us, but relatively speaking, very few of us feared for our lives in this past week.

As a simple example, very few of us really suffer the way so many suffer in the world today.

And so we get a little uncomfortable, and our world seems to be falling apart, and just perhaps God in his great loving kindness to us is reminding us that the point is not to have our comfort satisfied, but to have our souls satisfied.

Jesus' primary concern is not our temporal affairs, but our eternal destiny. This life, although it doesn't always feel this way, is fleeting, passing, like a vapor in the wind.

Jesus loves us enough to have the rest of it beyond in mind, to serve us to that great end. Let me make this point just a bit further from the text, although I'm going to have to venture just a bit outside of it.

[17:15] What do you suppose the significance of verse 13 is? So those left by those who had eaten. Why does John record that fact for us?

Abundant provision, of course. They had all that they needed, their stomachs were full and beyond, but why 12 baskets?

Well, there were 12 disciples, 12 men who were told to go gather the fragments, so they each had a basket. They each held in their arms a collection of bread miraculously produced by Christ.

So if you can hold that image in your mind, pretend that you were holding a basket containing within it bread that was miraculously produced by Jesus.

And then, hold that image, and then note with me verses 16 through 21. Now, next week, Colson's going to preach next week's sermon.

[18:30] What does this story have to do with the rest of chapter 6? Have you noted it already? Are you scanning across it? Boy, I hope you have a Bible with you today.

We've got Jesus feeding the 5,000. This big emphasis on bread is going on, and then he's going to spend the chapter from verse 26 on. The rest of the chapter he's talking about him being the bread of life, and dropped in the middle of that is a story about Jesus walking on water.

Why? Why is it there? Is John just being chronologically consistent? Is that all that's going on here? I say no. We are meant to derive something from this.

Okay, so again, you've got a basket full of bread in your arms. Look at verse 16. When evening came, this is part of our text for today, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum.

It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. He's gone away. He's in a desolate place, removing himself.

[19 : 43] Verse 18. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing, so a great storm has arisen. When they had rode about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened.

But he said to them, it is I, or you could read I am, do not be afraid. Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

I hope your brain is firing off right now, just in case. Let me show you what's going on. In a boat, in the sea, in a storm, the sea is always a place of danger and judgment all throughout the scriptures.

And he just walks to them out on the water and he says, I am, do not be afraid. And then what do they do? They welcome the bread of life.

He's going to go on to talk about that. The bread of life into the basket. They welcome him into the boat. And immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

[21 : 01] The point is that Jesus is the bread of life and his great care and concern for these disciples. He's going to go on to talk about eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood and people are going to leave him in the droves and yet the disciples stay on.

He's teaching them a lesson when he gives them baskets and says, go collect the leftovers. He wants them to get that he is the one that can satisfy their souls.

Deliver them through judgment. So, that's number one. Jesus, the bread of life. Secondly, Jesus, the new and better Moses.

It is at this point that we find the center of the chiastic structure of our text. If you have been with us in our study of John, I hope you have been wondering where to find it.

Show us where it is. Which verse is it? If you have not been with us, keep coming and I hope to show you more of this brilliant literary device, I'll spare you the explanation this morning.

[22 : 13] Here it is. It's verse 10. It's meant to draw our attention. It's meant to help us understand something about this particular pericope.

Jesus said, have the people sit down. And then John adds, now there was much grass in the place, so the men sat down, which was a normal way of counting in those days.

Matthew adds for us that there are also women and children, about 5,000 in number. The Greek word used here for sit down, he says, have the people sit down, is different from the one used in verse 3.

Notice in verse 3 that he sits down with the disciples. Here, it's a different word, it would be better translated recline, recline, lie down, which was the manner that meals were taken.

In low tables, they reclined at table. It was a restful posture. It's not a ready-for-action kind of posture, to recline at a table.

[23 : 26] They were to lay down in a field. John adds to the narrative, there was much grass in the place.

I don't know if you do this, but I read past details like this all the time until I'm forced to sit with it and really go, why? Why that sentence? Why is that inspired?

Why is it significant? What is going on here at the center of the text? Again, hold something for me.

Hold that question in your mind. We're going to come back to it and look at verse 14. Verse 10 is the center of the chiasm. Look at verse 14.

When the people saw the sign that he had done, this miraculous feeding, they said, this is indeed the prophet who has come into the world.

[24 : 23] Your translation likely capitalizes prophet. The prophet. prophet. This reference to the prophet is from Deuteronomy chapter 18 and verse 15, where Moses says, the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you from your brothers.

It is to him you shall listen. This is the prophet that they're talking about here in verse 14. There was a diversity of opinion in Jesus' day about who the prophet of Deuteronomy 18.

15 would be. But some held a messianic interpretation. They understood, which was the right interpretation, that the prophet, like Moses, would be the Messiah.

Why would they consider Jesus to be the prophet of Deuteronomy 18. 15? Well, just as Moses led God's people out of captivity, into a wilderness place, and provided bread from heaven, it was understood that the Messiah would do the very same.

Moses shepherded God's people, and here we see Jesus doing the very same. Our minds, if they're steeped in the biblical narrative, ought to see this.

[25 : 52] It ought to leap from the pages. And I'll admit to you that it doesn't always do that for me. But Jesus is telling his disciples to command the people to lay down in a grassy field.

So back to that question I asked you to hold in your mind. What's going on at the center of the text? Jesus is presenting himself, and Jesus is being presented by John as the new and better Moses, the good shepherd, the prophet.

If you are with me on the literary structure of John, guess what chapter corresponds to chapter 6? Chapters 1 through 11 are a chiasm as well.

Guess which one? Chapter 10. Chapter 10 corresponds to chapter 6. And in chapter 10, Jesus' good shepherd discourse takes place. It's cool stuff.

Verse 10, Jesus said, have the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. Perhaps your mind goes to a place like Psalm 23.

[27 : 08] This kind of imagery is presented to you. Psalmist says there, the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. I should be satisfied. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. So we see Jesus in this text as the new and better Moses, the one who will lead his people out of captivity from sin, shepherd them in the wilderness, and finally deliver them to the promised land.

third, we see Jesus as the now and forever king. Verse 15 says, perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain or the mountains by himself.

As you study the gospels, you will note over and over the misconceptions of who the Messiah was to be. We have mentioned it already many times in our study of John.

The most common misconception was that the Messiah would come to liberate Israel from its Roman oppression, reestablish its former temporal glory.

[28 : 32] This is what most of them were looking to. That's who the Christ would be. Many Jews today, in the very same way, they're looking for the Messiah, for temporal relief. life. This is the issue at hand in verse 15. Did Jesus possess the power to gather an army and overthrow Rome? Of course he did. With a single word he could call down legions from heaven and wipe the Romans off the map. Jesus is God. But he came not to establish the kingdom of our choosing, but of his fathers. Recall chapter 5 verse 19. Jesus said to them, truly, truly I say to you, the son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the father doing. For whatever the father does, that the son does likewise. He knows that it's not his purpose to be made a king, to lead an army, to overthrow Rome. He has a higher purpose, right? A better fulfillment, a way that he's going to bring about an eternal kingdom that God the father ordained, God the son, and God the spirit accomplished.

[29 : 51] They establish it. Do you remember the title that Jesus most regularly gives to himself? He calls himself the son of man. Do you recall where that title comes from? It's Daniel chapter 7 verse 13 and 14. Daniel sees in a vision, in a dream, and says, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man. And he came to the ancient of days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all people's nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Jesus is not uninterested in the temporal affairs of man. He is. He's not indifferent to the tragedies of this past week. He cares. But we do well to note as we grapple with the state of our state that Jesus is firstly, primarily concerned with the eternal kingdom.

[31 : 09] How all of this plays into that, I don't know. I'm not sure how it's all going to come to pass, but what we can be sure is that it will come to pass. And the question for us in the meantime is how do we be faithful? God is establishing a kingdom and it's a kingdom that will come and will not be destroyed. That means that Jesus is the forever king, but he is also the now king. Jesus upholds the universe by the word of his power, Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 3. And that includes the minutia of things happening in our country, things happening in your home, things happening in your very own heart. Jesus is not relinquishing his control to anyone. I heard a question this week from somebody close to me how it just didn't make sense why God would allow this assassination to take place, because they saw a greater good in him remaining here.

[32 : 31] We ought to be people who trust in God's absolute sovereignty over all things. It doesn't diminish the tragedy of it, but God's people ought to be the most confident, unmoved people at times like this. We're going to be okay. You know why? Because Jesus reigns. If God is for us, who can be against us? So some quick application. I've already jumped into it a little bit ahead. Number one, go to Jesus for Jesus. If you're not found in Christ, don't come to Christ for what he can offer you. Many blessings, many blessings, infinite blessings are found in Jesus, but he himself is the greatest of all of those blessings. If that idea is just foreign to you, oh, please come talk to me.

I'd love to talk to you about the riches found in Christ himself. He is precious. And if you are in Christ, don't forget that truth.

[33 : 39] You're so quick to, yeah, yeah, Jesus, and want to move on from him and see what it is that he can accomplish on our behalf. Secondly, find rest for your souls in Christ.

He's the new and better Moses. He's the good shepherd and he invites us to lie down in green pastures to be satisfied in him.

It doesn't diminish our responsibilities. We have much to do on the earth, many things to think through, but our souls should remain at rest even as we work to live his will, bring about his good in the places that we live.

And finally, just trust. Trust in the reign of the king. He gives to his people tasks. He reigns through the life of his church in the world in which we live, but beloved, we have to start with trust.

We have to begin with that disposition. Our God reigns. He is not firstly concerned about the temporal affairs of this world.

[34 : 53] He is firstly, and praise God, he is firstly concerned about the building of his church, the second coming of his son, the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth where we will enjoy his reign forever.

Let's be a people that declare that, say it out loud, and experience it to be true in our own hearts. Let's pray together to that end. as