

Bread from Heaven

by Bayless Conley

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Okay. John 6, John 6. Before we start reading, let me kind of set the scene and give you some context because, as you know, text without context is a con. So, here's the setup for John 6. As a matter of fact, it's the longest chapter that we find here in the book of John. It comes in at a whopping 71 verses, and John breaks it into four distinct sections. The first two sections of this chapter record for us two very familiar stories and two very familiar miracles. The first, section one, is the feeding of the 5,000. Many of us would know that story. As a matter of fact, what's really neat about this story, this miracle, is that it's recorded in all four Gospel accounts in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and, of course, here in John. Then, we get into section two of the second story. The second miracle is where Jesus walks on the water. I love this one. There are some important things for us to learn within this story. This story is recorded in three of the four gospel accounts. When you consider each of these stories against the backdrop of the entire chapter, what we realize is that these stories are actually setting the scene for section three. They build upon each other and get us to the heart and soul of the chapter, where Jesus begins to teach the crowd.

What He does in His teaching is use imagery from these first two stories, from these first two sections. Then, He also uses a lot of language from the Old Testament book of Exodus. In this teaching, Jesus reveals to the crowd, and He reveals to us who He really is and what it means to really follow Him, which leads us into the final section of the chapter and confronts us with a choice. Am I going to accept Jesus's teaching, or am I going to reject it? And just like the heroes of the day this morning, we too will have to choose whether to accept it or reject it. So, like I said, it's a big chapter with 71 verses, and here's sort of our plan of attack. We're going to start by diving into the first two sections, these first two stories, and then quickly, from there, jump into Jesus's teaching because that is the heart and soul of the chapter. We're going to look at what He says. We're going to talk about its meaning and its implications for us as believers. Then, if all goes according to plan, we're going to end just like this chapter ends, with a question and with a choice. Am I going to accept, or am I going to reject what Jesus has just said? So, needless to say, there is a lot to cover this morning, more to say than I have time to say it in. So, why don't we start by praying and asking the Holy Spirit to be our guide? How about that? Come on, let's pray.

Father, we come to You now in the name of Your Son, Jesus. First and foremost, we say thank You for Your Word. Thank You that it's living, breathing, and active, that it's sharper than any two-edged sword. We know Your Word is supernatural. So, we ask now that by the power of Your Holy Spirit, You would illuminate Your Word to us. May it act like a mirror, Father, to reflect and show back to us the things that need to shift and change in our lives. But may it also, Holy Spirit, act like a light so that we can see the Father's plan for us to move forward into the call that He has placed upon us. Because ultimately, we want our lives to glorify and magnify the name of Jesus. Holy Spirit, would You help us today? It's in the name of Jesus we pray. Amen, amen, amen.

If you have your Bible, John 6:1–2 NKJV. John writes and says,

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¹ After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased.

Just keep your Bible open. We're going to go through quite a few verses here, but I want to just pause and highlight a couple of things as we go. First and foremost, John begins by saying, "After these things." What things, John? After Jesus worked many different miracles in many different cities amongst many different regions, after these things, then he writes in verse two that a great multitude followed Him. Now, that word multitude in the original language in the Greek speaks of a large mob of people, a large crowd of people. That's pretty obvious. And that word, honestly, by itself, would probably be enough to describe the scene, but John adds another word. He adds a descriptor. He calls it a great multitude. He's letting us know that this is the biggest and the largest crowd of people that has followed Jesus up to this point in His ministry. He's talking about thousands, upon thousands, upon thousands of people. He says this great multitude followed Jesus. If you have a pen, maybe circle that word followed. That word in the original language is in the infinitive form. In other words, it means "they followed, and they followed, and they followed, and they followed." Whichever direction Jesus went, the crowd went.

Whatever direction Jesus turned, the crowd turned. Whatever region Jesus went into, they went into as well. Why? Verse two tells us, "Because they saw." That word in the original language literally speaks of spectators who are sitting at a play or a performance. It's a theatrical term. They're watching. They're seeing a scene unfold in front of them. Well, what exactly are they seeing? Verse two tells us again, they see Jesus perform miracles on the diseased. And that word perform is an interesting word in the original language. It's the Greek word poieo, which literally is where we get our English word poet, meaning that there was a creative flair and or creative action taking place. So, in context, what this is saying is that Jesus is not just performing simple miracles on the crowd, but there's a creative aspect element and flair to Jesus's miracles. He's creating eyes where there were no eyes. He's creating limbs where there were no limbs. Jesus is doing the impossible. There is this creative aspect to the miracles. As the people sat, they watched enthralled by what they saw. And that's why they followed, and followed, and followed wherever Jesus went. John 6:3-4 NKJV says,

³ And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.

⁴ Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near.

Again, just pause. There are a couple of things to note that are really important here. It says, "Jesus went up on a mountain there. He sat with his disciples." John is being really intentional in his language. He says, "Jesus went up on a mountain." This is a direct reference to the Old Testament and to the character and story of Moses at Mount Sinai. Keep Moses in the back of your mind. We're going to come back to him time and time again. John is reminding his readers, he's reminding us that God things happen up on mountains, that mountains are important places, and that supernatural things happen up on mountains. He records that Jesus goes up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. Now, anytime in the ancient world, a rabbi would sit, it's time to focus in and pay attention because he's about to reveal something definitive about God, the law, or the Torah. To sit is to take the posture of a teacher. Then, he highlights to us that the Passover was near. By saying that, John is doing a couple of things. First, he is obviously giving us context. He is letting us know the time of year, that it's near the Feast of Passover. What this does is it gives credibility to the great multitude of people who are following Jesus because they're making their pilgrimage from whatever city, perhaps

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Capernaum. Now, they're on their way to Jerusalem; that's what Passover was. It was a pilgrimage feast where everyone came from their cities, from their towns and made their way to Jerusalem. So, John is setting the context, but he's also intentionally drawing our attention back to the Old Testament character of Moses with whom the Passover started. Again, just file Moses away in the back of your mind. He's going to play a prominent role as we continue within the chapter. Look at John 6:5–7 NKJV. It says,

⁵ Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip (who was one of His disciples), "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" ⁶ But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. ⁷ Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little."

So, catch the picture here. Jesus lifts up His eyes. They're up on the mountain. He sees this large multitude of people coming. He turns to Philip, and He goes, "Hey, where are we going to get enough bread to feed these people?" But John says that Jesus already knows what He's going to do, but He said this to test Philip. Now, that word test in the original language is a test designed to reveal a deficiency. Now, if you insert yourself here into the text, it would seem to me that after the disciples had seen all of the creative and miraculous things that Jesus had been doing. That either Philip or one of the disciples would have said, "Lord, I don't know how we're going to feed these people or where we're going to get the bread. I'm not sure what we're going to do, but You're here. We've seen You do the impossible, and we've come to know and believe that with You, nothing is impossible." But they don't respond like that, do they? Instead of responding in faith, they immediately move into panic and fear. Philip goes into math mode inverse seven. He's like, "Man, 200 denarii or 200 days worth of salary wouldn't be enough to even give each of these people a little bit to eat."

Let me give us something to consider this morning. How many times in our own lives have we seen God do the miraculous? How many times in our lives have we seen God do the miraculous for other people, but then yet, in moments of needs, instead of responding in faith, we respond like these disciples, and we move into panic and fear? I'd love to stand up here and tell you that as a pastor, as a man of God, I never move into fear, but truth be told, and it's embarrassing to admit this, I oftentimes find myself in this same place, especially when it comes to the area of finances. The truth is, I can't even tell you why I begin to move into fear. It's not like I can point back to a specific moment that triggers this memory, and now I move into fear. But for whatever reason, every time the topic of finances comes up, I feel this fear and/or consternation begin to bubble up within my soul. Again, it's not like I can point to a traumatic moment. It just happens. But honestly, if I reflect back, the opposite of that is true. I've never had a traumatic experience. God has always been faithful. God has always taken care of me and my family. God has always taken care of the church. Yet it's so weird because often, when finances come up, I find myself going into panic mode. When I actually take the time to remember and think back, I know that Psalm 37:25 NKJV is true. Many of you know this verse. I've experienced it in my life. You've experienced it in your life. The verse goes like this.

²⁵ I have been young, and now am old; (almost 40) yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.

In other words, God is always taking care of our needs. As a family and as a church, He is always taking care of my needs. Again, if I'm honest, when it comes to this area of finances, for whatever reason, I find myself moving into fear rather than faith. When I do that, I know it's because I'm not doing a good job of remembering. Thank God for my wife. Man, I married way

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above my pay grade. Our Australian friends would say it like this: I'm punching above my weight class. She is so good about this. If she sees me starting to stress out with finances, she goes, "Hey, hey, remember how good God has been. Remember how He came through last time? Remember how He did the supernatural?" I wish I had time to go story by story by story of all the things God has done and provided for us. What I do is I begin to rehearse these moments over and over in my mind. I begin to rehearse them over and over from my lips. I begin to thank God for His faithfulness. As I remember the goodness of God, as I remember His creative power in my life, I begin to find and feel His peace wash over me, and that fear begins to subside.

Now, again, being vulnerable with you. For me, it's the area of finances. It may not be that for you. That area that takes you into fear or panic might have to do with your health. It might have to do with your kids. I'll let you fill in the blank. But when you find yourself moving from faith into fear, I just want to encourage you to remember what God has done for you. To remember what God has done for others. To remember His faithfulness. Here is the key to remembering. I mentioned it a moment ago. The key is rehearsing. Rehearse it verbally with your mouth. Talk about the stories. Thank God for His faithfulness. But then, as well, rehearse it in your mind. Meditate upon those moments. Think about them often. I'm telling you, if He was faithful before, He is going to be faithful again. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Let's go back to the text for a moment. John 6:8–10 NKJV

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 small fish, but what are they among so many?" ¹⁰ Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

So, here are the disciples. Instead of asking Jesus what He wants to do in the situation, they go on a food hunt. They're like, "We have to make this happen." So, they go looking for food, and verse nine says they find a lad. I really love this. That word lad in the original language speaks of somebody who is under seven years old. This is a little boy. By the way, little kids play a prominent role in God's kingdom. They find a lad, a young man, who's got five mini muffins or five barley crackers and two little pickled sardines that he uses as relish on the crackers. I like to call it a little Hebrew Happy Meal. This kid has a Hebrew Happy Meal. One of the disciples sees the crackers and the fish and goes, "Hey, we have to give this to Jesus." He begins to do the math, and the math is just not adding up. He's like, "Lord, look, we have this, but what good are these things when there's so many?" How many are we talking about? Verse 10 tells us about 5,000 men. Now, in the ancient days, they would have numbered just the men. But when you consider women and children, conservatively, we're talking about 12,000 people. When you consider that it is near the Feast of Passover and people are making their pilgrimage, and they're traveling with their spouses, their kids, their grandparents, their goldfish, and their dog, we could be talking upwards of 20,000 people. I saw one scholar put it at 40,000.

Here is the point. With a multitude so great and with what is currently available to feed them, the disciples see a lack. But what does Jesus see? He sees grass. The disciples see lack, but Jesus sees grass. At the end of verse 10, John highlights that there was much grass in the place. So, Jesus made them sit down. "Much grass." It's a really interesting detail, isn't it? It got me thinking: why would John put that detail there in the story? So, I started to dig a little bit. When you read this same story out of Mark's Gospel account, Mark 6:34–39, there is more detail given. It says that Jesus sees the multitude, and He has compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then, Mark highlights the fact that there was much green grass in the place. So, Jesus made them sit down on the green grass. Interesting. Does

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that language remind you of anything you've ever heard before? Maybe Psalm 23. "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down or sit down in green pastures amongst the green grass." So, both John and Mark record these details for us to draw our attention back and remind us that Jesus is not just a man. He's the God Man. He's the Good Shepherd. Not only does He care for the flock, but He provides for the flock. As we jump into the next section of verses, we're going to see the miraculous provision of the Good Shepherd. Look at John 6:11–13 NKJV.

¹¹ And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." ¹³ Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

A couple of things to note here. It says, "Jesus took the loaves." Can I just tell you? Jesus will take whatever it is we're willing to give Him. It could be much, or it could be meager, but whatever we are willing to offer Him, He is willing to take, and He can do much more with what we give Him than we could do with it ourselves. Jesus takes the loaves, or He takes the crackers, and the Bible says, "He gave thanks." Literally, there was an overflow of gratitude, an overflow of worship and thanksgiving to God. But you're like, "It's just a couple of crackers Jesus, what are You giving thanks for?" He's thanking the Father for His provision. As Jesus gave gratitude, worship, and thanksgiving to God, a miracle began to take place. What was in His hands began to multiply. Hear me. This is what happens when we put what we have into the hands of Jesus. When Jesus asks us for something, we have to remember that He is not asking us so that He can take it. He's asking us so that He can multiply it. He wants to multiply it to the point where not only you abound or I abound, but so that we are able to then bless others as well. Verse 12 says that all the people, the whole multitude were filled. That word filled in the original language is there twice. They were filled, filled. They were filled to overflowing. They ate, and they ate, and they ate until their bellies began to ache. Reminding us that God is not a God of lack. He's the God of abundance. He's the God of more than enough to the point where John records that Jesus tells His disciples to pick up the fragments and there are 12 basketfuls left over. One for each of the disciples.

Here's what I want us to consider this morning. Jesus is trustworthy with the things that we commit to Him. He's trustworthy with the things that we put into His hand. We don't have to be afraid to put things in His hand, whether it's our talents, whether it's our finances, whether it's our family, whether it's our lives, our jobs, or our dreams for the future. I'm reminded of what Paul would write to Timothy. He said, "Hey, I know whom I have believed, and I'm persuaded that He's able to guard, keep, and hold the things that I commit to Him." I'm reminded of what the great reformer, Martin Luther, has said. He said, "I've held many things in my hand, and I've lost them all, but whatever I've placed in God's hands, those things I still possess." Then, we get to verse 14, and this acts as a bit of a segue that takes us not only to the next story and to the next miracle, but actually foreshadows the heart and soul of what Jesus is going to teach us in just a few minutes. If you have your Bible, John 6:14 NKJV says,

¹⁴ Then those men, (or the crowd) when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

"When they had seen the sign that Jesus did," what was the sign? There in the wilderness, Jesus had miraculously fed the multitude with bread. Why is this significant? It's significant

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because it reminds the people of how God worked through Moses to feed Israel in the wilderness with manna, with bread from heaven. Here's Moses again. Listen, it cannot be overstated how important a figure Moses is to the Jewish people. He was their first, and he was their greatest rescuer and redeemer. He was the one who took them out of slavery in Egypt and led them through the wilderness into their promised land of freedom. For the multitude, this act of Jesus multiplying the bread is connecting them in their minds back to their national hero, Moses. Then, notice the next phrase that the crowd uses when they describe Jesus. They use this phrase. "Truly, this is the prophet who has come into the world." What we miss in our 21st-century eyes would have been plainly obvious for John's first-century readers. Again, John is intentionally drawing our attention back to Moses. In Deuteronomy 18:15 NKJV, Moses prophesied this.

¹⁵ "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear..."

So, in the minds of the people, if the coming Prophet was going to be like Moses, it made all kind of sense that He would also feed the people miraculously with bread, just like Moses had fed the children of Israel. Again, this comparison to Moses, just file that way. I promise we're going to come back and make a greater point in just a moment. At this point in the story, after being fed to the point of overflow and now connecting the miracle back to Moses' prophecy about the coming Prophet, it's easy to say that the crowd, the multitude, is in a frenzy. So much so that verse 15 records for us that they try to take Jesus by force to make Him their king, but this is not the type of king that Jesus came to be. He had come to establish a spiritual kingdom, but the crowd wanted Him to be a physical king. They wanted to make Him king because He could fill their bellies and give them stuff. As long as Jesus would give them what they wanted, they would love Him.

As you read this, it's very transactional. It's very, "What have you done for me lately?" It's unfolding here in the text. We read that, and if we're not careful, it gets really easy to criticize the crowd for their behavior and their thinking. But truth be told, as the Scripture acts like a mirror, this is the point in the story where we have to ask ourselves, how often do we act just like the crowd? Where our following and our love for Jesus is predicated upon what He can do for me and what He can give me. And make no mistake, don't get me wrong, He is a giving God. He delights in blessing His people. Ephesians 3:20 says, "He's able to do exceedingly, abundantly above what we could ask, think, or imagine." Hear me. We have to first love Him and obey Him for who He is, not what He does for us. We worship Him, we follow Him, and obey Him because He is Creator, He is Lord, and He is God, that comes first. So, Jesus, knowing that the crowd is going to try and forcibly make Him king, sends them away, and He retreats to the solitude of the mountain.

I'm so impressed by this, by the humility of our Savior, because He is not impressed or seduced by the crowd. He's not looking to find His identity in what the crowd says about Him. No, He sends them away. Instead of indulging the crowd, He goes off by Himself to pray and be with the Father. What an example that is, especially now in our modern-day, social-media-driven lives, where we live and die by the voice and the opinion of the crowd. Jesus goes away, up on the mountain, and gets away from the many voices of the crowd and leans into one voice, the voice of the Father. He was more interested in what the Father had to say than He was in hearing the applause and the adulation of the crowd. Let me ask you, and I'll just kind of let this one linger in the air for a moment. Whose voice is shaping your life? Is it the voice of the crowd? Do you live and die by your next social media post and what people have to say about it?

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Whose voice is shaping your life? The crowd or the Father? So, Jesus makes His way up on the mountain, and then the text transitions into section two, in miracle two of our story.

For the sake of time, I'm not going to go verse by verse here. I'm just going to summarize. You can go back through it this week and read each verse in detail. In verses 16–21, we see some things begin to unfold. The first couple of verses tell us that now evening has come, and the disciples go down to the sea. They get into a boat and are going to cross the sea. They're going to go to the city of Capernaum. It's on the far side of the Sea of Galilee. One interesting note about that is in both Matthew's account and Mark's account of this same story, it records that Jesus actually made His disciples go down and get into the boat. He made them get into the boat. Why? Perhaps Jesus saw the effect that the crowd was having on the disciples. Maybe they were getting caught up and carried away with the crowd's excitement and desire to make Jesus king, and they were beginning to think, "Where do I fit in this positionally in this new kingdom?" They're becoming seduced by the voice of the crowd. I don't know. That might be my thought, but we don't know for sure. All we know is that Jesus makes them get into the boat, and He sends them off by themselves to cross the sea.

Meanwhile, Jesus goes back up on the mountain to pray. It's such an interesting picture. Verses 18–19 in the Bible says that as the disciples are in the boat, a storm comes up on the sea, and John uses specific language. He says, "A great wind begins to blow." This is a sizable storm. Now, we might be scared if a sizable storm came up, but you have to remember, most of these disciples are professional fishermen. They spent their lives on the water. So, when it says a storm arose, we don't need to immediately infer that they're afraid for their lives. I think as you keep reading, you actually find the opposite to be true. They're not afraid. They're more frustrated. Verse 19 says that they had rowed three or four miles, and then when you look at Matthew and Mark's account of this story, you see that from their starting location, it was seven miles across the Sea of Galilee. It should have only taken them two hours by boat, but now it's the middle of the night. They've been rowing for six plus hours, and they still have half the distance to cover. Let me ask you, have you ever been there before? Not on the Sea of Galilee, but have you ever been in that place of obedience where you're doing exactly what Jesus asked you to do, yet it seems like a great storm has arisen? It seems like the wind is in your face. It seems like no matter what you do, everything is going wrong. Everything is harder than it has to be, and it seems like you can't quite get that forward momentum. Have you ever been there before? I have.

Even presently, if I'm honest. This is something I've talked about many times here from this pulpit. Two years ago, we felt God tell our church that we were supposed to launch a campus in Nashville. So, out of obedience to what God was asking us to do, we went, and God opened all kind of doors. I could sit here and tell you story after story. God has given us unprecedented favor in the city. He has surrounded our team with the highest quality of people. We have this core group that make up the beginnings of a congregation. Everything was going great until it wasn't, because we've been ready to launch our church for a year, but we've not been able to find a venue. We've been ready to launch this Cottonwood campus, but there's not been a venue come available. As a matter of fact, we've checked out venue after venue. We've gone, and it's looked promising, and they've led us on. They've strung us on for weeks, and weeks, and weeks, only to then go, "Ah, you know what? It's not going to work." And you're like, "Lord, You told us to go. You've surrounded us with favor." We've been wanting to launch this in obedience, but it just seems like every door keeps getting shut, and after hearing no, after no, after no, you're not able to go, "Hey, God has something better for us." It actually becomes a point and a subject of frustration, because although we've been obedient to what God has asked us to do, we feel like the disciples. Where you've been straining at the oar, tirelessly

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going, but you're having to fight the wind every step of the way. Again, that's sort of our story presently, but I'll let you fill in the blank. What's your story? If you're in that place, there are a couple of things that we need to consider from the next few verses.

First of all, it's this: following Jesus doesn't mean the absence of storms in our life. Contrary to popular opinion, following Jesus does not mean you have a perfect, easy life. If you were told that, and if that's what you signed up for, you were lied to. On the contrary, these disciples are in the middle of Jesus's will. They are obeying His command. They're doing exactly what they've been asked to do, and yet they find themselves in a storm. That gives me great hope. Not because I'm a masochist and I love storms, no, but because storms are often an implication and an indicator that I'm on the right track. Here's the second thing to consider, and this one gives me such great hope. Even in the midst of a storm, Jesus has His eye on us. He has His eyes on us. Mark's account of this same story records that Jesus is up on the mountain praying. He's communing with the Father. As He's up with the Father, the Bible says this in the book of Mark 6:48: Jesus saw the disciples straining and rowing, for the wind was against them. Please catch this imagery. Jesus is up with the Father, yet His eyes are on the disciples as they strain and fight. Here's why I want you to see this imagery. It's exactly what Jesus is doing right now. He's up in heaven. He's seated at the right hand of the Father, and do you know what He's doing? He's praying. He's praying, and as you and I struggle at the oars of this life, He also has His eyes on us. His eyes are on us, and He's praying for us. Listen to this verse out of Hebrews 7. Hebrews 7:25 says, "Therefore, Jesus is able to also save forever, completely, perfectly, for eternity, those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to intercede and intervene on their behalf with God."

So, not only does Jesus have His eyes on you, but He's also praying for you. He's talking to the Father about you. He lives to intercede on your behalf. Hear me; if Jesus is praying for me, there is no storm in the world that can take me under. Then, quickly, going back to the text in verse 19 is where things get really interesting. Here we see Jesus come down off the mountain. He begins to walk on top of the water towards the boat. This is super significant for a few reasons. One, just like the disciples, when we find ourselves in a storm, we can take comfort in the fact that we're not alone. Not only does Jesus see us, not only is Jesus praying for us, but He comes toward us. He comes to us, and He does that through His Holy Spirit, who, by the way, is our Comforter, our Helper, and our ever-present Guide. Secondly, Jesus walking on the water is super important. It's significant because it shows us that He has all power over demonic forces. This one is significant. In the ancient world, the sea was thought to be the domain of darkness. It was thought to be the place where demonic entities dwelled. Remember that story where Jesus crosses the sea, and He comes to this place? There is a demoniac that comes out. Jesus casts out the demons, and the demons are speaking to Jesus, saying, "We are legion, for we are many." Jesus says, "You have to come out of here." They go, "Well, look, look, don't send us into the abyss. Let us go into that herd of swine." So, Jesus is like, "Go." They go into the herd of swine. The swine run off a cliff and drown themselves in the sea.

We read that, and we're like, "Man, that's weird." But in the first century, it would have been understood that those demons were going back to their stronghold, back to their place of dwelling there in the sea. Here in our text, we see Jesus coming to the disciples, and he's walking on top of the water. He's walking on top of the domain of darkness, demonstrating His total power over supernatural and demonic forces. There is nothing in this world, not a principality, a power, a ruler, or a thing of darkness, that can stop our Jesus. He has all power. Lastly, this picture of Jesus walking on the water is significant because, once again, it connects us back to the story and to the character of Moses. It does that in a couple of ways. First, it connects us back to Moses in a very obvious way. Do you remember that it was Moses

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who demonstrated power over the elements? He split the Red Sea, and he led the children of Israel across on dry land. Here in our story, Jesus, the greater Moses, doesn't have to split the sea, but rather He demonstrates His power over the elements by walking on top of the sea. The second way that John connects us back to Moses is by recording the specific language that Jesus uses when He walks near the boat. You can read it here in the Gospel of John. He says, "Guys, it's I. It is I. Don't be afraid." That language, it's I. Do you remember back in the Old Testament when Moses had that burning bush encounter with God? God says, "Hey, look, the cries of My people have come forth. I want you to go to Egypt. I want you to go to Pharaoh, and I want you to say to him, 'Let My people go.'" Moses goes, "Oh, okay, cool, Lord, but who should I tell Pharaoh who sent me?" What does God say? He says, "Tell him I am sent you."

So, when Jesus approaches the disciples in the storm, He says, "Don't be afraid. It is I." As a matter of fact, in the language, it's the same exact phrase that God used when He spoke to Moses, that "I am" language. What He's doing is revealing to His disciples afresh that He is divine, that He is God, and that He is the supernatural Jehovah. This is revelation language. On that note, when you consider the same story, Jesus walking on the water, but you read it from Mark's gospel, which, by the way, Mark's Gospel is Peter's eyewitness account. You see a similar revelation. You see a similar revelation but a different language. Mark 6:48 says this: as Jesus comes walking on the water toward the boat, He was actually about to pass them by. Why would He do that? That's weird. He was about to pass them by, but Mark is using specific revelation language here. Where else have you seen that phrase pass by? Moses. Remember when Moses says to God, "God reveal to me, show me Your glory."? God says, "Moses, no one can see My glory and live, but here is what I'll do. I'm going to place you in the cleft of a rock, and I'm going to cause My backside to pass by you." So, when Mark records that Jesus was about to pass by His disciples, he does it intentionally to take us back to the story of Moses.

Now, one final word of encouragement before we jump into Jesus's teaching in this third section of the chapter. Verse 21 tells us that Jesus gets into the boat with the disciples. I love this. As soon as He gets in the boat, it's recorded that the boat was immediately at the shore where they were going. Listen, you might be in a storm right now. You might feel like you are straining, struggling, and not making any headway. Can I just encourage you? Stay obedient, stay faithful, and lean into it. Remember that Jesus sees you. He's praying for you. He sent His Holy Spirit to help you and be present with you. In a moment, immediately He is able to get you where you need to be. He is able to make up the time that you feel like you've lost and do a miracle that settles your soul. That's what I'm believing for in Nashville. It feels like we've been straining, but I'm believing that in a moment, immediately, we're going to have that miracle. The venue is going to open, and God is going to do the miraculous. It's going to seem like the time that was lost is actually made up. But you read this, and it's this cool miracle. Immediately, they are at the shore. I don't know if you've ever been like me where you read it, and you wonder, "Why didn't Jesus just calm the storm?" There was precedent for that. He has done it before. Remember, He calmed the storm with the Word. He said, "Peace, be still." Why doesn't He just do that now?

Maybe you find yourself crying out in your storm for help, going, "Lord, Lord, calm the storm. You did it before. Lord, You calmed the storm for so-and-so. I've seen You do it. Would You do it now for me in the same way?" But it hasn't happened for you, and you feel like, "Man, I'm just sitting here straining. God, why aren't You doing this again?" Could it be that because God rarely does the same thing in the same way twice, He is actually wanting to do something new and different in your story? I don't know about you, but I do know this for sure. Our God is not a God who will be pigeonholed. Perhaps, in the midst of storms, He is more interested in making sure we get a revelation of who He is rather than acting like a genie in a bottle and doing what we say when we say to do it. Perhaps, just like in our story, God is wanting to reveal different

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aspects and characteristics of His nature that we wouldn't see outside the confines of a storm. Maybe He wants to reveal to us that He is not just Savior, not just the one who can take us out of the storm, but, actually, He is sustainer. He sees us through the storm. He is not just rescuer, but He is also the provider. So again, maybe you feel like the disciples, and you feel like you're in a season of frustration and straining. Listen, you can take heart. You can be of good cheer because King Jesus sees you, and He is praying for you. He is with you by His Holy Spirit. He has all power over demonic forces. In the process of obedience, He is revealing to you new and glorious aspects of His nature and character. He is Savior. He is sustainer. He is the rescuer, and He is the provider. Then, we come to the heart and soul of the chapter, section three, verses 22–59. Everything that John has recorded up until this point is setting us up for this moment. We see this same crowd that had miraculously been fed by Jesus the day before. They are now looking for Jesus again, but they come to Him with the wrong intentions. They had been fed well the day before, and now, they show up in Capernaum looking for more of the same. They expect Jesus to be a free meal ticket for them. In verse 26, if you have your Bible, Jesus is about to expose the motives of their heart. In John 6:26b NKJV, He says to the crowd,

²⁶ “You seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.”

In other words, “You have now come to Me because I filled your bellies, and you want another free meal. You came to find Me not because I have stuff to give you spiritually, but you came after Me because you want the benefits that come from Me for what I can physically do and physically provide for you.” What Jesus is doing is teaching them and teaching us that there is a greater hunger that needs to be fulfilled. He is not talking about physical hunger in our bellies. He is talking about spiritual hunger in our hearts. This is a hunger that every human heart longs for. It longs to be satisfied. Jesus is saying, “Look, this hunger that you feel, it can only be filled and satisfied in a relationship with Me.” He's going, “Hey, look, guys. You're in the right place, but you're after the wrong thing. It's not about your bellies being filled. It's actually about your soul and what's hungry and missing in your soul. I am the only one who can satisfy that need.” Look at what He says in verse 27. I promise I'm almost done. I promise we're about to finish, but we need to catch this. John 6:27 NKJV, Jesus reiterates this point. He says,

²⁷ “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”

Here's what we have to see. Jesus is making a contrast between material things and spiritual things, but the crowd doesn't see it. The crowd doesn't get it. I wonder this morning; do you see it? Do you get it? Look at the crowd's response in verse 30. They go, “What sign will You perform then? What one new miraculous act will You do that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Jesus, we need You to perform.” Then, they bring up Moses and the Exodus story. Suddenly, we understand why John has been constantly hinting at this throughout section one and section two. He is letting us know that Moses was a type and a shadow of Jesus who was to come. The life of Moses, the story of Moses, is just a precursor pointing us to Jesus. Watch this. In John 6:31 NKJV, the people say, “Our fathers ate the manna in the desert.” There's the connection back to Moses.

³¹ “Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

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I love Jesus's response. In essence, He is going, "Oh, I see what you're doing here. Y'all like Moses? Okay, cool. That's why you flock to Me because you think I'm like him because he gave you and your fathers bread in the wilderness, and I gave you bread in the wilderness yesterday. Oh, that's why you come." Jesus is about to put all their misconceptions to bed. He goes, "No, no, no, I'm not like Moses. If anything, Moses is like Me. Moses was just a foreshadow that pointed to Me. If you like the bread and the manna that he gave your fathers, just wait." In John 6:35b NKJV, Jesus goes,

³⁵ "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

Drop down to John 6:47 NKJV. Jesus goes on. He doubles down on this thought. He says this.

⁴⁷ "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life."

Why? John 6:48 NKJV, because

⁴⁸ "I am the bread of life."

Jesus goes, "This is what separates me from Moses." John 6:49 NKJV,

⁴⁹ "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, (And guess what?) and are dead."

Jesus goes, "Look, I've come to give you something completely different, not physical bread. I've come to give you eternal bread that gives you life." John 6:50–51 NKJV,

⁵⁰ "This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

So, three times in just a few short verses, Jesus makes this declaration. "I am the bread of life." This is the first of seven "I am" statements Jesus is going to make throughout this Gospel of John. But in making this declaration, this is what Jesus is getting at. This is what He was saying to the multitude. This is what He is saying to us this morning. Number one, He is saying, "Hey, look, guys. I'm God. I'm God." When Jesus says, "I am the bread of life," that "I am" is what theologians call Exodus language. Jesus is revealing Himself to the crowd as God. He is Jehovah, the same eternal covenant-keeping God who spoke with Moses, and revealed Himself to Moses. We covered that just a moment ago at the burning bush. Moses goes, "God, who shall I tell sent me?" God says, "Tell them 'I am' sent you." Jesus is using the same language. He is declaring, "I am the same eternal covenant-keeping God. I am Jehovah." Guess what? Just like the crowd that day who heard those words, you and I, today have to choose as well. Am I going to accept this? Or am I going to reject this? The Scripture tells us that many in the crowd that day struggled with this statement. Verse 60 says that this is a hard statement. As a matter of fact, it says that they began to argue amongst themselves. "How can He make this declaration that He came down from heaven? We know His parents." They struggled with this, and they argued with it.

Hear me; it's the same reflection of many in the crowd today. We hear this declaration of Jesus. "I'm God, and I've come to bring you eternal life." But we argue about it, and because we can't figure everything out logically and because it's a hard statement to accept, many of us walk

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away. This morning, the most important decision in your life will come down to how you respond to this claim of Jesus. Is He God? Or is He not? I'm telling you that you have to choose. There is no middle ground here. This is a binary decision. Either He is the eternal son of God coming into the world to save you, or He was just a man, a good moral teacher who lived 2,000 years ago. You have to choose. Is Jesus God? Or is He not? Here's the second thing that Jesus is revealing by saying, "I am the bread of life." He's saying, "Look, guys, I'm the only one who satisfies." He's saying, "I am the true fulfillment of what every human heart longs for." Meaning that if you look to anything else, anything outside of Christ, to fulfill the hunger and thirst in your soul, you will find that it will not satisfy. The desire to be known and to have your identity secured will not be fulfilled in more human relationships. It will not be fulfilled in more sexual encounters. It will not be fulfilled by climbing the corporate ladder. It will not be fulfilled by having 10 degrees and the title doctor affixed to your name. Jesus says, "I am the only true fulfillment. Do you want to be known? Do you want your identity secured? It's found and fortified in Me." But how often do we look to these other things? Sure, maybe for a moment, having more relationships feels like physical bread and abates the hunger for a moment. Only then to find out, "Ah, it didn't do the job. I'm hungry again. I'm still unsatisfied." Everything we run to outside of Christ either turns out to be a cloud without rain or a well that is empty. Only Christ can fulfill that hunger you feel in your soul. As a matter of fact, Jesus goes one step further. He says this in John 6:56 NKJV.

⁵⁶ "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."

On the surface, this is a really hard and really odd statement for Jesus to make. Nonetheless, He says it. It's recorded, so we have to address it. I believe He's actually saying the same thing to us today. Now, of course, He's not talking literally. "Eat My skin. Drink My blood." That would be weird, but that's not what He's saying. He's speaking in metaphor. He's saying, "The only thing that will fulfill, satisfy, and save the human soul is to receive Me. All of Me." He's alluding to His sacrifice on the cross, where His body would be broken, and His blood would be shed for our healing and for the cleansing of our sins. That's why we partook in communion this morning. That's why we eat of the bread, and we drink of the juice. That's what Jesus is talking about. If we will accept this, if we will take Him in, if we will put all of our faith and trust in what He has done for us through His death on the cross and through His resurrection on the third day, if we will continually feed upon Him and depend upon Him, then His eternal resurrection life becomes our life and our souls become satisfied unto eternal life. But again, this leaves us with a choice. Will we accept this, or will we reject this? Unfortunately, the Bible says that many in the crowd that day heard the words of Jesus. They had been following Him, but they heard this, and they turned back and followed Him no more. Now that you've heard Him say the same thing to you, what will be recorded of you in your life? Will you continue to follow, or will you turn and follow Him? No. I end with this verse, verse 68. Jesus turns to His disciples. He goes, "Y'all going to walk away from Me too?" I love Simon Peter's response. He speaks up on behalf of the group. This is what he says in John 6:68–69 NKJV.

⁶⁸ But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, (where are we going to go?) to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

My prayer is this, that those same words would be echoed in our hearts today. Come on. Would you bow your heads, close your eyes for me? Let's pray.

Lord, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your Holy Spirit, who teaches us from Your Word. The things that we've looked at this morning, Holy Spirit, we pray that

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You would seal them over our lives. Some of us, Lord, needed encouragement. We find ourselves, Father, in the midst of a storm. We thank You that You see us, that You pray for us, that You come to us through Your Holy Spirit, and that You're able in a moment to do the miraculous. But God, if You don't, we still trust You. God, we look to You. So, we thank You for the encouragement that comes from Your Word. Holy Spirit, some of us need to be convicted this morning. Where we've been like the crowd, and we've looked to You, Jesus. We've followed You because of what You can do for us. In this moment, we take a step back. We get on our knees. We say, "Lord, forgive us." We follow You because of who You are, because You're good, because You're loving, because You're Creator, and because You're God. Then, Father, even as we look at this declaration of Jesus that He is the bread of life, He is the one who sustains, help us now to make that choice to follow Him, to put our faith in Him, to not look to the left or to the right, to not look outside of what He offers, but truly to rest in the fact that He is the one who nourishes and sustains our soul. Help us to put this word into practice, Holy Spirit, because our desire is that we would look like Jesus. Our desire is that the world would see us, see a picture of the loving Savior.

Then, Holy Spirit, for those who are under the sound of my voice this morning, who don't have a relationship with You, who have never put their trust in Jesus, His finished work on the cross, and His resurrection, I pray, Holy Spirit, that You would do what I cannot do, that You would convict hearts of sin. As I've said many times, that's not something I'm able to do, nor is it something that I want to do. But, Holy Spirit, You can, and You do it so gently. It's the kindness of God that leads us to repentance. Holy Spirit, would You kindly convict hearts of sin right now? Would You reveal to them the chasm that exists between them and God? Would You reveal to them that no amount of good works or being a good person can fill that gap, but that truly Jesus is the only answer? So, Holy Spirit, convict hearts of sin, but also, convince them, convince them of the love of Jesus. Convince them that He is the all-sufficient Savior. Open their eyes and reveal to their eyes Jesus. I can't do that, Holy Spirit, but would You do it now? Father, for those who are seeing Jesus and their need for Him, I pray You would give them courage. Give them articulation to cry out for help, to cry out for saving, and to cry out for forgiveness of sin.

As they do, Holy Spirit, I thank You that, in a moment, You apply salvation to their life. You impute the righteousness of Jesus to their life. You take them from the kingdom of darkness and transpose them into the kingdom of light. You take them out of death and move them into life. You pour out God's love in their heart. Thank You, Holy Spirit, for doing that for those who cry out for salvation now. We love You, God. We're desperate for You. As a church, we're desperate for You. As a nation, we are desperate for You. Would You move in our midst? God, as we get ready to dismiss today, I pray that You would bless Your people, that You keep them, and that You cause Your face to shine on them. God, I ask that You would be gracious to them, that You would lift Your countenance upon them, that You would give them Your peace, and that as they go, they would know the love of the Father, that they would know the grace of our Lord Jesus, and that they would experience the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Again, we declare we love You, Jesus, our bread of life. It's in Your name, we pray. Amen, amen, amen, amen.