

Session 10

May 3, 2020

Unit 2: Jesus Encounters . . .

The Great Crowd

Only Jesus provides our true nourishment.

The Word

John 6:1-13, 26-33

Session Outcome

To discover and share the true nourishment that Jesus provides.

Discover:

See Illustrated Bible Life to learn more about the importance of bread in the ancient diet, and for verse-by-verse commentary on the Scripture passage.

Last Week:

We looked at how Jesus offers healing, both physically and spiritually.

This Week:

We will look at the ways Jesus provides to us what we really need.

Listen:

This week's Illustrated Bible Life podcast on FoundryLeader.com explores one of the main staples of ancient times: bread.

Discover:

The diet of ancient nomads, who wandered the land with their flocks, was mainly meat and wild vegetables. However, the diet of more settled people always included bread as a staple. This is true of settled peoples throughout the world. In many households even today, while many days

might pass without meat, not a day goes by without some form of bread. Learn more about this important dietary staple in this week's Illustrated Bible Life article, "Bread of Life."

Engage the Word

LARGE CROWD—SMALL LUNCH

John 6:1-9

The multiplication of loaves and fish happened near the Sea of Galilee. John calls it "the Sea of Tiberias" (named for an emperor), reflecting the extensive Roman influence in Israel at that time. Gentile readers would more likely have known the lake by its Latin name.

We see from the text that twice John says the crowd was "great" (large, great numbers). We also see that the theme of "signs" appears again (singular and plural forms in John total 17 instances)—especially linked to healings of the sick.

Somewhat awkwardly John inserts a statement that Passover was near. There is no smooth transition to the statement. Little context appears. Jesus asked Phillip where to buy the food in order to feed the large crowd. A real meal, and especially Passover, requires bread. Once, while at a café near the Dead Sea, our travel guide saw that the bread was gone. He immediately called out to the manager, in Hebrew, "lehem, lehem" ("bread, bread") as in Beth-lehem (e.g., "house of bread"). Jesus and His disciples called for bread on this day (John 6).

Andrew reported a boy with a few barley loaves and fish. But Andrew was practical. Count the people. Count the resources. The crowd was too large. The supplies too small.

SMALL LUNCH—LARGE YIELD

John 6:10-13

Jesus did not dismiss the boy and his small lunch. Nor did Jesus concede to the "it can't be done" pessimism of Andrew and Phillip. Instead, Jesus directed the people to take seats on the grassy lakeside. They obediently sat and received all they desired.

The Greek word translated "gave thanks" (6:11, 23) provides the basis for our word "eucharist." But there are no other obvious features of Passover or of Christian communion yet.

There was an abundant supply that day. Twelve baskets of left-over bread, more than at the beginning! The disciples were eyewitnesses to Jesus' miracle power that day. Jesus met an overwhelming physical need of thousands with His apparently meager resources.

WHAT KIND OF MAN IS THIS?

John 6:26-27

An important phrase occurs frequently in John—“Very truly”—(Greek *amēn*, *amēn*, in 26 verses). The statement usually validates another’s character or testimony by saying *amēn* (“truly”) in support. In John, Jesus will make a declaration and then affirms His own words by a duplicated “amen”! A pastor of mine, years ago, listening with friends to a recording of his Sunday message, began to say “amen” to his own sermon (his wife quickly pointed this out to him)! Jesus is the only person who could ever confidently fully “amen” His own sermon.

A key title for Jesus appears. He is “the Son of Man.” Perhaps Jesus’ preferred way of referring to himself, the title appears some 80 times in the four gospels combined. It draws on Daniel 7:13, the enthronement of a heavenly champion. Some understood the Son of Man to be a messianic figure. The phrase could also suggest an earthly “human one” (as in Ezekiel). Jesus’ use of the title may have been intentionally ambiguous. Clearly John believed Jesus to be the agent of God, speaking and acting in the Father’s behalf. John gives a lofty affirmation of Jesus. Jesus had the Father’s “seal of approval.”

BREAD FROM HEAVEN

John 6:28-33

Jesus challenged the crowd, saying it was not the signs (healings primarily) that attracted the people, but the bread. Jesus was quick to add that earthly loaves would spoil, but the bread from God was lasting and life-giving. The people asked how to do the “works” that God required. Jesus replied with a singular “work of God,” which was to believe in the one God had sent.

Then the people asked for a sign. What “sign” would He give them so that seeing the sign would lead them to faith in Him? Jesus sought to move the people to an active faith in himself as “the bread of God” that had come from heaven. Believe, don’t look for a sign. No doubt the crowd found it quite difficult to hear the words “it was not Moses” who provided heavenly bread to their ancestors. Even more astounding, Jesus declared “I am the bread of life” (6:35). He was spiritual food and drink that would never fail, but always be enough and more.

Did You Know?

Feeding the 5,000 is the only performed miracle by Jesus recorded in all four gospels (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17, and here). Think About It
Jesus used the title “Son of Man” of himself in three ways: 1) earthly ministry; 2) heavenly, coming one; 3) suffering. Which of these would have been most troubling to those who opposed Jesus? To Jesus’ circle of believing disciples?

Reflect

What spiritual nourishment do you need from God this week?

Rick Williamson

Discussion Guide

Insight

In John's gospel, the term "world" is used almost exclusively in negative ways, carrying connotations of rebellion and sin. And yet, the Father gives Jesus, the True Bread from heaven, in order to "give life to the world." God so loves this broken, sinful world.

Connect to My Experience

Think of a time when you felt completely overwhelmed in the face of a task at hand. Perhaps your first semester of college knocked you off your feet, or the first day of training at a new job left you convinced you would never figure it all out. Facing our own inadequacy can be very uncomfortable. Discuss how people typically handle extreme stress and worry.

Do we tend to look within for strength? Or do we seek external support? Why?

Do most of us have a tendency to cast blame on ourselves or others? Why?

Our culture lifts up those who seem to have made their own way in the world, against all odds, and with minimal support. These "success stories" suggest that winners are the ultimate source.

How does this narrative align with the gospel?

Transition:

In this passage, the task at hand seems impossible: feed this crowd of thousands!?! The disciples immediately dismiss the suggestion as impossible. And yet, with Jesus our "not enough" is transformed into "abundantly more." Jesus reveals himself to be, not only a sign-producing prophet, but the very source of our eternal sustenance. All worry, doubt, and fear of inadequacy are silenced as we trust the True Bread to meet our needs extravagantly. We are put in our place, not as the source of life, but as participants in God's redemptive work in the world.

Connect to the Word

Invite someone to read John 6:1-9, then discuss the following,

Jesus has developed a reputation as a man who performs signs. People are captivated by the signs He is performing; some out of their own sheer need and others perhaps out of curiosity or spiritual hunger to bear witness to God's action in the world. Whatever their motivations, a huge crowd has gathered. Jesus' question to Phillip is unexpected. The disciples have been observers of the previous signs, not participants. Phillip's response is immediate rejection: it's impossible. Andrew responds by procuring a small lunch, but with no expectation that it will meet any meaningful need.

The crowd expected Jesus to heal not feed them; yet, Jesus ministers to them in this unexpected way. Why might Jesus have chosen to perform this particular sign? What might it reveal that the other signs do not?

Consider the significance of divine provision and the role of bread throughout the story of God. What connections do you see to the larger biblical story?

Why do you think Jesus chose to perform this sign with the participation of His disciples? How might that have changed their experience of the miracle?

Invite someone to read John 6:9-13, then discuss the following,

Jesus continues to involve others in this sign, accepting the boy's meager lunch, instructing the disciples to seat the people, presumably to help distribute the now abundant food, and to gather up the remainder. The sign is not one of "just enough," but of "abundantly more." In fact, the leftovers seem almost extravagant, even excessive. In this highly visible sign, Jesus reveals His power clearly to those who bear witness to it.

In spite of their conviction that the situation was impossible to remedy, the disciples cooperated with Jesus by following His instructions.

What change might their obedient participation have wrought in them that the mere observation of previous signs did not?

Jesus chose not only to provide adequate provisions for all present, but to provide an excess. Why such abundance? What does this aspect of the sign reveal?

Invite someone to read John 6:26-27, then discuss the following,

The people pursue Jesus, but not because they understood the revelation in the sign of the bread, but because they want more bread. Jesus encourages the crowd to devote themselves to the pursuit of spiritual sustenance, which Jesus can and will provide to those who are willing to receive it. Jesus himself is the source, the chosen one of God, approved and ordained for this very task.

It is likely that a significant number of those in the crowd following Jesus were poor and genuinely concerned, if not anxious, about their daily bread.

Why would Jesus seemingly criticize this real worry?

Jesus encourages the crowd to work for "food that endures to eternal life," life of the coming age of the kingdom of God. What "food" might Jesus have had in mind?

Invite someone to read John 6:28-33, then discuss the following,

The crowd responds to Jesus' challenge by asking how they might perform the works of God. Jesus' simple response, believe in the One sent by God, is not well received. They demand even more signs, referencing God's provision for daily manna in the wilderness. The crowd however attributes the gift of the bread to Moses, not God. Jesus not only corrects their corporate memory but also claims that the Father now sends the True Bread from heaven for the sake of the world.

The crowd initially seems eager to participate in the work of God. How does this attitude change and why?

Jesus contrasts the manna of Israel's memory with the Father's new gift of the True Bread from heaven. How is the gift of Jesus similar to the gift of manna to Israel in the wilderness? How is it different?

Connect to My Life and the World

Share with the group that God is on the move in the world, redeeming, restoring, healing, reconciling. Jesus not only invites us to participate in this kingdom life, He promises to sustain and provide, as the True Bread, given from heaven for the sake of the world.

In what ways can God help us overcome doubt in God's ability to redeem a broken situation?

What are the ways God invites us to participate in His redemptive work?

Jesus took the small offerings, of the disciples' participation in the midst of doubt and of the boy's lunch, and performed one of His most well-known signs. Silently consider,

What small offering might we be holding back from God for fear that it is too small, meaningless, or unimportant?

What would it look like to offer what you have to God, trusting God to take your "not enough" and make it "abundantly more"?

Before closing in prayer, consider playing "Give Me Jesus" quietly in the background as group members sit in prayerful silence.