"WHERE ARE WE TO BUY BREAD?"

This morning we'll be in John Chapter 6 looking at a very familiar story – the feeding of the 5000. Most of us probably heard this story for the first time when we were kids in Sunday school. So we know the story. It's always a challenge to teach a lesson on a familiar passage because, well, we all know the story and we know how it ends. But hopefully we can gain a fresh perspective as we look at it again. I took the title of today's lesson, “Where are we to buy bread?” from a question that Jesus asks one of His disciples, Philip, in verse 5. The very next verse says that Jesus said this, He asked this question, to test Philip. So, it's a test question.

Before we delve into our passage I need to set the stage for you. The time frame from the end of Chapter 5 to the beginning of Chapter 6 is anywhere from 6 months to a year. We don't know for sure but some time has gone by. Jesus has left Jerusalem and is back in Galilee. There He continues His ministry of teaching and healing. During this period of time we know from the other gospel accounts that John the Baptist has been killed. Jesus has delivered His famous sermon on the mount. The 12 disciples have been sent out two by two to proclaim the gospel and to heal. They've now returned with their report and are accompanying Jesus as He ministers at the Sea of Galilee. This is at the height of Jesus' popularity. His fame has spread throughout the region. Back in Jerusalem the religious leaders want to kill Jesus. But here in Galilee, Jesus is the most popular man in the land. People by the thousands are eager to go see Him.

John's purpose in recording this miracle is stated at the end of John's gospel, John 20:31 – READ it. So even though the other 3 gospel accounts include this same miracle, John feels compelled to include it because this miracle clearly demonstrates to thousands of people who were there that Jesus is God. It is an amazing display of His divine nature.

READ John 6:1-5

We know from reading the other 3 gospel accounts of this same event that Jesus went to a desolate place and we know from Luke's account that it would have been near Bethsaida. So this places Jesus with His disciples somewhere in and around the NE part of the Sea of Galilee. [Show slide from trip to Israel]

Jesus is popular. The crowds are following Him. And v 2 tells us why. “Because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.” They weren't following Jesus because of His great spiritual teachings (well maybe some did) but most were following Him because of His miracles, specifically His healing of the sick. It was during this period of time that the other three gospel accounts tell us of the many miracles Jesus was doing: a man with a withered hand is healed on the Sabbath; the multitudes are healed; a centurion's servant is healed; Jesus raises a widow's son from the dead; Jesus heals the Gadarene demoniac (pigs); Jairus' daughter dies and is raised to life; the woman with a hemorrhage is healed; two blind men have their sight restored; a mute demoniac is healed... so there is a whole lot of healing going on in Galilee and the person at the center of it all is this Healer named Jesus. Frankly, most of the people just want to see the show. They don't necessarily believe in Jesus as the Son of God and they are not following Him like one of His disciples. And Jesus knows this because He knows what's in a man's heart. John 2:24 says that “Jesus on His part did not entrust Himself to them because He knew all people...” So He focuses His attention on His disciples.

V 3, Jesus has pulled Himself away from the crowds and is going up to a remote location to be alone with His disciples. V 4 gives us a time frame for this event – it is around the Feast of the Passover. So we are one year away from Jesus' betrayal, crucifixion and resurrection.

OK, here's the situation... v 5. A large crowd has made its way out to the place where Jesus was with His disciples. It's anywhere from 3-5 mites away from Bethsaida. It's pretty much out in the middle of nowhere. They have tracked Jesus down and they are coming to Him. And Jesus is going to use this opportunity to show them who He is.

It's late in the afternoon. The crowd of people is no doubt hungry and weary from their rather lengthy journey by foot. Now it is important to realize that at this point Jesus knows exactly what He's going to do. Jesus knows what miracle He is going to perform in order to demonstrate who He is. But His disciples don't know. So He uses this as a teaching opportunity for them. “Hey Philip,” Jesus says, “Where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?”

READ John 6:6

Jesus has no intention of sending His disciples to town to buy bread for this mass of people. And He isn't going to just send them away. The other gospel accounts tell us that's what the disciples wanted – to just send them away. But not Jesus.

READ John 6:7-10

We know that there are five thousand men, and we can conjecture that there are, counting women and children also, anywhere from between 10,000 and 20,000 people total. Both Philip and Andrew have assessed the situation and they have concluded, bottom line, they don't have enough resources to feed a crowd of this size. The situation is impossible! And it is at this point, when they have acknowledged that there is no way humanly to pull this off that Jesus speaks up: “Have the people sit down.” Again, Jesus knows what He is going to do.

Jesus gets His disciples and the people to the point where they are probably asking, “What is He up to? We're just sitting here doing nothing. I don't get it. I don't understand.”

Here is the spiritual point I want to make before Jesus actually performs the miracle... It isn't about you or me or what abilities we have or what resources we have or any of that. No, it's all about what Jesus can do! Jesus is about to do something that only God can do. He is going to create something from nothing. What do they have food-wise? Five barley loaves and two fish. How many people do they need to feed? Ten to twenty thousand

people. If I were there I, being the professional engineer that I am, would have to agree with Andrew – “what are they for so many.” We don't have enough food.

READ John 6:11

So, there's the miracle! Did you see it? When did the miracle happen? When Jesus begins to distribute the food. As He is passing out the food Jesus creates physical food, barley loaves and fish from nothing. And the people eat until they are full. How can Jesus do that? He's God! He's the Creator of the world! John 1:3 says, “All things were made through Him (speaking of Jesus), and without Him was not anything made that was made.” And how many people witnessed this incredible miracle? Thousands. And they didn't just witness it. They participated in it. They were personally involved in it.

And if just feeding all these people until they are full isn't enough, there's even more...it gets better!

READ John 6:12-13

Twelve baskets, one for each of Jesus' disciples to carry filled with the leftovers.

Why does Jesus perform this miracle? I believe it is as John states, “So that they will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing they might have life in his name.” Jesus didn't do this just to feed them or to try and win their favor, but he did it ultimately to bring them to believe in Him as the Son of God and to have eternal life. He came to seek and to save those who were lost. That included every person in this crowd.

But, alas, they didn't quite get it. Did they?

READ John 6:14-15

The people were referencing Deuteronomy 18:15 – Moses is speaking to the people of Israel, “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 a reference to a coming Messiah who like Moses would receive and preach divine revelation and lead his people, the nation of Israel, the Jews. Interesting, like Moses, Jesus had just provided bread from heaven, a divine miracle to feed the people (manna in the wilderness). What's emphasized in Deuteronomy 18, however, is not the actions of the Prophet, but the words that he will say. So rather than focusing on Jesus' miracles and the possibility that He might deliver them from foreign oppression, they should have been listening to what He said.

So when they tried to take Him by force to be their king - One who would defeat the Romans - Jesus withdrew from them. That's NOT why He came, was it?

Notice the same pattern in John 6 as we saw in John 5 - (1) a miracle, (2) a teaching follows which draws upon the miracle to make a spiritual point, (3) reaction by the Jews to kill Jesus. The same pattern that happened in Jerusalem happens in Galilee.

Application. Mark's gospel records that just prior to performing this miracle that “Jesus saw the great crowd and He had compassion on them, because they were like a sheep without a shepherd. And He began to teach them many things. And when it grew late...” His disciples came to Jesus and said to send them away. “This is a desolate place and it's getting late...” Jesus feels compassion for people. He teaches them spiritual truths that will change their lives. Then He meets their physical needs. We need to have the same heart for people that Jesus had. Meet their physical and emotional needs, yes. But be sure to tell them about Jesus the Savior and how He changes lives.