



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Relinquishing His Right to Reign

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John 6:1-21. The day John witnessed Jesus feed a crowd of over 5,000 and walk on the Sea of Galilee was a day never forgotten. Overwhelming were these signs alone, but something more significant impacted John and made this day stand out—Jesus' refusal to be king. The disciples had the same desires and expectations as the crowds, and on this day that changed completely.

It seemed that the world was on the verge of change. For more than ninety years the flames of revolution had been burning throughout first-century Palestine. Anti-Roman embers were scattered far throughout the region, and Jesus so easily could have fanned them into a blaze. The people wanted Messiah and were susceptible to every rumor of a would-be deliverer.

Simon of Peraea, Athronges and Theudas all led revolts in the early first century. Judah the Galilean arose in fierce opposition to the Roman census. Urging the people to refuse all earthly masters, he gained a following who hoped against hope that God would give them a string of stunning victories. Such never happened, and he experienced the same fate as many others.

God had called Abraham's descendants to be His chosen people and promised to make them into a blessed nation (cf. Gen 12:1-3). He promised a righteous king whose reign would endure forever (cf. 2 Sam 7:16). Wars would cease, peace would come, and Israel would be celebrated among the nations (cf. Isa 60; Jer 33:10-11).

Passages with these themes are legion in the Old Testament and instilled hope. Unfortunately, God's people used them to justify their revolts against Rome. They were ever on the lookout for a divine revolutionary and with each rebellion came disaster and defeat. They longed for change... and so did each of Jesus' disciples.

The twelve held all the same ideas and hopes as the masses. They wanted a deliverer as much as anyone else. Yet, in John 6, the disciples realized their Lord had no political agenda and would do nothing about Rome. In fact, Jesus dismissed the crowd who attempted to make Him king, told His disciples to depart across the sea and then went to be alone. Having already given more than a year of their lives to Him, the weight of the disciples' despair must have been enormous.

NO REST FOR THE WEARY (JOHN 6:1-3)

Five month of ministry took place between John 5 and 6. Where chapter 5 ended with a paralytic healed, Matthew 5-14, Mark 1-6 and Luke 6-9 continue the narrative. A widow's son and a ruler's daughter are restored to life, demoniacs are cleansed, the blind receive sight, the mute speak and the deaf hear. "After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee" (cf. John 6:1).

The Lord concentrated His miracles and preaching upon Galilee for half a year and now had an incredible reputation throughout the region. As He sat with His disciples on a nearby hillside, He could hardly escape the masses. They tracked His boat crossing the sea and ran ahead to meet Him (cf. Mark 6:33). He wanted rest; they wanted more miracles.

Month after month of ministry had taken its toll on Jesus and His disciples. They were tired and often had "no leisure even to eat" (cf. Mark 6:31). News that Herod had beheaded John the Baptist was fresh, and their hearts were heavy with grief (cf. Matt 14:12-13). Physically and emotionally, the Lord and His twelve were spent and needed time alone.

Though the Galileans had a self-serving interest in Jesus (cf. John 6:2), His heart still broke for them. Mark tells us that when He looked at the crowd following, "He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (cf. Mark 6:34). It is touching that the Lord ended His time of rest with the disciples out of love for a people who hardly understood Him.

A MIRACULOUS MEAL (JOHN 6:4-13)

A crowd of 5,000 men plus women and children did not come solely from any nearby city. They were on their way from Galilee to celebrate the Passover. It was the greatest of the annual feasts, and millions throughout Palestine were traveling to Jerusalem. En route, they discovered Jesus and took a detour to see Him.

As the day grew late, hunger had set in. The disciples told the Lord to dismiss the crowd; He told the disciples to feed them (cf. Mark 6:36-37). It was a test—how well did they know their Lord? (cf. John 6:6). Jesus performed countless miracles throughout Galilee, all of which involved individuals. The

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disciples witnessed many of these, but never had they seen Him perform a miracle involving thousands. They believed in Him for smaller matters, but never considered that the Son of God could do infinitely more had they only asked (cf. Eph 3:20).

Philip estimated the cost of feeding the entire crowd. Andrew discovered that only a boy brought anything to eat (cf. John 6:7-9). Five barley biscuits and two pickled fish was the sum total of food amongst 5,000 families. The disciples never asked the Lord to meet the need, and yet, the Lord so graciously met it anyway. He created and kept creating and kept creating. In fact, the Son of God created so much food that the people ate until they were stuffed (cf. John 6:12). One small lunch, and from it Jesus fed twenty thousand.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29—But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

The Lord typically uses what is weak and insignificant to accomplish His greater purposes. He used the tear of a baby to touch the heart of Pharaoh's daughter. He used a shepherd's stick to bring forth wonders that toppled an empire. A sling and a stone conquered a mighty nation, and an insignificant shepherd boy was raised to become Israel's greatest king. If God can use the mouth of a jackass to confront a prophet or multiply a boy's lunch to feed thousands, is there not hope that He can use you and me?

DISAPPOINTMENT AND DESPAIR (JOHN 6:14-17A)

After months of miracles, the Galileans wondered if Jesus might be the Moses-like Prophet (cf. Deut 18:18). Speculation prevailed the instant He miraculously fed them. So similar to Moses providing manna, the people went into a frenzy and wanted to Christ reign over them. They prepared to take Him to Jerusalem and crown Him during Passover (cf. John 6:14-15).

As Moses delivered Israel from Egypt, so the Prophet would deliver Israel from Rome. The masses could see it no other way—Messiah *will* deliver us. If ever this longing reached a crescendo it was during the week of Passover. A strong spirit of nationalism surged in the expectation that Messiah would come with the dawn of a new age.

The Galileans and the twelve were right about much that day. Jesus clearly identified Himself as the Prophet, and the Davidic throne was His. Yet, how could the throne belong to a man who would not lead a revolution?

Nothing could have been more stunning, disheartening or upsetting than to see Jesus turn His back. All of Galilee along with the disciples expected Him to move forward, take the crown and crush their enemies. Like a punch in the stomach, Jesus bid everyone leave. The crowd dispersed, the disciples left, and the Lord went to pray (cf. Matt 14:23). No one could comprehend a Messiah whose kingdom had nothing to do with this world (cf. John 18:36).

FAITH REAFFIRMED (JOHN 6:17B-21)

The disciples embarked without Jesus across the Sea of Galilee with a sense of sorrow and perhaps betrayal in their hearts. Who had they followed for the past year? Why did their Lord send them away? What kind of Messiah was He? Where now would they go? Little made sense, and the disciples' hearts became hard (cf. Mark 6:52). It was night, and certainly it was dark in more ways than one as they rowed across the sea (cf. John 6:17b).

Fierce storms are characteristic of the Sea of Galilee. Cool winds can sweep down from the mountains with little notice and violently churn the waters. The disciples had rowed halfway across the sea when the wind and waves became threatening (cf. Matt 14:24). Their faith had never been lower, their lives were now at stake and Jesus had left. Why did He do this to them?

The Lord never leaves His people. When He told His disciples to go across the sea without Him, He knew their faith hung by a thread. He knew their doubts were severe, that they had learned nothing from the miraculous meal and that an awful storm was on its way. He knew their hearts had become hard, and so, while they struggled on the sea, He struggled in prayer (cf. Matt 14:23). The Lord refused to lose the hearts of His disciples that day.

When the time had come, Jesus walked onto the sea towards His men. He entered their boat simply saying, "I Am" (cf. John 6:20). It was one of the most profound reminders the disciples ever experienced. Being at the point of breaking within, Jesus told them to remember exactly who it is they had followed—God Himself. The waves calmed, fear subsided, and on the following day when everyone deserted, the faith of the disciples remained (cf. John 6:20-21, 67-69). Realizing Jesus' identity far more deeply, they passed the test confessing, "You are the Holy One of God" (cf. John 6:69).