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Participants in the Miraculous *John 6:1-15*

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY 201st General Assembly

- **TUESDAY (SESSION) @ 8:00 AM**
IN ROOM 203, RYAN BLDG.
- **WEDNESDAY (EVERY) @ 1:00 PM**
IN ROOM 203, RYAN BLDG.

Capitol Commission Bible studies are held on Tuesday and Wednesday. The legislator Bible study meets from 8:00-8:45 AM in Room 203, Ryan Bldg. (during session weeks). An open-to-all Bible study meets from 1:00-1:30 PM in Room 203, Ryan Bldg. (during session weeks). The Bible studies are nonpartisan and non-denominational, and will focus on the Gospel of John for the 2017/2018 General Assembly.

– Jeff Whitebread, Pennsylvania State Minister, Capitol Commission

John 6:1-15: “Participants in the Miraculous”

When you read detective stories you quickly realize that the most irrelevant details may actually be clues to discovering who the murderer really is.

Many years ago, I had developed a couple murder mystery themed parties. For these parties, we would meet in someone’s home and have friends who acted out the mystery. The guests of the party would interview the character, search for clues, and try to solve the mystery.

In writing these mysteries, I would put in all kinds of details, clues that were meant to lead the eye and the mind in different directions. In all the activities of the evening and physical clues that were presented, there was nothing there by accident. But somewhere in the middle of all the action is a sign that, if you were being observant, will tell you the secret that unlocks the whole mystery

One of the things to remember when reading John’s gospel is that nothing happens by accident. Unlike my mysteries, the most insignificant of details is meant to help us discover clues that lead us to important things, and these hold for us the deepest meanings of this account.

Bread in the Wilderness

John 6:4: *The Jewish Passover Festival was near* - This is the second time John mentions in his gospel that something is happening over Passover. The first took place when Jesus overturned the tables of those buying and selling in the Temple courts (John 2:13). The third will be when Jesus enters Jerusalem for the last time. Because of its significance, Jesus’ last arrival in Jerusalem is mentioned three times (John 11:55; 12:1; 13:1).

In our account John draws our attention that the feeding of this crowd took place at the time of Passover. He hopes that his readers will connect

Passover - the time when God freed the children of Israel from their slavery in Egypt - with the other events in this gospel that took place over the Passover, namely, the cleansing of the Temple and Jesus’ death and resurrection.

In this chapter the Passover is meant to be the dominate theme or, more specifically, that God fed the children of Israel during the years they wandered in the wilderness with bread from heaven. This account is found in Exodus 16, where ‘manna’ was provided by God because the people were grumbling and complaining. Both God’s provision and the people’s grumbling are part of the background that help frame this chapter.

The account begins with Jesus providing food for a large crowd in a wilderness setting. This provides a starting point for the long discussion, that will cover most of the chapter concerning, the bread from heaven. For this section of the text, it will be best to step into this scene using our imaginations and, perhaps, trying to identify with one of the characters we find here.

Jesus with His Disciples

John 6:5: *Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat* - Jesus does not hesitate in expressing his desire to meet the needs of those who have followed him to this remote location. There was not the slightest desire to sidestep this situation. In this, Jesus reveals to us the very nature and character of God, and we see this by the settled pattern of behavior in His life. The needs of others require a response for those who are children of God. This is one of the many things that Jesus was teaching his disciples in this moment.

While a deliberate attempt was made to retreat for a time from the expectations of the ministry; when genuine needs present themselves, those who are students of Jesus find themselves prompted to act, but always with the Lord’s help. While we may feel tempted to avoid these needs initially, as we increasingly enter into the training school of Jesus we find ourselves drawn to do the things Jesus would do. While meeting a need is the right thing to do, doing it in bitterness and frustration does no one any good, but actually, great harm. It is not simply outward behavior or pursuing a specific outcome that is the only consideration, but it is becoming a person who would naturally and easily do what Jesus himself would do, just as he would do it - with love, joy and peace.

Philip

John 6:5: *he said to Philip* - Now Jesus engages Philip, specifically, to solve this problem - talk about being put on the spot. The question seems almost loaded, as if Jesus is pointing to a solution that is moving in the wrong direction. Interestingly, the very next line in this account informs

Participants in the Miraculous (cont'd) - *John 6:1-16*

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us that Jesus already knew what he was going to do. Unfair, we may cry! Well, that depends. What type of relationship do we want with Jesus? It seems like Jesus is trying to stretch Philip, as he seeks to pursue a deeper interaction with him by the question He poses.

John 6:7: *It would take more than half a year's wages* - Maybe Philip is all about the cold hard facts. What do the numbers say about this situation? He certainly responds emphatically, with a quick calculation as to the necessary funds required. It seems that Philip, like most of us, has allowed the circumstances to blind him to the opportunity of Jesus' interaction and involvement with him in this matter. The circumstances do not need to overwhelm us or cause us to lose sight of this reality, if Jesus is my shepherd then I am with him and he is with me. His presence and power are available to me in this moment, and every moment, regardless of how overwhelming the circumstances are that we may encounter.

Andrew

John 6:9: *Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up* - Into this scene steps Andrew, he was one of Jesus' first disciples whom John introduced earlier in this gospel. He finds a boy with a tiny picnic lunch, but even he is uncertain about how this small amount of food would be any help in this situation. Maybe we can relate to what is going through Andrew's mind at this point, as we reflect upon the needs that face us. Have you ever found yourself in a circumstance, maybe out of a desire to follow Jesus, and you sensed the Lord asking you to meet a specific need? As we survey our limited resources, it becomes clear, rather quickly, there is no way that we are able to address the need that stands before us.

John 6:9: *Here is a boy* - What Andrew did, which is instructive for us, is that he brought what he had to Jesus. Certainly, this was not much, but little in the hands of one who can multiply matter provided abundantly for the needs of those in this wilderness setting. Like Andrew, we often don't know what to do, but the starting point is always bringing what we have to the attention of Jesus. You can never tell what he is going to do with it - but part of our growing confidence in Jesus is the knowledge that he will do something that we have not thought of, something new and creative, maybe something miraculous.

Jesus

John 6:10: *Have the people sit down* - How Jesus met this need helps us catch a glimpse of the generosity of His heart. He doesn't just line the people up cafeteria style with the goal of getting them through the line as quickly as possible. He has the people sit down, he seeks for them to share this meal in the context of other relationships. While this need prompted Jesus' action, we find that meeting this need was shaped by a larger vision of what is beneficial for the people. In an effort to meet the needs of others, let's not become so goal-oriented to accomplish the task before us that the people who are in-need are not valued or appreciated.

John 6:11: *(Jesus) distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted* - It is understood that meeting this need was a time-consuming affair, and he is intimately concerned that all those seated received as much as they wanted of both the bread and the fish. In this we see that Jesus was present to those who had gathered. He was not in a hurry to complete this task. He was not checking his schedule with the next thing that needed to be done. This can be helpful for us in our fast-paced world where it is easy to mistake the busyness of our lives with success and accomplishment. I don't think anyone would consider Jesus idle or ineffective, but he was never in a rush. This is because He understood that being fully present in each moment was the greatest gift he could give to those near him.

The Crowds

John 6:14: *(The people) began to say, surely this is the Prophet* - One can imagine the murmuring that is sweeping through the crowds at the sheer abundance of food that was being distributed among not only their gathered group, but all the groups scattered over this remote grassy area. The connection that John wants us to make regarding God's provision of manna in the wilderness is the very leap these people now make with the promise in Deuteronomy 18:15. Here, Moses tells the people that God will raise up "a prophet like me from among you," there responsibility was to listen to him. They think, if this Jesus is not only able to heal the multitude of sick in the land, but also provide an abundance of food; their minds stagger at what he might be able to accomplish politically for them.

John 6:15: *knowing they intended to make him king by force, he withdrew again* - One might ask: Isn't this what Jesus wants? This is the tricky thing with the power that has been entrusted into our hands. Certainly, Jesus could have won the nation of Israel over by his power, maybe even the religious leaders. He could have developed a carefully orchestrated campaign showing that he was indeed the one to lead the people now. While it is true that Jesus is King, that he was the prophet like Moses. The reaction of the crowds shows that they understood both of these in what Jesus regards as quite an inadequate sense. In the remainder of the chapter, Jesus will attempt to move them towards a deeper and truer understanding. This must be true for us as well. Jesus's call is always to move us beyond surface needs, and pursue a growing confidence in Him in which our whole lives are transformed.

Book referenced:

Wright, NT. John for Everyone. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002

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