

John Chapter Six

JESUS TAKES THE MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE

A Gallup survey which was released a few years ago suggests that Americans are in fairly good moods. The poll revealed that 56 percent of Americans are satisfied with the way things are going in the country.

In the past, polls have found that American's reported contentment is predictably linked with their confidence in the economy and the president. The Gallup organization's reported results show that Americans are leery about the current economic conditions, yet their hope that things would improve was widespread. Other similar studies by other organizations, suggest Americans are largely a happy, resilient lot, in spite of fearful conditions or people.

Many times, our source of trust influences our state of mind. When we base our trust on political leaders or economic conditions, our feelings rise and fall with each new day. The Lord offers us a constant source of contentment and encouragement and strength, regardless of circumstances. Confidence in the Lord is a secure, and unshakeable foundation.¹ The psalmist writes in Psalm 20:7-8 "*Some may trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm.*"

Do you think the Jews of the Gospels based their sense of well-being on their economic condition as well? We get a clue in John 6:1-14.

After being rejected by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and the surrounding regions, Jesus took His message north to the people of Galilee.

John 6:1-14 NAS:

1 After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias).

2 A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.

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

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

5 Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was

¹ Washington Times, *Americans Express Optimism*, May 14, 2002. —Fresh Illustrations.

coming to Him, said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?”

6 This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.

*7 **Philip** answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.”*

*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 fish, but what are these for so many people?”

10 Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

11 Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted.

12 When they were filled, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost.”

13 So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

14 Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

If you look at a map there is a considerable distance between Jerusalem and the Sea of Galilee. It would take several days to get there and possibly a good deal longer if Jesus and His disciples were to spend time stopping and teaching in each of the villages and towns they passed through along the way. We believe that is exactly what Jesus did because it is most likely that six to twelve months passed between the end of chapter five and the beginning of chapter six.

How do we know this? Well, if you go back to chapter 5, verse 1, you will see that Jesus had gone up to a feast in Jerusalem. The text does not specify the exact feast but we know it was either the Passover, the Feast of Pentecost, or the Feast of Tabernacles because those were the three feasts that required Jewish men to travel to Jerusalem. Then here in John 6:4 we see that Jesus was in Galilee when the Passover was about to begin. If the feast in John 5:1 was the Feast of Tabernacles, then about six months had passed (October to April). If the feast in John 5:1 was the Passover or Pentecost, which was only seven weeks after Passover, then almost a year had passed. Most evidence suggests it was the Passover.

So after six months to a year the miracles and healings that Jesus performed had become widely known throughout the land. The Jewish leaders may have continued to reject Him, but the common people were awed by the things He was doing, and many believed that He was actually the Messiah that had been promised by the prophets throughout the Old Testament.

In verse 2 we see that a large crowd of people followed Jesus wherever He went. They were probably anxious to see the next miracle in person and to hear the words that Jesus might speak to them. So we might visualize a picture here of Jesus as a Pied Piper with a

large throng following every move He made everywhere He went. You might imagine what it would be like if Jesus came today. He would undoubtedly be hounded by hoards of news people as well as massive crowds wherever He appeared. Imagine yourself sitting in a large arena, such as the United Center in Chicago, that is filled to capacity with 20,000 people. Jesus walks out on the stage with His 12 disciples and He is carrying with Him a large basket that He empties on a table. The total content of the basket is revealed to be five loaves of bread and two fish. He puts the contents back into His basket, then turns and goes to each of His disciples taking something from His basket and placing it in the basket of each disciple. The disciples then distribute what was placed in their baskets to all 20,000 people in the stadium giving each of them as much as they think they can eat. They return to the stage and place twelve overflowing baskets of leftovers on the table. What do you think the CNN or FOX news commentators would have to say when they saw that?

But let us go back to the actual event, sometime around the year 30 A.D., when the world was blessed without news coverage other than what was spread by word of mouth among the people. And people were spreading the word everywhere that perhaps this Jesus was the Son of God, the One whom they had been promised, Jesus.

As Jesus moved up the side of the mountain and sat down to teach His disciples, the people followed. Now remember that some of these people may have been following Jesus for some time and came from all over Galilee. There may have been others who lived locally and may just have joined the crowd. Now in those days they did not have a fast-food restaurant at every bend of the road as we do today. In fact the location described in verse 1 was most likely on the northeast side of **the Sea of Galilee**. Since Jesus had crossed to the east side of the lake, the mountainside mentioned would have been what is now called the Golan Heights.² And a crowd gathered even in this “solitary” (Matthew 14:13; Mark 6:32) and “remote place” (Matthew 14:15).³

Jesus and His disciples realized the people needed to be fed, and that simple fact allowed Jesus a great opportunity to really display His miracle-working abilities, proving conclusively that He was who He claimed to be, the Messiah. Even though He asked **Philip** where they could buy food to feed all of these people, as we see in verse 5, Jesus knew full well what He was about to do. The question He directed to Philip was undoubtedly meant as a test to determine Philip’s faith. Jesus was interested in how Philip would respond to a need of major proportions. Would he call a meeting of all the disciples? Would he call in a consultant? Would he send out scouts to see where they might get that much food? Would he throw up his hands saying, “*I don’t have a clue as to what to do?* Or would He turn to Christ? It seems that Philip leaned toward the “*I don’t have a clue*” answer. But then **Andrew** jumped in and said that there was a boy in the crowd who had five loaves of bread and a couple of fish, but that would hardly feed so many. So it looks like Andrew also opted for the “*I don’t have a clue as to what to*

² Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary*: 21st Century Edition. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Jn 6:1.

³ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:293.

do" option.

If you look at verse 6, the Greek word that Jesus used for test was the same word used to describe what Satan did to Jesus in Matthew 4:1. That word was also used in Genesis 22:1 in the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament) for the testing of Abraham. Jesus intended to test his disciples' insight and faith and to show them that he was the true bread of life.⁴ So Jesus' disciples once again, as they did so often, proved worthless at providing the right solution to a problem.

So Jesus offered, as He did so often, to solve the problem. He told His disciples to invite the people to sit down in kind of a mega-church picnic style. We are told that there were five thousand men, not counting the women and children. That could mean that there might have been another five thousand women, and perhaps five to ten thousand more children. So there may have been up to twenty thousand people sitting on this vast mountainside waiting to be served. Now to give you an idea of just how many people that would be to feed, imagine that you stood all the people in a single line, each person occupying a space of approximately 3 feet. That line would stretch for over **eleven miles**.

Jesus' answer to this situation was that it was easily taken care of. Now try and picture this. He very likely went over to the young boy and asked if He could use his five loaves and two fish to feed all the hungry people including Himself. The boy handed the fish to Jesus who in turn gave thanks to His Father for providing the food they needed.

It is significant that twice John mentioned the fact that Jesus gave thanks (John 6:11, 23). Matthew, Mark, and Luke all state that Jesus looked up to Heaven when He gave thanks. By that act, He reminded the hungry people that God is the source of all our provision. This is a good lesson for us: instead of complaining about what we do not have, we should give thanks to God for what we do have, and He will make it go farther.⁵

Jesus distributed the five loaves and two fish in some manner to His disciples who in turn gave food to all the people. There was enough food to allow them all to eat their fill and still have twelve baskets of food leftover.

That was much more than they started out with. It appears very likely that Jesus' message to His disciples here was to show them that He was more than adequate for their needs. Just as He is more than adequate for any need you may have.

What was the reaction of the people? What would your reaction have been if you were there to see this? They were convinced that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Savior who had been promised. There was a popularly held belief about the promised prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15-18 as being the Messiah (John 1:21; 11:27). The idea is suggested again in Acts (3:22; 7:37).

⁴ Hughes, Robert B.; Laney, J. Carl; Hughes, Robert B.: *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (The Tyndale Reference Library), S. 472.

⁵ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 6:1.

Do you need this kind of miracle to believe? Some people claim they do, and even though God has provided all the proof anyone could need in the Bible, some people still demand a miracle from Jesus that will prove to them that He is a supernatural being. And do you know what? People with that attitude just are not going to get what they want, and we will let Jesus Himself tell you why.

Luke 16:19-31 NLT:

*19 Jesus said, "There was a certain **rich man** who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury.*

*20 At his gate lay a **poor man named Lazarus** who was covered with sores.*

21 As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man's table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores.

22 "Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried,

23 and his soul went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side.

24 "The rich man shouted, 'Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.'

25 "But Abraham said to him, 'Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish.

26 And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there.'

27 "Then the rich man said, 'Please, Father Abraham, at least send him to my father's home.

28 For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them so they don't end up in this place of torment.'

29 "But Abraham said, 'Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read what they wrote.'

30 "The rich man replied, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.'

31 "But Abraham said, 'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even if someone rises from the dead.'

So if there are any here this morning who do not know Jesus Christ as their Savior, who have not invited Him into their lives as the only, and we repeat **only source** of forgiveness for your sins, the one sure thing you can learn from this passage is that you are not going to be shown a miracle in the here and now to prove to you that Jesus Christ is God. God has given everyone all the miracles they need in the Bible, and He has also given them, through the Bible, all they need to know about salvation, eternal life, and how people can live in peace and harmony with one another in this world. If you do not want to read it, and continue to make demands of God for your own personal satisfaction, you are going to be sharing eternity with the rich man described in this story.

This is not to say that God no longer does miracles today. For indeed He does. Many Christians can attest to miracles done by God in their lives. The point here is that if your desire for a miracle is to test God in some way, or just to get Him to show off for you, forget it. God uses miracles to accomplish His purposes, not to entertain us as a magician would.

Now let us stop here for a moment and gather together what we have covered. Although Jesus performed the miracle of the loaves and the fishes before this gathering of thousands, His primary reason for coming to this hillside was to teach His disciples. When Jesus saw the crowd approaching He saw an opportunity to teach all of His disciples something they would never forget. By asking Philip specifically, but certainly within the hearing of the others, Jesus wanted to see how much they had learned about Him after two years of concentrated tutoring. Had they learned that Jesus can do anything?

You see it may have been a good thing for the crowd to see this miracle and for them to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but there is more to salvation and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ than just seeing a miracle. The disciples were going to form the foundation of the Church. They were the ones that were going to carry the Gospel message to people and bring them into a house church where they could be nurtured and fed with the Word and love of God and be prepared for the Holy Spirit to lead them to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The disciples were the ones, therefore, that had to understand the message as well as the One who brought it because the One who brought it was God in the form of the man, Jesus. They had to be absolutely certain of what His coming meant so that they could be the source of teaching throughout the centuries for people to come to know Christ. It is because of the Bible that people come to know God, and it is through the church that they learn what the Bible teaches.

When the people saw the miracle on the hillside, what was their reaction? They believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and the first thing, as we will see next time, they wanted to do was to make Him king so that He could overthrow the Romans and restore Israel to a position of world leadership.

But that was not Jesus' purpose in coming. He came to bring the message of the new covenant and to die for the sins of mankind. Conquering and ruling the world will be what He does at His second coming. When the people saw the miracle, that in itself did not bring the people to salvation. That would require further teaching and understanding of the message as it was further explained to them

Jesus said people would not believe someone even if they returned from the dead, and He was right. How do we know this? Because there is clear cut evidence that Jesus rose from the dead and yet most people today do not pay any attention to what Jesus has to say through the Bible. The people in the story of the loaves and fish in John 6:1-14 saw one miracle and believed, believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. The Bible tells us about countless miracles performed by Jesus and yet many people still do not believe. So it appears that a person can be impressed by a miracle or, in the case of the Bible, a great

number of miracles, but not necessarily impressed enough to even want to hear the message that the Miracle Worker brings.

If a human being is willing to temporarily set aside their preconceived idea about religion and look at the evidence in the Bible with an open mind, they would have to come to the conclusion that the Bible was written by the inspiration of God because of the evidence presented by miracles and prophecy alone. The ability to perform one miracle after another as well as predicting the future with 100% accuracy is unique to the one and only God of the Bible. And if that is not enough for them, Christ is the only deity that ever physically rose from the dead. If one can reject the God of the Bible after processing that information, I would very much like to hear their explanation for such a conclusion.

What is it going to take to get people to see and accept the truth? Will they, like *Chicken Little*, finally believe if they see the sky falling? Well guess what? The Bible answers that question as well and it reminds us how hard Satan works at deceiving people so they will not accept the truth in spite of overwhelming evidence.

Let us see just how well this process works. In chapter six of Revelation, John writes:

12 I watched as the Lamb broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake. The sun became as dark as black cloth, and the moon became as red as blood.

13 Then the stars of the sky fell to the earth⁶ like green figs falling from a tree shaken by a strong wind.

14 The sky was rolled up like a scroll, and all of the mountains and islands were moved from their places.

15 Then everyone—the kings of the earth, the rulers, the generals, the wealthy, the powerful, and every slave and free person—all hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains.

*16 And they cried to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from **the wrath of the Lamb.**”*

17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to survive?” (NLT)

This is a description of what happens when Jesus opens the sixth seal judgment. What unbelievable devastation! Surely people will now listen to the preachers, repent, and call on Jesus to save them. Well, not so fast. Look at what happens as this devastation continues during the final bowl judgments in Revelation 16:1-21 NLT:

1 Then I heard a mighty voice from the Temple say to the seven angels, “Go your ways and pour out on the earth the seven bowls containing God’s wrath.”

2 So the first angel left the Temple and poured out his bowl on the earth,

⁶ Keener, Craig S., InterVarsity Press: *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993, S. Re 6:12.

and horrible, malignant sores broke out on everyone who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his statue.

Surely this will bring the people to believe what the preachers have been telling them, and cause the people to repent and call on Jesus for salvation. No, not yet.

3 Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse. And everything in the sea died.

Surely this will bring the people to believe what the preachers have been telling them, and cause the people to repent and call on Jesus for salvation. Well, no, not quite yet.

4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs, and they became blood.

5 And I heard the angel who had authority over all water saying, “You are just, O Holy One, who is and who always was, because you have sent these judgments.

6 Since they shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, you have given them blood to drink. It is their just reward.”

7 And I heard a voice from the altar, saying, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, your judgments are true and just.”

Now for sure people will come to believe what the preachers have been telling them, and cause the people to repent and call on Jesus for salvation. Well, things have not really become quite that bad yet to convince the people that this is the wrath of God on a sinful world. Maybe they need just a little more proof.

8 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, causing it to scorch everyone with its fire. 9 Everyone was burned by this blast of heat,

Okay, enough is enough. First the cancerous sores, then the water in all the oceans turned to blood killing all the fish and other forms of life living in them, then all the rivers and streams turned to blood, and now people are being fried by sun and heat. Perhaps temperatures have risen to 150 degrees Fahrenheit and all air conditioning systems are breaking down because of overload. Surely now people will begin to fall on their knees all over the world begging God for forgiveness and accepting His offer of salvation through faith in Him and His work on the cross. Well, the rest of verse 8 tells us what they did.

and they cursed the name of God, who had control over all these plagues. They did not repent of their sins and turn to God and give him glory.

Wow, what does it take to convince people of the reality of the existence of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit? I guess God just needs to continue turning up the heat. Surely, one more catastrophe will convince them beyond a doubt.

10 Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. His subjects ground their teeth in anguish,

Can you imagine what it would be like if God turned off the Sun and stars and there was no light? People would freak out totally. By this time most of the generators may have shut down because of the contamination of the water supply all over the earth, and the supplies of coal available to power generators at electric power plants would soon run out because there would be no way to mine it and transport it. Remember that people are already sick with cancerous sores and the temperature has made work impossible, and that is not even taking into account the panic of the people that would throw every normal workday into chaos. Where else could the people turn but to God, believing finally what the preachers had been telling them, and asking forgiveness and salvation? Verses 11-15:

11 and they cursed the God of heaven for their pains and sores. But they did not repent of their evil deeds and turn to God.

12 Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great Euphrates River, and it dried up so that the kings from the east could march their armies toward the west without hindrance.

13 And I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs leap from the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.

14 They are demonic spirits who work miracles and go out to all the rulers of the world to gather them for battle against the Lord on that great judgment day of God the Almighty.

15 “Look, I will come as unexpectedly as a thief! Blessed are all who are watching for me, who keep their clothing ready so they will not have to walk around naked and ashamed.”

If you want clarification of verse 15, look up the passage in Matthew 25:1-10 and read the parable of the virgins. From the very start of the bowl judgments billions of people are going to die and they will continue to die in greater numbers with each continuous bowl judgment. If people have not come to faith in Christ and asked Him to be their Savior, they are going to be on their own when they die, and anyone who dies without the salvation provided by the blood of Jesus will go straight to Hell.

Continuing in Revelation 16:16:

*16 And the demonic spirits gathered all the rulers and their armies to a place with the Hebrew name **Armageddon**.*

17 Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air. And a mighty shout came from the throne in the Temple, saying, “It is finished!”

18 Then the thunder crashed and rolled, and lightning flashed. And a great earthquake struck—the worst since people were placed on the earth.

19 The great city of Babylon split into three sections, and the cities of many nations fell into heaps of rubble. So God remembered all of Babylon’s sins, and he made her drink the cup that was filled with the

wine of his fierce wrath.

20 And every island disappeared, and all the mountains were leveled.

21 There was a terrible hailstorm, and hailstones weighing seventy-five pounds fell from the sky onto the people below.

Whatever number of people are still alive finally see that they are at the end of their rope. By now they have seen every possible catastrophe strike their world. I can foresee people down on their knees everywhere pleading with God to save them. There can be no other hope for them. Even at this late hour, if they call on the name of God, ask forgiveness, and accept Christ, they can still have an eternity in Heaven rather than Hell. Here are the final words of the final verse in chapter 16 of Revelation describing the end of the world.

They cursed God because of the terrible plague of the hailstorm.

It is all over and there are no second chances, and all who have rejected Christ will be dead. A few believers that came to faith after the Rapture and before the end will be left alive to begin repopulating the earth for the reign of Christ during the Millennium. But all who have died cursing God will be in Hell where they will remain for a thousand years during Jesus' millennial reign upon the earth. At the end of that time they will be cast into "The Lake of Fire" for eternity.

One thing we did not mention here is the fact that somewhere in the midst of all this the Church is going to be raptured. That event will remove all believers from the world instantly. They will be taken up into the heavens to Christ. One moment people will be riding on a bus, train, or airplane and all of a sudden the driver, engineer, or pilot will disappear. How do you imagine the people left behind are going to explain that phenomenon? But even after that the greatest majority will not believe.

You may think this story belongs in a Steven Spielberg science fiction movie, but it goes far beyond the ability of man and all his abilities to produce special effects. The devastation here can only be brought about by God, and it will be so horrible that no one is even capable of imagining it. God has been good enough to give us a peak at the future. Please do not be so foolish as to ignore it. I encourage you to read your Bible and get to know the God that inspired the writing of each and every word. Get into a Bible study with a qualified leader or leaders who can answer your questions and help you through those difficult passages. Bathe yourself as much as possible in God's Word and surround yourself as much as possible with God's people to keep you accountable. When you do that, you will be prepared to help others who do not know Christ to come into a relationship with Him that will provide them salvation and an eternity in Heaven as well.

Then you will be like the people in John 6:14 proclaiming, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." That is a far better place to be than with those in Revelation 16 who cursed God and who were then in turn cursed by God. Choose the path to blessing and life. Choose Jesus as your Savior from sin and for eternal life. Amen.