

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The Feeding of the 5,000

John 6:1-9

Part 1

Certainly one of the most well known Bible stories of all time is the story of David and Goliath. It is a very powerful story. Here was a young man, David, a teenager really, facing an enemy, Goliath, so terrifying that the bravest men in Israel were afraid to face him in battle.

Why would so many brave Jewish men be so fearful? Goliath was no ordinary man and neither was his family. The book of **2 Samuel** tells us that Goliath had four brothers, one of whom had six fingers and six toes. Obviously Goliath's family was not what you would call ordinary. They did not have the normal genetic stock. They were all human, but there was obviously something very different about them. Of the four brothers, Goliath was the most distinct of all.

Scripture tells us that Goliath was six cubits and a span in height. How tall would this make Goliath? This would make Goliath just about ten feet tall, nearly 3 feet taller than Shaquille O'Neal, not three inches but three feet taller.

Goliath was not only remarkable in respect to his physical stature. He was also remarkable in terms of his standing. According to rabbinical teaching, he was a "champion" for ten years. That would mean, according to Kent Hughes, that he had killed at least one hundred men a year in hand-to-hand combat.

In addition to his remarkable stature and his remarkable standing was his remarkable armament. His spear was compared to a weavers beam. How long is a weavers beam? A weavers beam is 14 feet long. The tip of the spear weighed six hundred shekels of iron; or in other words, 16 pounds, which is the same weight as a college shot put. His scale armor weighed 5,000 shekels of bronze, or in other words, approximately 150 lbs. Certainly it should not be difficult for us to understand why Jewish men were afraid to individually challenge him on a field of battle. They were simply intimidated. They did not believe that they had any chance of defeating Goliath. This was true of every Jewish man except for David. David was totally confident he would be able to defeat Goliath.

We see this confidence in the way he chose to verbally respond to Goliath's initial challenge. What did Goliath initially say to David? ...**"Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" ..."Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field" (I Samuel 17:43-44).**

And how did David respond to this challenge? He certainly was not faint hearted or unsure of Himself. Listen to his words in **1 Samuel 17:45-47, "Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me, with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. (46) This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you.'**" Certainly I think we would have to say that David's response to Goliath's challenge did not lack confidence. Nor did David's confidence waver when Goliath began to move toward him.

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According to **1 Samuel 17:48**, after Goliath began to move toward David, David began to run, not away from Goliath but toward him, not leisurely but rather the Scriptures tell us that he began to run toward him rapidly. David was ready! David believed! And of course you know the rest of the story. While at a dead run, David reached into his bag, took out a stone, placed it into his sling and then slung the stone striking Goliath in the forehead.

What was David's secret? Where did he get the courage for this confrontation? Where did he get his confidence? David believed that it was God's will for him to slay Goliath. Because he believed that it was God's will for him to slay Goliath, he was absolutely confident that God would supply him whatever was necessary in order to gain the victory.

Is this type of confidence always evident in those who profess to be followers of Christ? Unfortunately, at times, it is not. Unfortunately there are times when those who profess to be followers of Christ focus more on their deficiencies rather than on Christ's sufficiency when it comes to doing His will. And of course this leads to a very unsatisfying spiritual walk.

But this certainly was not true of David and it should not true of us when it comes to doing those things we believe are the will of God. We should look at each day as full of exciting spiritual possibilities. We should never doubt the willingness and ability of Christ to supply us with all the resources we could ever need to perform His will. And I would hope that our study of **John 6:1-15**, the feeding of the 5000, would make this truth come alive for us this weekend.

Let me read for you **John 6:1-15**. "**After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias) (2) And a great multitude was following Him, because they were seeing the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. (3) And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. (4) Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. (5) Jesus therefore lifting up His eyes, and seeing the great multitude was coming to Him, said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?' (6) And 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 therefore 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) And when they were filled, He said to His disciples, 'Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost.' (13) And 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) When therefore the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, 'This is of a truth the Prophet who is to come into the world.' (15) Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone."

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Hopefully as we begin our study of the feeding of the 5,000 we will be encouraged to focus not on our deficiencies or shortcomings when we are seeking to do the will of Christ but on His willingness and ability to provide us all that we need. How does the feeding of the 5,000 begin?

Our study of the feeding of the 5,000 begins with a description of the *problem* (John 6:1-9). Let us look at the very first words. "After these things"... This phrase might indicate to some that the events recorded for us in **John 6** take place immediately after the events that take place in **John 5**. This is not true.

Though the events in John 6 take place "after" the events in John 5, they do not take place immediately after the events in John 5 (Matthew 9:35-38; Mark 6:1-6; Mark 6:30-46). What were some of the events that took place between **John 5** and **John 6** that are not spelled out for us in the text that we are now studying? First of all, Jesus and His disciples had withdrawn from the area of Jerusalem and Bethesda and went to the city Nazareth in the area of Galilee according to **Mark 6:1-6**. Secondly, Jesus after being rejected in Nazareth began an extensive teaching and healing ministry in the surrounding towns and villages according to **Matthew 9:35-38**. Thirdly, after this rather extensive teaching and healing ministry, Christ then sent His disciples out to do the very same thing that He had been doing. He later, in addition to this, received His very joyful but weary disciples back again according to **Mark 6:30-46**. And because they were so weary from ministry, Jesus in the same passage suggested that they get away for a while and get some rest.

This brings us back to **John 6:1**. Let us continue to read the verse. "**After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias).**" Why did Jesus leave to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee? The extensive ministry in the area of Galilee by Christ and His disciples between John 5 and 6 led them to seek *rest* "on the other side of the Sea of Galilee" (John 6:1; Mark 6:30-32).

What a wonderful thing it is when we are tired and able to look forward to getting some rest. And this is what Christ and His disciples are looking forward to here in **John 6:1** when it says, "**after these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.**"

How did they travel? According to **Mark 6:32**, it was by boat. And where were they going? When we compare **Mark 6:32** with **Luke 9:10** we would have to conclude that they were going to a wilderness area near the town of Bethsaida. Assuming that they were leaving near or from the city Capernaum this would mean that they would be taking a trip of no more than 10 miles by boat along the very northern tip of the Sea of Galilee.

Obviously these men were very committed to getting a little rest in light of the fact that they were willing to invest themselves in the kind of trip described for us in **John 6:1**. I would imagine that as they were moving along the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee enjoying their boat ride they were getting more and more excited about eventually getting out of their boat, preparing a nice leisurely lunch and then taking a very long, well deserved nap. But this is not at all what happened.

What actually happened? Though Christ and the disciples wanted to rest, a great multitude of people followed them to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (John 6:2).

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Let us read **John 6:2**. "**And a great multitude was following Him.**" Why were they following? They followed Him because of the many miraculous healings that He had performed in their towns and villages (John 6:2). Let us continue to read the verse, "**And a great multitude of people followed Him, [to the other side of the Sea of Galilee] because they were seeing the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.**"

How excited was this great multitude about following Christ? **Mark 6:33** tells us that the people who had seen Jesus getting into the boat began to run, apparently anticipating the very place that Jesus and His disciples were planning to go. In fact they were running so fast that they arrived at the place that Christ and His disciples were intending to rest even before Christ and His disciples arrived according to the same verse.

What an incredible scene. Jesus and His disciples had wanted to get away and rest. I am sure they were looking forward to this, but obviously this was not going to happen. They probably could see the people running along the shoreline. The disciples seeing them run along the shoreline may have been thinking to themselves, "**Can't we get any time to ourselves?**" "**Can't we get any time to rest?**" This kind of thinking would not surprise me. But even though this might have been what they were thinking, this certainly was not what Christ was thinking.

Christ's response to seeing this great multitude of people was one of compassion; and therefore, after arriving on the shore, He taught them late into the day according to Mark 6:34.

From where did He teach them? Let us read **John 6:3**. "**And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.**" And when did this instruction take place? Let us read **John 6:4**. "**Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.**"

Jesus felt compassion for the multitude and because He taught them late into the day, the multitude became hungry. Would the people die if they had not eaten at this particular moment? No! Some might have felt that they were dying but they certainly were not dying. But even though they were not dying the multitudes certainly would have felt hungry.

What was the disciples' solution to this problem of hunger? The disciples solution to the hunger of the multitude, according to Mark 6:36, was to encourage Christ to send them into the surrounding cities to buy food. Was Christ particularly sympathetic to this suggestion by His disciples? No! Let us read **John 6:5**. "**Jesus therefore lifting His eyes, and seeing that a great multitude was coming to Him, said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?'**"

When Jesus asked Philip "Where are we to buy bread?" He communicated to His disciples that He wanted to feed the multitude. He was expressing His will. Could Christ have taken the suggestion that the disciples had made to send the multitude away into the nearby cities to buy food in **Mark 6:35-36**. Of course He could! This certainly would not have been a sin. He was free to do this. But the question that Jesus asks Philip clearly indicates this was not what He wanted to do. Christ clearly did not want to send the multitude away hungry. Though this rather subdued expression of Christ's will may not seem very significant, it is extremely important to the flow of the passage.

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Though the question that Jesus asks Philip was clearly designed to communicate that Jesus did not want to send the multitude away hungry, it was also designed to test Philip (John 6:6). Let us look at **John 6:6. "And this He was saying to test him..."**

Jesus knew that they did not have enough money to buy sufficient food to feed the multitude. But He wanted Philip to grapple with the problem of their financial shortfall in light of His stated desire to feed all the people who were with them. Jesus wanted to see if Philip and the other disciples could see how His expressed desire to feed the multitude could be accomplished even in spite of their own personal deficiencies.

Let me ask you a question. Do you believe that you, within your own strength and resources, can do anything that you set your mind to? And the answer to this question is absolutely not! Just because I might want to do something does not mean that I can do it. This I believe should be obvious.

But now let me ask you a different question. Do you believe that you can accomplish anything Christ desires for you to accomplish through His resources even if you lack the personal resources in and of yourself to accomplish it? And the answer to this question should be what? Absolutely!

If Christ's will for you is to be patient do you believe that He is willing and able to provide what you need in order for you to be patient? If Christ's will for you is to be diligent in your studies or at your work do you believe that He is willing and able to provide what you need to be diligent? I would hope that you would believe He would. I would hope that you would be confident just as confident as David was confident. But this is not a given. We are being continually tested. And this is exactly what Jesus was doing when He asked Philip, **"Where are we to buy bread?"** And this is clearly stated in **John 6:6**. Let us go back to the verse but this time let us finish reading it. **"And this He was saying to test him; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do."**

Jesus had already made up His mind that the people were going to be fed. The only question that was presently outstanding for Jesus was just how far had the disciples come in understanding the height, breadth, and depth of His person and His power.

So did Philip pass the test? How does Philip respond? Let us read **John 6:7. "Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little."** Philip stated the obvious.

Two hundred denarii was enough money to supply food for a typical family for approximately eight months. Philip knew that Jesus by his question wanted to feed the multitude but all he could do was to respond to Christ's question with a statement about having insufficient funds.

Did he pass the test? No! He did not pass the test. How should he have responded? I would expect that he should have responded something like this? "Lord, if you want me to go into Bethsaida and purchase whatever bread I can, with the limited amount of money that we have, I am sure that you will be able to feed this multitude. I am not sure exactly how you will be able to do it, but I am sure that you can. Here I am as your willing servant."

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And if this were the conviction of Philip, that Christ would be able to feed this multitude through the food he would be able to purchase in Bethsaida, how do you think he would have approached this trip? I would think that he would have approached this trip with a great deal of confidence, even with excitement. Why? Because I believe that he would have fully expected Christ to do something truly special with the very humble offering that he would have brought back with him from Bethsaida.

I would think that a response like this would have been far better than the one that he gave. But unfortunately for Philip this is not how he responded, and therefore he failed the test. Philip failed the test because his focus was on their insufficient amount of *foods* rather than on the fact that Christ's expressed will was that the multitude would be fed.

But let us not think that it was just Philip who failed the test. Let us read **John 6:8-9. "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'..."** Apparently it was not only Philip who knew that Christ wanted to feed the multitude. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, also knew.

And what did this lead Andrew to do? It led Andrew to tell Christ of a lad who had five barley loaves and two fish. Now this seems to be promising. Here is a disciple of Christ, in light of His master's expressed desire to feed the multitude, offering some information about some food that might be available to Christ in meeting this need. If he could have stopped at that point in his comments to Jesus it would have been good. At least it would have given the impression that he believed that Christ might actually be able to do something in meeting this huge need through this very small offering of loaves and fish. Unfortunately Andrew did not stop there.

Let us go on to read the rest of the verse. **"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?"** Once again we see a disciple of Christ focusing not on Christ's expressed will but rather on the insufficiency of the resources.

Did Andrew pass the test? No! He did not pass the test. If he had passed the test he would have said something like this. "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish. I know that this is not very much in light of the multitude of people who have here, but if you want, I will bring them to you, and I am confident that you will be able to feed this multitude. I am not sure exactly how you will be able to do it, but I am sure that you can. Here I am as your willing servant."

And if this was Andrew's belief, if it was his conviction, that Christ could feed this multitude of people using these five barley loaves and two fishes, I would imagine that he would have gone to the lad who had these limited provisions with a great deal of excitement.

Why? Because I believe that he would have fully expected Christ to very shortly do something very special with the five barley loaves and two fish.

I would think that a response like this would have been far better than the one that he had given. But unfortunately for Andrew, this is not how he responded. And therefore he failed the test. Andrew

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failed the test because his focus was on the insufficient amount of *food* rather than on the fact that Christ's expressed will was that the multitude would be fed.

CONCLUSION

Let me ask you a question. How could David approach Goliath with so much courage? How could David approach Goliath with so much vigor? David was not looking at what he lacked when he faced Goliath, but rather at what the Lord was prepared to *supply* as he did what he believed was God's will.

Philip and Andrew should have followed David's example. If they had followed David's example, they certainly would not have viewed themselves so lacking when it came to feeding the multitudes with their limited material resources. Because they focused on their deficiencies rather on Christ's willingness and ability to provide, they were defeated before they even got started. They should have realized that Christ was very well prepared to supply for them more than enough resources to accomplish His will through them. And if they had realized this, they would have passed the test.

Where are you presently being tested? In what areas of your life is the will of Christ being made clear to you? Is He calling you to put away anger? Is He calling you to put away greed? Is He calling you to get more involved in His mission? What areas of your life is the will of Christ being made clear to you. Are you excited about performing His will through the strength and power that He will supply for you? You are being tested. It is simply a matter of whether or not you will pass the test.

Are you more like David, or are you more like Philip and Andrew? Are we prepared when the Lord discloses His will to us through His written Word to trust Him for His abundant *supply*?