

LESSON 7

*February 7-13

The Sacred *and the* Common



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 6.*

Memory Text: “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (*John 6:63, NIV*).

Key Thought: In Christ all of life, even the common things, can bring us into a closer communion with Christ.

Throughout John, chapter 6, the people relate to Jesus on a material level. They are not searching for spiritual food; rather, they want their physical needs satisfied. They want to see more miracles such as the feeding of the 5,000. In spite of that awesome event, when the people looked at Jesus, they saw a common everyday human being like themselves, not Someone who came down from heaven. They were unable to see the sacred shining through the common.

In chapter 6, Jesus tries to direct their eyes away from the common toward spiritual things, the food that endures to eternal life. Life is not found in miracles and in the things of this world. Life is found by accepting the claims Jesus makes about Himself. One of the secrets of the devotional life is to learn how to see the presence and the power of Jesus working in the common things of everyday life, to sense that He is there with us, even though we cannot see, hear, or touch Him.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 14.*

SUNDAY February 8

The Miracle of the Fish and Loaves

(John 6:1-13).

Read John 6:1-13, the feeding of the 5,000. What lessons can you see in this account? What does this story say to you personally? What's in it that speaks to your needs? What kind of hope does it offer? What does it tell you about God?

Notice, too, the timing of this account: It took place around the time of Passover (*John 6:4*), when the Lord worked a mighty deliverance for His people. Though the feeding of the 5,000 certainly was not as dramatic as the Exodus from Egypt, it was still a powerful manifestation of God's power in behalf of His people, even in their spiritual ignorance. John makes it clear that many of those who had followed Christ did so only because of the miracles they already had seen (*vs. 2*) and not because of any deep, spiritual conviction that this Man was the Messiah or that He could bring them spiritual freedom.

Nevertheless, the Lord still worked in their behalf. In other words, though He knew their hearts were still not right, He ministered to them anyway. How grateful we can be that our God is like that. What does that tell us about how we should act toward those who aren't where they should be spiritually?

Though Christ multiplies the fish and the loaves (the miracle), He does not miraculously deliver them to the crowd. How was the food distributed and gathered? What lesson is in there for us? *John 6:10-12.*

Though Jesus ministers here to their physical needs, is that an end in itself or a means to an end? After all, a few hours later, all those people would be hungry again. What is Jesus doing with that miracle? In what ways are we called to do the same thing?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *John 6:63*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show that Jesus was God, yet, at the same time, a human being like ourselves.
2. To demonstrate how the miracles of Jesus, while satisfying physical needs, most importantly illustrated spiritual reality.
3. To stress that Christ's life demonstrated a right relationship between the sacred and wondrous and the ordinary and mundane.

Lesson Outline:

I. Is God One of Us? (*John 6:60, 61*).

- A. Christ's contemporaries were fascinated by His wonders, but most were unwilling to believe His claims.
- B. Christ hoped to guide His public to a loftier, more spiritual perspective.
- C. While knowing this, Christ continued to show patience with the people, in the hope that some would eventually understand.

II. Miracles and Meaning (*John 6:14*).

- A. The disciples assumed that Jesus' signs and miracles were a prelude to His ascension to the earthly throne of David.
- B. Jesus' miracles usually alluded to past events in salvation history, most notably the Exodus.
- C. Jesus' miracles were focused on the needs of His hearers, whether spiritual or physical, never on His own need for recognition.

III. The Great in the Small (*John 6:55, 56*).

- A. Our physical and spiritual needs are satisfied by a common source, Jesus, who created both realities.
- B. It is important to realize that Jesus is not something apart from the rest of life.
- C. The sacred and the secular may be different, but they become connected together through Christ.

Summary: Many have become needlessly confused on the issue of Jesus' humanity and His divinity. It may help to reflect on the ways in which Jesus united the human and the divine in His own Person and how this was, in fact, central to His mission. The life, miracles, and message of Christ are bridges between these seemingly incompatible realities.

COMMENTARY.

What is the nature of Christian discipleship? John 6 tells us that discipleship is (a) mending the body, healing the soul; (b) continual surrender to Christ; and (c) abiding in Him until the end.



MONDAY February 9

Miracle at Sea (*John 6:16-21*).

Read the story in **John 6:16-21** of Jesus walking on the water. Compare it to the miracle of the fish and the loaves. What are the differences?

It is interesting that Christ would perform such a powerful miracle, especially after what just happened on the mountain with the multitude, who did not respond in a positive manner to the miracle He had performed there. (Read John 6:14, 15: They wanted to make Him a king, by force; Christ did not come to allow Himself to be set up as King. Their reaction caused Him to leave the area.)

What reason, then, would Jesus have for doing this miracle? **Hint:** Who are the ones who witness it?

In the story of the disciples on the sea (*John 6:16-21*), Jesus accomplishes a deed similar to those done by the God of the Exodus (*see Exod. 14:20-22*). To people schooled in the Old Testament, therefore, Jesus' ability to walk on water and to control wind and wave was a powerful affirmation of His divinity, something the disciples needed after their disappointment with Christ's refusal to be made king.

In *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White writes that the disciples are eager for Christ to be crowned the Davidic King, and when He forbids it, they become upset. "The disciples had long hoped for a popular movement to place Jesus on the throne; they could not endure the thought that all this enthusiasm should come to nothing. . . .

"Unbelief was taking possession of their minds and hearts. Love of honor had blinded them. They knew that Jesus was hated by the Pharisees, and they were eager to see Him exalted as they thought He should be."—Pages 379, 380.

By performing the miracle of walking on the water, Jesus strengthens the faith of His disciples. But do we always need miracles to have our faith strengthened? What are some things that have happened in your life that have helped your faith grow yet would not necessarily be called "miracles"?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

I. Discipleship: Mending the Body, Healing the Soul.

John 6:1-14 records the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 when the Creator turned a boy's five barley loaves (the food of the poor) and two fish into a vast cafeteria. Jesus well knew that "man shall not live by bread alone" (*Matt. 4:4*), but He also was sensitive to the fact that bread is essential to life. Stanley Jones said that a stomach starved all day long does not prepare a mind to comprehend the mystery and glory of John 3:16 during the evening service.

This does not mean, however, that the gospel must be turned into a social revolution in which the imperatives of the body and its environment take priority over the needs of the soul. Just as the body cannot live without bread, neither can the soul live without Christ, the Bread of Life (*John 6:35*). Christian discipleship, therefore, must care for both physical and spiritual hunger.

It does seem, though, that emphasis on physical hunger often provides a push up the social ladder. The untouchables in India, the underprivileged in parts of Asia, the illiterate in Africa, and the marginalized in the United States seem to achieve an upper mobility when they turn to Christianity. This trend has coined the term "rice Christians." It is not a new trend, for soon after the 5,000 were fed, multitudes followed Jesus, hoping for another free-food miracle. Jesus was the first to sense this (*vs. 26*) and to thereby express the principle that materialism cannot be the basis of true evangelism (*vs. 27*). His kingdom is not of this world. Neither is He the king of the material (*vs. 15*).

II. Discipleship: Continual Faith in Christ.

John 6:28-59 provides three essentials in Christian discipleship. First, a disciple is one who does the "works of God" (*vs. 28*). "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (*vs. 29, NIV*). Nothing or no one can compete with Jesus. He demands of His followers all or none at all. There is no middle course.

Second, the relationship between Jesus and His disciples transcends all else. Take, for example, Israel's experience with manna (*vss. 31, 32*). Manna was indeed a miracle, but it pales before the miracle of the Bread from heaven. "I am the bread of life" (*vss. 35, 41, 48, 51*), Jesus declares. This is the first of the great "I AM" metaphors Jesus uses to describe Himself and to assert His uniqueness as God in human flesh (*John 8:12; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; and 15:1, 5*).

This uniqueness demands of Jesus' disciples absolute allegiance. Just as bread is eaten and becomes part of the body, so must Jesus be a part of the person's body, mind, and soul, so that whatever the person is and does comes under the exclusive ownership and service of Jesus. Without such exclusiveness, there can be no discipleship.

TUESDAY *February 10*

Bread From Heaven (*John 6:22-35*).

After that stormy night (John 6:16-21), the crowd crosses the lake and finds Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum, where all the preaching and the dialogue of the rest of the chapter take place.

How do the ancient Israelites survive in the desert, and what does that have to do with the feeding of the 5,000 earlier in the chapter? *Exod. 16:33-35, John 6:27-31.*

A consistent theme in the background of John 6 is the Exodus from Egypt. The feeding of the 5,000 recalls the original Passover when the Israelites escaped from the immediate grasp of the Egyptians. Then the storm episode (*vss. 16-21*) recalls the perils the Israelites faced at the Red Sea. Now comes a reference to God's guiding of their experience in the desert of Sinai. As with the Israelites in the desert, the hearers of Jesus react to miracles they can see or touch, but their faith remains inadequate. Jesus directs their attention away from the manna the Israelites received in the desert to the spiritual bread He has come to offer them.

Read prayerfully and carefully John 6:32-35. What point is Jesus making here? What is He telling us about Himself? What do these words mean to us? Why does He use the bread analogy?

The clear implication of the sermon is that seeing Jesus and believing in Him is what produces real life in the spiritual sense now and in the fullest sense " 'at the last day' " (*vs. 40; 5:21*). Just as food constantly must be eaten in order to sustain physical life, so it is necessary to invite Jesus into our daily experience in order to sustain spiritual life. "Believing" in the Gospel of John (*see also John 1:12, 6:47*) always has a continuous sense. It must be an ongoing and daily experience.

Read in verse 35 of John 6 where Jesus says that those who come to Him and who believe in Him will never hunger nor thirst. How have these promises been manifested in your life? If they have not, then you need to ask yourself, How can I come to Jesus and believe in Him?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Third, because of this exclusiveness, Jesus can say: “ ‘I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day’ ” (*John 6:53, 54, NIV*). Jesus is saying in this passage that discipleship is not possible until a person accepts Him in all areas of life.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Matthew 13:13, John 1:47-50, 4:27-32, 5:1-18, 2 Peter 3:9*

- ① John emphasizes the extent to which people followed Jesus for self-centered, materialistic reasons. So, why do you think He continued to perform such miracles as the feeding of the 5,000?
- ② Jesus’ miracles as recorded by John all have a deeper spiritual meaning and, in some cases, a connection to earlier sacred history. Do you think the significance of these miracles went completely over the people’s heads? If so, what purpose did the miracles serve?
- ③ In all Jesus’ teachings, He Himself was, to some degree, the message. What did His miracles tell us about Him and His true nature?
- ④ Of John 6:16-21, William Barclay writes, “One of the loveliest things in the Fourth Gospel is that John, the old fisherman turned evangelist, found all the wealth of Christ in the memory of a fisherman’s story.”—*The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 210. What is the “wealth of Christ,” and how do these verses depict it? How can we use this wealth today when we find ourselves in trouble and afraid?
- ⑤ Although we are used to the idea in a religious/biblical context, the eating and drinking of someone’s body and blood (*John 6:51*) is, at first glance, an extremely strange and off-putting concept, as Jesus’ hearers noted. Why do you think Jesus chose such a shocking image? In what ways do we “eat” Jesus’ body and “drink” His blood?
- ⑥ Clearly, most people listening to Jesus in John’s Gospel did not “get” Him. Why, then, did He continue to explain Himself to them?

WEDNESDAY *February 11*

Talking to Deaf Ears (*John 6:36-50*).

Why do many people in the following text have a hard time accepting Jesus' claims? *John 6:41, 42*. How do the words of the people here reflect the words of Nicodemus in *John 3:4*?

How do many of Jesus' own disciples react to His teachings in this chapter? *John 6:60, 66*. Why would they react this way?

Throughout this chapter the crowds relate to Jesus on a material and physical level. They want to see more miracles such as the feeding of the 5,000. When Jesus refuses to accommodate them, they all too quickly conclude that Jesus is a common everyday human being like themselves, not Someone who came down from heaven. The common keeps them from seeing the sacred. The very physical presence of Jesus becomes a stumbling block to them.

Like the second generation of Christians, we think that we would be better off knowing Jesus in the flesh instead of struggling to have a relationship with Someone we can't see, hear, or touch. But the physical presence of Jesus caused the first generation not to take Him as seriously as they certainly should have.

Who really was Jesus? He was much more than just a good man who grew up in Nazareth with Joseph and Mary. But what kind of man would claim to be the Son of God who came down from heaven? To make such a claim, he would have to be either crazy, a deceiver (in neither case would people designate him a "good man"), or exactly what he claims to be. There is no middle ground; we must either accept Him and all that He stands for or reject Him as insane, or even worse, the perpetrator of the greatest scam of all time. The foolishness of the people in this story is that they insist on seeing Jesus as just a good man. This is not really an option as far as Jesus is concerned.

It is crucial, therefore, that people recognize exactly who Jesus is. He brings from heaven a revelation of God and about God that is of life-and-death importance to the human race. To partake of Jesus as bread, flesh, and blood is a graphic way of expressing that only through an intimate relationship with Jesus—as close as food that has been eaten is to the body—can one gain the eternal life that He promises.

In what ways might we be in danger of doing the same thing as the crowds in *John 6*; that is, not distinguishing the sacred from the common? For example, do our attitudes toward the church, its leaders, or our message reflect this same spiritual principle?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Then that person can say, like Paul: “ ‘I no longer live, but Christ lives in me’ ” (*Gal. 2:20, NIV*).

“To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ is to receive Him as a personal Saviour, believing that He forgives our sins, and that we are complete in Him. . . . What food is to the body, Christ must be to the soul. Food cannot benefit us unless we eat it, unless it becomes a part of our being. So Christ is of no value to us if we do not know Him as a personal Saviour. A theoretical knowledge will do us no good. We must feed upon Him, receive Him into the heart, so that His life becomes our life. His love, His grace, must be assimilated.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 389.

III. Discipleship: Abiding Until the End.

Genuine discipleship continues through ups and downs, rain and shine, work and worship, until the end. There may be hard sayings difficult to believe, testing times almost beyond endurance, and faith on trial—but in the midst of it all, Jesus will always hold first place. John 6:60-70 speaks of two perils and one promise in this call for continued discipleship. Some would defect to the enemy

Witnessing

There is a popular children’s storybook entitled *The Runaway Bunny*, written by Margaret Wise Brown. The story unfolds as a little bunny mischievously tells his mother that he’s going to run away from home. The mother, not wanting anything to happen to her little bunny, tells him that she will follow him to make sure he is always safe. The bunny then tells his mother that he will become something else in his determination to get away. Each time the bunny imagines himself to be something new, his mother also becomes something new, so she can keep him safe. In the end, the bunny decides he will just be a bunny and stay home.

Although this story was intended for small children, it has some spiritual implications. Just like the runaway bunny, many people are determined to get away from God. But no matter where they go, they cannot escape His blessings. It is impossible for even the wicked to live without Him. “In him we live, and move, and have our being” (*Acts 17:28*). If God were not actively involved in each of our lives, we would cease to exist.

The story of the little bunny is simplistic, but the Lord can use the simple, ordinary things of life to direct our thoughts to Him. This week’s lesson speaks of how we can have a more fulfilling devotional life by seeing God work through everyday things. We can be more effective witnesses by doing the same. We will be able to point many souls heavenward by sharing Bible truths using practical everyday experiences as examples.

THURSDAY *February 12*

The Sacred and the Common *(John 6:51-71).*

Read John 6:51-58. What does Jesus mean by saying we must eat His flesh and drink His blood? Summarize in your own words the essence of what you believe He says to us with these startling words.

Time and again in the Gospel of John symbols are drawn from everyday experiences, symbols such as bread, water, and light. These symbols help us to connect Jesus' words with things in the context of our everyday lives. No matter how ordinary our lives may be, our relationship with Jesus will deepen and grow as we learn to remember Him in the course of everything we do. As the Bread of Life, Jesus brings us a foretaste of eternal life, which makes physical food and drink seem insignificant by comparison.

As the body craves food and drink and sunlight, so the soul craves the presence of Jesus (whether or not one is aware of that), and if Jesus is not allowed to be present, human beings will go to all kinds of ridiculous lengths to fill the gap with something else.

What are some of the things people resort to in order to fill their innate spiritual needs?

When we sit down at a table to eat, we can remember that rain, life, and sunshine, and the food production that they make possible, would all have ceased with sin were it not for the Cross of Jesus. When we lift up a glass to drink, we can remember the Water of Life. When we get dressed in the morning, we can think about the robe of Christ's righteousness. One of the keys to a living relationship with Jesus is recognizing His sacred touch at work in common things, to make all the ordinary events of our lives reminders of the words and actions of Jesus.

Read again the text for today. Time and again Jesus talks about life and living. What, ultimately, has Jesus promised those who eat His flesh and drink His blood, and why is this promise so important to us?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

(vs. 66). Some would choose denial, as Judas did (vs. 70). The enduring one, however, will grasp Christ's promise of eternal life (vs. 44) and will shout from the soul's inner depths, as Peter did: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68, 69, NIV). Distance, however small, is unknown between Christ and His disciples.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: "In the years just after A.D. 60 the luxury of Roman society was unparalleled. It was at this time that they served feasts of peacocks' brains and nightingales' tongues; that they cultivated the odd habit of taking emetics between courses so that the next might taste better. . . . It was at this time that Pliny tells of a Roman lady who was married in a robe so richly jewelled and gilded that it cost the equivalent of 432,000 [British pounds]. There was a reason for all this, and the reason was a deep dissatisfaction with life, a hunger that nothing could satisfy. They would try anything for a new thrill, because they were both appallingly rich and appallingly hungry."—William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: John 1*, p. 212.

Thought Questions:

- 1 The happenings recorded in chapter 6 of John focus on the needs of people around Jesus for personal, not spiritual, satisfaction. Even after the miraculous feeding of the 5,000, the people wanted more. Greed clouded their vision; they could not see that Jesus held the answer to all their needs. What are the issues in our church today that cloud our minds from recognizing Jesus as the panacea for our spiritual ailments?
- 2 Many Jews of Jesus' day thought in terms of good works. Living a life filled with good works, they believed, earned them favor with God. What is the danger of this kind of thinking?

Application Question:

Consider the need for thrills in today's world. Television shows scramble to find ways to take viewers to more exciting entertainment levels: shows about a hidden camera on cheating spouses; about daring contestants to do the unimaginable; and even airing a live execution. Compare the need for thrills today with that in the days of Christ. What are the differences? The similarities? What are the elements in your life that help you justify your need for thrills? How can you let God fulfill your need?

FRIDAY February 13

Further Study: Carefully compare the accounts in John 6:16-21 with Matthew 14:22-27 and Mark 6:45-52. Note all the parallels and contrasts between John's account and the other two, including omissions. How does this comparison illuminate the point the Holy Spirit was making with the story? In what ways do Matthew and Mark, moved by the Holy Spirit, use the story?

For additional spiritual insights into this marvelous chapter, see Ellen White's comments in *The Desire of Ages*. John 6:1-21 is covered on pages 364–382, and pages 383–394 are devoted almost exclusively to John 6:22-71.

Discussion Questions:

① **Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "It is only because He became like us that we can become like Him" (*The Cost of Discipleship* [New York: Collier Books, 1963], p. 344). What do you think that means? Do you agree or disagree, and why?**

② **Why was Jesus' teaching in John 6 so hard for the listeners to accept? Could it be because they had preconceptions about what they expected from a divine Deliverer? If so, what does that tell us about the danger, as Christians, of having certain ideas about what God should or should not do? What happens when those expectations are not met?**

Summary: In John, chapter 6, Jesus struggles to communicate His mission in the face of continual misunderstanding. He feeds the 5,000 in order to demonstrate that He is the One who can bring them the bread of divine spiritual life. They, instead, see someone worthy to run the national economy (*vs. 14*). In stilling the storm, Jesus sought to show His disciples that He is as capable as the God of the Exodus to supply their needs and free them from fear. But they seem at the same time too fearful and too self-confident to seek His help.

At Capernaum He uses bread, flesh, and blood as analogies to illustrate the need for the spiritual life He offers. Most of those who hear Him there, however, react with disgust and abandon Him. Taken together, the three events chronicled in this chapter teach us the need to differentiate between the sacred and the common, to learn how to have a living relationship with One who makes Himself real to us in the course of everyday life.