

Series: The Difference

March 13, 2016

## **Title: Bread of Life**

**[Slide 1]**

**Text: John 6:1-15**

### **The Test of Need**

#### **A Test for Philip:**

It was a conversation that we've all had at one time or another: faced with too many mouths to feed and no food in the cupboard, Jesus turned to one of the local boys with a question:

**[Slide 2]**

*John 6:5 NIV*

*When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"*

But hidden in the question was something more -- a test:

**[Slide 3]**

*John 6:6 NIV*

*He asked this only to **test** him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.*

The test Jesus presented to Philip was *the test of need*. How would he respond to the neediness of people in this old creation? *Where* would he go to try and meet the need?

#### **A New Exodus moment:**

The test was filled with echoes of the ancient Exodus Story:

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- Like Moses leading the people to the far shore of the Red Sea, Jesus and His disciples had just "crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee."

- A huge crowd of people followed Jesus because of the signs he had been performing – liberating people from the kingdom of evil, just as Moses had performed signs to liberate Israel from Egypt.
- Jesus had spent the day teaching on a mountain, like Moses delivering God’s Word from Sinai.
- Even the timing of the story dovetailed with the Exodus: “The Jewish Passover was near.” (John 6:4 NIV)

Now, like Moses in the Sinai, Jesus finds that He has a whole lot of hungry people on His hands. It is a *New Exodus moment*. So what would Philip do to meet the need?

### **Not “What” but “Who”:**

Philip’s answer is very practical and down-to-earth:

#### **[Slide 5]**

*John 6:7 NIV*

*Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”*

Andrew overhears the conversation and adds to the sense of impossibility in the face of the overwhelming need:

#### **[Slide 6]**

*John 6:9 NIV*

*“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”*

Pass or Fail – what do you think?

- From this world’s perspective Philip’s and Andrew’s answers were correct.
- But from God’s perspective they had totally missed the point!
- They had answered Jesus’ question of *where* to get bread by focusing on **What** instead of **Who**.
- They had no grasp of **Who** was asking them the question. As John tells us, “...he already had in mind what he was going to do.”

Their test highlights one more Exodus connection, this time from Moses' retelling of the Exodus Story in Deuteronomy. In reminding Israel of the gift of bread, or manna, in the desert, Moses explains:

**[Slide 7]**

*Deuteronomy 8:2-3 NIV*

*Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these 40 years, to humble and **test** you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.*

**[Slide 8]**

*He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, **to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.***

God had put His people to a test – the test of need and the test of manna – to teach them to focus on **Who** instead of **What**. Would they focus solely upon their immediate physical *needs*? Or would they seek out a trusting and obedient relationship with the God Who was bringing them into freedom? Would it be “bread alone” or “every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD?”

## **The Test of Plenty**

### **Food in the Desert:**

It turns out that there was one person in the crowd that day who knew where to go in this moment of need. It was the little boy who gave his lunch to Jesus. He *didn't* quibble about the cost of feeding the crowd. He didn't see his lunch as woefully inadequate. He saw that Someone greater than Moses was present in the wilderness that day.

And so it turned out that there was more than enough food for the 5000 men and their families that day. Just as the LORD had fed His people in the desert, Jesus, the LORD who had come as one of us, took the little lunch, gave thanks to His Father, and distributed it to the crowd. Like any good Jewish feast, there were plenty of leftovers.

One person, at least, had seen that **Who** was present was far more important than **What** was needed.

### **The Test of Plenty:**

Like the overwhelming need, the abundance of food in the desert was a test. This time the test might be called The Test of Plenty – the mirror opposite of the test Jesus posed to Philip.

So how did the vast crowd handle the test of plenty? John writes:

#### **[Slide 9]**

*John 6:14-15 NIV*

*After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."*

*Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.*

### **Golden Calf:**

In Jesus' time there was an intense expectation that God would raise up a new prophet to rescue His people from foreign oppression and make them rulers of their world. Moses had promised that one day God would provide a prophet like Moses to do just that. When the prophet appeared, he would perform *signs* like those Moses had performed in the desert: miraculous bread, meat and water.

No wonder, then, that the crowd that day identified Jesus as "the Prophet who is to come into the world." The miracle of the bread and fish sealed the deal. Now all that remained was to make Him the King who would lead them to victory.

And here is where they failed their test. Instead of discovering **Who** Jesus actually was – God in human form – they tried to make Him into **What** they wanted. In the Exodus Story Israel had rejected **Who** God was, and had re-imagined Him as **What** they wanted: a Golden Calf.

Now the crowd repeated that disastrous sin: Instead of allowing the sign of the bread to lead them to discover **Who** Jesus actually was, they tried to make Him into **What** they wanted: a political and military leader.

## **Bread of Life:**

### **Not What, but Who:**

John tells us that the next day Jesus and the crowd had a long conversation in which Jesus offered them the opportunity to take the test of the bread again – and come up with the right answer.

It started, as you might expect, with revisiting the Exodus Story:

#### **[Slide 10]**

*John 6:30-31 NIV*

*So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe in you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"*

There it is: the focus was on the **What**. "What sign?" They wanted something to see and believe in.

Jesus answers by challenging them to think outside the box of **"What."**

#### **[Slide 11]**

*John 6:32-33 NIV*

*Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."*

Quite a riddle! They still think in terms of **What**:

#### **[Slide 12]**

*John 6:34 NIV*

*"Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."*

Then Jesus solves the riddle:

*John 6:35 NIV*

*Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

### **Bread of Life:**

The Bread of Life is not a **What**, but a **Who**. **The Bread of Life is the One Who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.**

That is why later in the chapter Jesus says:

### **[Slide 13]**

*John 6:58 NIV*

*"This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."*

Life is filled with tests. Every day we face The Test of Need. Every day we face the Test of Plenty. Every day we will be tempted to see things from an earthly perspective. Every day we will want to focus on **the WHAT** that fills the need or derives from the plenty.

But when we focus on **the WHAT** we fail the test. The things of this world will never give us the fullness of Life that God intended for us. That Life can only come from Him. Jesus is the Bread of Life.

### **Table Time:**

In the Book of Revelation Jesus poses the same test to a church that has lost its way. It's a church that believed the right things and was very content with itself. You might say that it was facing The Test of Plenty. From an earthly perspective, things were going well. But Jesus tells the church that it is actually in a desperately needy condition: wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked! (Revelation 3:17).

The cure: to turn from **What to Who**. Jesus says:

### **[Slide 14]**

*Revelation 3:20 NIV*

*"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."*

We all know what it's like to gather around the table with close friends and family. Sure, the food is an important part of the occasion. We put hours and hours into preparing it so that every dish is just right. But that evening is *not about the food*. It's all about the friendship, the love, the bonding, the getting to know each other and a deeper and deeper level.

Isn't that what it means to discover the Bread of Life? All you have to do is open the door. He brings the bread. It is Himself.

## Small Group Discussion Notes: Bread of Life

### Icebreaker:

Think about a time when you and friends or loved ones gathered for a special meal. What made that time so very special? What do you remember most about that day or evening?

### Seeing God's Glory:

What does it mean to "see God's glory"? What would that glory and splendor actually look like or feel like? John's goal is that this happen for us. He wrote:

*John 1:14 NIV*

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have **seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

The stories he tells us about Jesus each show us God's glory in a special and unique way. So let's think back to the story of Jesus feeding the 5000.

### Feeding the 5000:

This story appears in all 4 Gospels. But in John's Gospel the story is about much more than the miracle of the loaves and fish. It is about a profound misunderstanding of both the bread and of who Jesus is. It is a story that makes us choose between the earthly provision of bread and the Bread of Life.

The crowd was looking for a new Moses who would lead them out of oppression and slavery into victory and freedom. They wanted a national hero like Judas Maccabaeus who had led the great revolt against foreign oppressors and had set the Jewish people free.

But Jesus came to do something far more important and life-changing. He came not as Moses, but as the LORD Himself in human form. Just like God came to dwell with His people in the desert, Jesus had now come to dwell with His people as "God with us." The miracle of the loaves and fish was a *sign*. It pointed to this far greater reality.

That is why Jesus called Himself the bread from heaven, the Bread of Life.



**Bread for your journey:**

In what area of your life do you sense the greatest lack, the greatest need?

What would seem to be the practical, down-to-earth solution to that need?

What would be your "bread in the desert"?

What would it mean for you to look for Jesus in this situation?

What difference would it make if you knew He was right here with you, walking in and through this time in your life?

What steps can you take to open the door and welcome Him into your world?

**Prayer:**

Take some time to pray with each other about finding the Bread of Life in the very real and difficult situations you have talked about.

**Next week:**

Next week we will learn about a blind man who came to see not just the world around him, but the glory of God. You'll find him in John 9.