

That You May Continue to Believe...



AN EXPOSITION OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Jesus as the New Moses John 6:1-21

A few years back, our granddaughter Lexi used to come to our house on Thursdays. When she did we used to play certain games. We'd off with Play-Doh and the we'd read books. After that, we ate Cheetos. Then sometimes, we'd go out and swing. Naturally, we jumped on the bed a little and then we almost always ended up playing a little Hide N' Seek. It is our particular form of Hide N' Seek that I want to focus on this morning. You see Lexi only liked to hide in one place.

She refused to hide in my office because it was too noisy. She didn't like the back bedroom because it was too close to the street. She only liked to hide in the closet in our bedroom. Our closet has two sliding mirrored doors on it and I think she liked to hide there because it wasn't completely dark and even with all her grandmother's clothes there was plenty of room to walk around if you were small enough.

Anyway, whenever she hid in there it almost always went like this. Beverly would go out of the room and shut the door. Then Lexi would hide in the closet. Then Beverly would come into the bedroom and say something like, **“I wonder where that Lexi is?”**

Usually, there would be some scurrying around in the closet and then some giggling. And then Beverly would say something like, **“I don’t seem to be able to find Lexi anywhere. I guess maybe she’s hiding in some other room.”** Then a small still voice will come out of the recesses of the closet and it would say almost as if to comfort her grandmother, **“No Grandma, I’m in here.”** The Beverly would push the closet door back and both her and Lexi would scream like Banshees and then hug and do the whole thing all over again.

Now I thought how we used to play Hide N’ Seek this week because of the clues that were associated with our game. You see the clues made the game pretty simple. We knew the game was Hide N’ Seek. We knew the person hiding. We knew where they are going to hide and if we got confused the person that was hiding would even help out by revealing where they were.

It seems like it would have been hard to get it wrong, if you know what I mean.

Now, this morning I want to do kind of the same thing. I want to give you some facts and after I give you the facts, I want you to tell me who is playing with us. Do you understand what I mean? I give you some facts and you tell me who is involved in our scene. All right then.

First, I want you to imagine that Passover is near and the pressing thing that is on your mind is the marvelous way in which the Lord delivered you and your people out of the land of bondage. You can picture in your mind the Lord Himself coming down and reaping havoc on your enemies if that helps.

Secondly, I want you imagine that your leader has taken you out into a remote and sparsely populated area and that you and your fellow travelers have grown hungry.¹

Thirdly, I want you to imagine that your leader has prayed to God and somehow miraculously God has furnished Bread from Heaven to sustain you and your friends.

Fourthly, I want you to imagine that your leader has gone up into a mountain to spend time alone with God.

Finally, I want you to imagine that just when you thought all hope was lost, just when you were being assailed by supernatural forces your leader somehow miraculously led you and your friends through dangerous waters to bring you out safe on the other side of the sea.

Now, here's the question, **"Who are you?"** Perhaps, even more importantly, **"Who is your leader?"**

Now, you know of course that the answer to the first question is **"the children of Israel."** And even more importantly, you know that the answer to the second

question is **“Moses.”**² Everyone single one of those elements point, of course, to the great redemptive work of God when He delivered the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt and feeding them wondrously in the desert and then taking them troubled waters and destroying their enemies.

Of course, if I were to ask you, **“How did you come with an answer like that?”** You would probably say, **“Are you kidding? The clues are too obvious.”** That is precisely what I think John wanted us to think of as we read the text of John 6:1-26 this morning. I think he purposely used words and phrases to draw our attention to the **“Mosesness”** of what is going on in this section. I think he is doing that for a reason.³

You will remember I hope the closing few lines of John 5 that we looked at last week.

^{ESV} **John 5:45...**Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

I think what John is doing here is making a direct comparison to the unbelief of the Jews wondering around in the desert with Moses. Just as it is almost impossible for us to understand how it is that they could have not believed after all the miracles that the Lord worked through Moses so John is going to leave us shaking our heads at the end of chapter 6 asking ourselves, **“How is it that they failed to believe in Jesus in view of all the miraculous signs He accomplished in their midst? How is it that someone could eat of the bread that Jesus made**

out of five small barley loaves and within a matter of hours, a matter of hours, reject Him? "

Of course, John is asking that question in light of a bigger question. You will remember that from the beginning of our study we have been working under the premise that John wrote his gospel to a specific group of people for a specific purpose. You will remember that we posed the idea at the beginning of our study that the Gospel of John was written to encourage Jewish believers who were under pressure by the leaders of the Synagogue to forsake Jesus and return to the Synagogue. John then was written to encourage them to keep on believing in Jesus and by believing to have life in His name. John picked out selected stories and discourses to demonstrate to his readers the vast superiority of Jesus over the Synagogue.

We have already seen in previous lessons that Jesus was superior to Jewish ceremonial law. We saw then in chapter two where Jewish turned the water into wine. We heard the Samaritan woman ask the question, **"You are not greater than our father Jacob are you?"**⁴ We saw by way of His words and promise the implicit answer that He was, in fact, greater than Jacob. We saw Jesus present Himself as the new and living temple of God. In effect saying, **"I am greater than this holy temple of God built here on this sacred mountain in Jerusalem."** We saw Jesus present Himself as the one place where God and man could meet at last in a mediated, reconciled fashion.

What we are going to see today is that beginning of an extended section in which Jesus is going to show Himself to be greater than Moses and Elijah. He is going

to do works that bear out His own prophetic word and we are going to see the very words of Moses come back to condemn those that refuse to put their faith in Him.

Now let's look at John 6, verse 1 and 2.

^{ESV} **John 6:1**...After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.

The Sea of Galilee is not really a sea, as we understand the word "sea" at all. To start with, it contains fresh water.⁵ It is located on the Jordan River which flows down north to south and forms a natural lake, which is about 12 miles long and 7 or 8 miles wide. When the text says that Jesus passed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee. What that probably means is that He and his disciples were in Capernaum or in the area around Capernaum and that they crossed over from the western side of the sea to the eastern side. The eastern side is called the far side because it was more remote than the western side and because in those days there were very few Jews living on the eastern side.⁶ Today the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee is known by a different name that will almost certainly be more recognizable to you. It is known as the Golan Heights. It is mountainous though not anything like our American Rockies. The tops go up only to around 2,500 feet, which by our American standard would not be considered much more than foothills. But the Sea of Galilee is some 700 feet below sea level so the difference between the water and the mountains on the eastern side of the sea is dramatic.

At any rate, Jesus and His disciples took off in a boat for this far side of the Sea of Galilee and a great crowd of people followed Jesus by walking around the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee keeping His boat below them in full view. The text says they followed Jesus because they had seen the miraculous signs He had performed on the sick. The word for "sick" there is plural and the implication is that Jesus had healed lots of other sick people. So it is not just talking about the man at the Pool of Bethesda. Apparently, Jesus had healed many other people and worked many other miracles and this group that followed Him was interested to see more or to learn more about who He was and what He was about.

Now look at verse 3.

^{ESV} **John 6:3...** Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

The fact that the text mentions the Passover is the first clue that John is going to make a comparison between Jesus and Moses. Jesus went up into the mountains and sat down with His disciples. The point the text is trying to make and that is born out by the Synoptics is that Jesus was instructing His disciples. It was normal for a teacher to teach His disciples while sitting down. It is a custom, which I wished we adhered to in our modern age. The other thing that I think the text is trying to do is bring to mind the character of Moses. You will remember the extensive time that Moses spent up on the mountain of God learning from Him and receiving the Ten Commandments.

Anyway, when Jesus and His disciples were up in the mountain they could look down and see a huge group, a massive group, of people coming around the northern end of the lake to the eastern side where He was. Now the thing you have to keep in mind is that there is little or no population in this area. It is very sparsely populated. No 7-Eleven's. No rest stops. No water fountains no public facilities and no bread.

^{ESV} **John 6:5**...Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "**Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?**"

Think about the enormity of that question. The text tells us that there were five thousand men. It doesn't number the women or children. Matthew makes it very clear that the number was only of the men.

^{ESV} **Matthew 14:21**...And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

That means the group may have been as large as twenty or twenty-five thousand.

^{ESV} **John 6:5**...Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "**Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?**" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."

Now, scholars speculate that one of the reasons that Jesus asked Philip where they might buy bread is because Philip was from Bethsaida⁷. We had already learned that fact earlier in John. In a sense, they were on Philip's turf. It seems

obvious that if you are looking to buy bread you ought to ask someone living in that vicinity. But Philip's answer is not the answer of a hometown traveler. It is, instead the answer of an accountant. The gist of his response is something like this, **"Lord, why do you ask me where we can buy it? We wouldn't have the money to buy it even if there were a bakery right here on this mountain."**

Now the Greek text says two hundred days or denarii would not buy enough bread for everyone to have just a bite or morsel. The NIV tries to smooth that out and changes the wording to months. Here's the idea. A denarius was the amount of money a workman, like a stonemason, made in one day's work. So you can estimate for you how much your denarius would be worth. Obviously, your denarius would be different from mine but the point is that that the money made by a workman over a two hundred day period would not be enough to money to buy bread to feed everyone there.

Now when you read the commentaries they often get lost in how much money that would be in modern terms but that is not the point John is trying to make. The point he is trying to make is that it's **hopeless**. It wouldn't matter if there were bakeries right and left. It wouldn't matter how much money it was because they don't have it. They do not have the resources to feed this mass of people.

It reminds me of an earlier scene with the Israelites.

^{ESV} **Exodus 16:2**...And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, ³ and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

The point was that it was hopeless. Now look at verse 8.

^{ESV} **John 6:8**...One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹
"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?"

There were five barley loaves. Think of them as small muffins. Think of them as those muffins that are about the size of a half-dollar. They were just about right for a three year old if you gave them two or three.

Barley bread as a food was primarily reserved for the lower class. The elite disliked it. Philo writes...**as a foodstuff it is of somewhat doubtful merit, suited only for irrational animals and men in unhappy circumstances.**⁸

Whenever, I think of their disdain for it I think of Samuel Johnson and his great English dictionary in which he defined oats this way, **"A grain which in England is used to feed livestock; in Ireland it is the principal fare of the people."**

That's the point. Barley bread is inferior, sort of nasty. Of course, the fish would have been dried fish from the Sea of Galilee something like sardines, maybe something like sardine jerky.

Now, before I go on I want to read for you another passage that also talks about barley loaves. I think you will find this very enlightening. Turn to 2 Kings 4:42. As I read this, look for similarities with the story we are reading this morning. This is the story of Elisha, the servant of the magnificent prophet Elijah.

^{ESV} **2 Kings 4:42...** A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And Elisha said, "**Give to the men, that they may eat.**" ⁴³ But his servant said, "**How can I set this before a hundred men?**" So he repeated, "**Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, 'They shall eat and have some left.'**" ⁴⁴ So he set it before them. And they ate and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.

I think that's a great story. Do you see any similarities to the story we are looking at this morning? It's barley bread.

They have too few loaves to supply everyone still the prophet says, "**Give it to them and there will be leftovers.**" They feed it to a large group and when they finish they have some left over. This is the story of the servant of the prophet of Elijah and implicit in using this story of the barley bread is John comparing Jesus to the servant of Elijah. In fact, it is a comparison of Jesus and the prophet Elijah and what John is saying is this, "**What the Lord Jesus does here completely blows what Elisha did out of the water. And if that is true it is because Jesus is greater than both Elisha and his master, Elijah.**"

Do you see that? Do you see how that comparison might have been made? The problem with us is that we don't know our Bibles well enough to see such allusions when they occur. We miss the point of the barley bread, the insufficient quantity, the point about leftovers. Still, John wrote this to first century Jews that would have known the Scripture well enough to catch such allusions.

I am reminded in this of what Moses said to God when he talked about the people grumbling. God told Moses He was going to give the people meat to eat.

ESV Numbers 11:13...Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.'

Then Moses says to God later on...

ESV Numbers 11:22...Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, and be enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, and be enough for them?"

I think what is implicit here is that John is saying when Jesus supplies they will have enough. In fact, they will have some left over. Look down to verse 10.

ESV John 6:10...Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number.

Now I should stop here for just a minute and point out that this is the only miracle, apart from the resurrection, that is included in all four gospels. And three of the gospels mention that there was plenty of grass in that place⁹.

Now, why would the writers of the gospels do that? Of course, there is the obvious reason that there was lots of grass there. And that demonstrates an eyewitness aspect to the story. But beyond that, what image was John trying to get his readers to see? He was trying to show Jesus to be the good shepherd.¹⁰ Just as a shepherd leads His sheep to green pastures so Jesus gives food to those that follow Him. Look what he says...

ESV John 6:11...Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost."

He fed twenty thousand people out of five small barley loaves and two small dried fish. It is truly extraordinary.

I want to make one point about verse 11. One commentator points out that Jesus does not bless the food. He gives thanks for the food. My wife has often chided me about this asking, **“Why are blessing the food. How do you make food happy?”** Jesus does not bless the food here. He gives thanks for the food. Typically, a first century prayer would have go be something like this, **“Bless you name, O God, for providing for you people food to eat. Amen”**

Now, I want to stop for a moment and give you some insight on biblical commentaries. The reason I want to do that is because thee are some commentators that say things that are so bizarre that it is hard to keep from laughing or maybe better crying. It is possible that you may be teaching a Sunday school class sometime and that as you do you may want to refer to a good commentary for help. That is a good thing to do. Many are carefully written and wonderful helps in studying Scripture. In the same light, however, I have to add that some that are really, really strange. I tell you that not to discourage your use of commentaries but to make you aware that just because somebody writes something down and gets it published is no guarantee that it will be sound. Let me illustrate. The following is from William Barclay’s commentary on John. Sometimes Barclay is truly insightful; sometimes he is completely nuts. Listen to his explanation concerning the three possible explanations of what actually happened at the Feeding of the 5000.

Possibility 1: We may regard it simply as a miracle in which Jesus multiplied

loaves and fishes. Some may find that hard to conceive of; and some may find it hard to reconcile with the fact that that is just what Jesus refused to do at his temptations.¹¹

Here's what he is saying. Of course, it is possible that there may have actually been a miracle. But that is pretty difficult for some to believe especially in light of the fact that in other places Jesus refused to make bread when He could have. So here's another possibility.

Possibility 2: It may be that this was really a sacramental meal. In the rest of the chapter the language of Jesus is exactly that of the Last Supper, when he speaks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. It could be that at this meal it was but a morsel, like the sacrament...¹²

What's your response to that?

I think it goes to the heart of what Philip said at the beginning. Even if we had 200 denarii of bread, it would not be enough bread for each person to have just a morsel. Philip seems to be stating at the beginning that that is not what happened.

Finally, here is Barclay's third possibility and the thing that troubles me deeply about this one is that he really seems to think this idea would have been a good thing. Remember, I am not making this stuff up.

Possibility 3: There may be another and very lovely explanation. It is scarcely to be thought that the crowd left on a nine-mile expedition without making any preparations at all. If there were pilgrims with them, they would certainly possess supplies for the way. But it may be that none would produce what he had, for he selfishly— and very humanly—wished to keep it all for himself. It

may then be that Jesus, with that rare smile of his, produced the little store that he and his disciples had; with sunny faith he thanked God for it and shared it out. Moved by his example, everyone who had anything did the same; and in the end there was enough, and more than enough, for all.¹³

How do respond to that?

You do get what he is saying don't you. He is saying, **"When everyone else saw the generosity of Jesus and that He was willing to share what He had with everyone else, the rest of the crowd felt ashamed and pulled out the food that they had been selfishly hiding and began to share that food with everyone else and lo and behold there was enough food for everyone."**

What's the problem with that? Well, first of all that is not what the words say. What would be the miraculous sign in that? Why would the crowd then exclaim, **"Surely this is the prophet that was to come into the world?"** If Barclay were right, then the crowd would have declared Jesus to be the prophet coming into the world simply because he got them share their food. That doesn't sound right to me.

Now why would Barclay have written this? I think it is because he is anti-supernaturalistic. He can't abide the thought of a miracle. He not only says that this last possibility might be what happened. He even intimates that it would be better if that were what happened. How could that be better than Jesus feeding twenty thousand people with five muffins and two sardines and then having twelve basketfuls left over?

I brought this whole thing up because you will see from time to time a measure of anti-supernaturalism in commentaries. But remember this is the one miracle apart from the resurrection that is included in all four gospels. Twenty thousand people witnessed this one miracle. If we disbelieve it, we do so in spite of the witnesses.

Look at verse 13...

^{EDV} **John 6:13...**So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. Now honestly, I don't know how the words could be much plainer. It is not **"filled twelve baskets with what they had left over."** It is rather, **"filled twelve basketfuls with the pieces of the five barley loaves, the five barley loaves, the five barley loaves left over by those who has eaten."**

What that means is that when they were finished there were enough scraps of the five barley loaves to fill up twelve laundry hamper baskets.

^{ESV} **John 6:14...**When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, **"This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"**¹⁴

Now let me ask you a question. What prophet are they referring to?¹⁵ It is possible that they may have been referring to the prophet that Moses spoke of in Deuteronomy 18. Listen to what he says...

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 18:15...**"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers--it is to him you shall listen--

However, there was also an expectation that Elijah was going to come into the world. You will remember that we discussed that when we were looking at the John the Baptist passages. It seems that Elijah was expected before the Messiah would come. Perhaps they are thinking this is just the sort of thing Elijah would do. Here's how Malachi puts it.

^{ESV} Malachi 4:5..."Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

It could be that they were looking forward to the end of the age and the coming of the great eschatological prophet that God would send before the end times and certainly they would have had cause to think of Elijah in light of the fact that his servant multiplied barley bread just like Jesus had done.¹⁶ Only this was greater much greater. Perhaps, this was Elijah himself.

Jesus had gotten their attention and now that He has their attention all He has to do is speak the truth to them. But that is not what happened. Look at verse 15.

^{ESV} John 6:15...Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

The Greek text is strange here. The word that is used in many manuscripts for "**withdrew**" is the word for "**flee**" or "**run**". Jesus fled into the mountain to get away from the people and their desire to have Him be their king.

^{ESV} John 6:16...When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea,

Whatever region of the lake they were in, this verse paints an extraordinary scene. People camping out in the darkness, Jesus up on the mountain alone with God in prayer, like Moses, almost exactly like Moses. Then Jesus' disciples go down to the lake and set off for Capernaum.

^{ESV} **John 6:17**...(They) got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, "**It is I; do not be afraid.**"

The Greek phrase is ἐγώ εἰμι (ego eyme) which means "**I am.**" It is the divine name and He is speaking it to them to comfort them. It is the same name that God gave to Moses at the burning bush. It is the same name that God gave to Moses when Moses asked, "**Who shall I tell them sent me? What shall I answer when they want to know your name?**"

Jesus is speaking peace to them through the divine name. He is walking on the water and He comforts them with His presence. Now, earlier I demonstrated to you some of the goofiness that you will see from time to time in commentaries. This is another place where commentators get bizarre. I am reading from Barclay again.

We must remember two facts. At the north end the lake was no more than four miles across; and John tells us that the disciples had rowed between three and four miles; that is to say, they were very nearly at their journey's end.¹⁷

Of course, he makes here a couple of assumptions that may not be quite so easily granted. First, he assumes that they stayed on course. Secondly, he assumes that

he knows exactly where they started and where they were going. Anyway let me read on.

It is natural to suppose that in the wind they hugged the shore of the lake, seeking what shelter they might find. That is the first fact and now we come to the second. They saw Jesus, as the Authorized Version and Revised Standard Version have it, walking *on the sea*. The Greek is *epi tēs thalassēs* which is precisely the phrase used in *John 21*, where it means—it has never been questioned—that Jesus was walking on the seashore. That is what the phrase means in our passage, too.¹⁸

Now let me translate for you in case it's not clear what he is saying. He is saying, **"The disciples had rowed all night and were nearly at the end of their journey. They had hugged the shore right along and as they approached the end of their journey they looked up and saw Jesus walking alongside them on the shore. That's what Barclay is saying this meant. Jesus was not actually walking on the water."**

Jesus was walking *epi tēs thalassēs*, by the seashore. The toiling disciples looked up, and suddenly saw him. It was all so unexpected, they had been bent so long over their oars, that they were alarmed that it was spirit that they were seeing.

Think about that. They were alarmed. These were seasoned fishermen, who had grown up on the Sea of Galilee, and they were alarmed because they looked up and saw someone walking along the shore. That's what Barclay says. I just don't see it. But let me read the text to you again.

^{ESV} **John 6:17**...(They) got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four

miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, **"It is I; do not be afraid."**

Mark tells us that they thought they were seeing a ghost.

Here it just says that they were terrified...

^{NIV} **John 6:20**... But he said to them, **"It is I; don't be afraid."**

Of course, Matthew describing the same event tells us that Peter asks Jesus, **"Lord can I come to you?"** and Jesus says, **"Come on."**

^{ESV} **Matthew 14:29**...He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me."

So in response to Barclay, I would have to say apparently Peter was not on the shore. Now look at verse 21.

^{ESV} **John 6:21**...Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

Now here's what Barclay says, **"They were rowing along the shore when they saw Jesus walking along the beach. After they got over their surprise, they rowed over to the shore and Jesus got into the boat."**

Does that seem miraculous to you? What's wrong with that?

The thing that is wrong with that is that it guts the meaning of the story. Here's what the story means. Just like Moses led the children of Israel through the Red

Sea in miraculous fashion Jesus delivered His own people from the tumultuous Sea of Galilee by working over the water not through it. That's the point. And the reason that Jesus does that is because He is greater than Moses.

I love Psalm 107 and its appropriateness here.

^{ESV} **Psalm 107:28**...Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. ²⁹ He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. ³⁰ Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.¹⁹

Isn't that beautiful? Here's the point John is making.

The synagogue was persecuting first century Jews and they are worried about whether they ought to stay with Jesus or recommit to go back to the synagogue. What John is trying to prove here is that Jesus is greater than Moses and that He will guide you through safely to the other side even in the most tumultuous of times. Why would you want to go anywhere else? Why would you leave Jesus for the Synagogue when Jesus is greater than Moses, greater than Elijah and greater than Elisha?²⁰

Of course, we're not first century Jews so the question then becomes what is the relevance to us? Let me preface my application by saying that the early church fathers often spoke of something called "**the Dark Night of the Soul.**"²¹ For them the "**Dark Night of the Soul**" was that time in your life when the bottom falls completely through. It is that time in your life when everything goes as bad as it can. Now here is something strange. The early church fathers longed for that time. Not in a masochistic sense but in the sense that that meant all of the props

were removed and they had to rely only on Christ to sustain them. They saw God as their only hope, their only refuge, their only salvation because all of the worldly props that sustained in the midst of troubles were gone.

Brothers and sisters, that is the point that John is trying to make here. Jesus will sustain your soul with food and He will preserve you through the most hateful, difficult, tumultuous times you can imagine.

Why would you go anywhere else?

Brothers and sisters let me admonish you this week, **“Keep believing in Jesus. He has provided for you thus far and He will see you through.”**

Now what we are going to see next week is that the same people who were prepared to make Jesus king are going to reject Him not because of the signs He does but because of the words He says. You see what happens in the rest of chapter 6 is a discourse not unlike what we had in chapter 5. You will remember that there the discourse explained what the miracle meant. That is what happens in chapter 6 as well. The second half is going to explain what the miracle of the multiplied bread and fish meant. And what we are going to see is that the words of Jesus are going to drive this vast crowd away. They loved His bread, His fish, His provisions but His words are going to drive them away. Come next week having read the rest of chapter six and we'll look at it together.

Let's pray.

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 376. “No alert Jewish mind would come to a word like this without thinking somewhat of the significance of the Passover. And it would be hard to miss the fact that the Passover marked the beginning of that period when Israel left the seeming security of Egypt and entered the wilderness where they were entirely dependent upon God. Things had been bad in Egypt, certainly. The people were slaves. They had been treated cruelly. Still, with grit and a little bit of humor a man could get by. In the desert it was different. In the desert there were vast extremes of temperature (from 140 to 160 degrees Fahrenheit in the daytime to below freezing at night). There were no towns and therefore no shops in which to buy food. Above all, there was no water, and without water a man cannot survive. This is the picture that John is setting before us in the opening verses of this chapter and which he is reinforcing specifically by reference to the desert wandering later. It is a picture of the failure of human resources—not only in a physical sense but also in the attempts of a person to please God.”

² George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 36: John*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher) 1998. “The statement as to the nearness of the Passover (v 4), the identification of Jesus as the prophet who should come (cf. Deut 18:15), and the discussion on the bread from heaven within the discourse (vv 31–33) combine to indicate that the feeding miracle is understood as falling within the fulfillment of the hope of a second Exodus.”

³ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 227-228. “The Jews demand a miracle, similar to the miracle performed by Moses in feeding the people with manna (v. 31). They speak like this because Jesus has promised them the bread of life, and so they show that they have not understood his words, but still vainly imagine that life is given by physical food.’ The reference to the manna is important also, because according to the Jewish belief the coming Messiah, as the “second Redeemer”, must correspond to Moses, the “first Redeemer”, because, that is to say, the miracle of the manna must be repeated in the final age.”

⁴ NIV **John 4:12**...Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?”

⁵ International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Electronic Version), “Sea of Galilee”, “The sea lies in the deep trough of the Jordan valley, almost due East of the Bay of Acre. The surface is 680 ft. below the level of the Mediterranean. It varies in depth from 130 ft. to ft., being deepest along the course of the Jordan (Barrois, PEFS, 1894, 211-20). From the point where the Jordan enters in the North to its exit in the South is about 13 miles. The greatest breadth is in the North, from el-Mejdel to the mouth of Wady Semak being rather over 7 miles. It gradually narrows toward the South, taking the shape of a gigantic pear, with a decided bulge to the West. The water of the lake is clear and sweet. The natives use it for all purposes, esteeming it light and pleasant.”

⁶ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 267. “Some time after this renders the same Greek expression, meta tauta, introduces 5:1 and 6:1 (cf. notes on 2:12). The expression is vague: it establishes sequence, but not tight chronology. The

next words establish Jesus traveled to the east side of the Sea of Galilee, since the far shore is normally determined from the west side, the dominantly Jewish side.”

⁷ NIV **John 1:44**...Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of **Bethsaida**.

⁸ Philo, *De Spec. Leg.* 3.57

⁹ NIV **Matthew 14:19**...And he directed the people to sit down on the grass...

NIV **Mark 6:39**...Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass...

NIV **John 6:10**...Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place...

¹⁰ B.F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1954), 97. Westcott notes that the grass was an indication of two things: (1) it was spring, and (2) the writer was an eyewitness. I think the analogy to that of a shepherd or shepherd king is hard to pass by.

¹¹ Barclay, William. *The Gospel of John Vol. 1* (Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1955), 204.

¹² *Ibid*, 204.

¹³ *Ibid*, 204.

¹⁴ Philip W. Comfort, & Wendell C. Hawley, *Opening the Gospel of John* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1994), 107-108. "Again, John indicates that the people saw the sign that Jesus did—who could have not seen it! Their seeing of the sign led them to believe that Jesus was the prophet whom Moses had predicted would come (Deut. 18:15-18). And as Moses was a prophet who (they thought) fed the children of Israel in the wilderness (see comments on 6:31-32), so Jesus must have been the prophet predicted by Moses, who was now feeding them in the wilderness. John does not say they were wrong to think of Jesus as the prophet, but the next verse shows that they conceived this prophet to be a military leader. In this they were wrong."

¹⁵ Carson, 271. "It is uncertain whether the text speaks of 'the miraculous signs that Jesus did' or *the miraculous sign that Jesus did*. Either way, the people find in the *miraculous sign* sufficient evidence to argue that Jesus is the expected *Prophet who is to come into the world*. The reference is to Deuteronomy 18: 15-19 and the promise of a prophet like Moses. Certainly some first-century Jews interpreted that passage messianically, though admittedly there was diversity of opinion. Doubtless Jesus' provision of much bread to so many people in a wilderness area prompted some to think of Moses' role in providing manna. Toward the end of the third century AD, Rabbi Isaac argued that 'as the former redeemer caused manna to descend...so will the latter Redeemer cause manna to descend' (cited in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* on Ec. 1:9);"

¹⁶ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 211. “Although some of the details of the story correspond completely with those of the Synoptics there, too, we read of five loaves and three fishes!—John’s version is conspicuously his own. Apart from the roles he assigns to Philip and Andrew, there are in Andrew’s mention of a boy and of *barley* loaves two special features that occur also in the story of the miraculous feeding in 2 Kg. 4:42ff. There “the boy” is Elisha’s servant. In John the boy is also undoubtedly a helper or servant (of the disciples); Andrew would of course not make an inventory of what food the whole crowd had but of what they themselves had on hand (cf. Mk. 6:38). The servant’s question in 2Kg. 4:43 (“How am I to set this before a hundred men?”) strongly resembles Andrew’s question John: “But what are they among so many!” Although this last point of correspondence is natural and cannot by itself be considered striking, the combination of these three links — the boy, the barley, and the question — can be regarded as accidental. Elsewhere in the Gospel we encounter expressions that bear a striking resemblance to certain features or statements Testament miracle stories; cf. Jn. 4:50 with I Kg. 17:23; Jn. 9:7 with 2 Kings 5:10; Jn. 2:6 with Gn. 4:55 (and possibly Jn. 1:29 with Gn. 22:8). Some scholars go even further and also see a clear resemblance in character between miracles and those of Elijah (and Elisha) and Moses.”

¹⁷ Barclay, 208.

¹⁸ Ibid., 208-9.

¹⁹ Barrett notes this miracle within in a miracle connection. This may have been first noted by Bauer. Cf. C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John: An Introduction with Notes and Commentary on the Greek Text*, (London: S.P.C.K, 1967), 234. “If there ἐπι τῆς θαλάσσης means “by the sea’ these words may be regarded as confirmatory, the disciples were closer to land than they thought. But it is more probable that John is recording a second miracle perhaps with reference to Psalm 107.23-32 (especially v. 30, So he bringeth them unto the haven where they would be).” The point is credited to Barrett by Morris but it is noted also by Hoskyns even earlier..

Cf, Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John (Rev.)* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 310.

Cf. Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel V.1* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1942), 327. Hoskyns trashes Barclay’s explanation even before Barclay came up with it.

²⁰ Raymond E. Brown, *Gospel of John V.29* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 255. “ What role does this miracle play in relation to the multiplication and to the rest of the chapter? To a certain extent the evangelist uses it as a corrective of the inadequate reaction of the crowd to the multiplication. Impressed by the marvelous character of that sign, they were willing to acclaim him as a political messiah. But he is much more than can be captured by the traditional titles of ‘the Prophet’ and king; the walking on the water is a sign that he interprets himself, a sign that what he is can be fully expressed only by the divine name “I am.” Is there also a Passover symbolism in the walking on the sea by way of a reference to the crossing of the Reed Sea at the time of the Exodus? (This would fit the miracle into the general context of ch. vi.) The Passover *Haggadah*, the

liturgical narrative recited at the Passover meal, as it is preserved for us from a slightly later period, closely associates the crossing of the sea and the gift of the manna. Since the latter theme appears in vi 31, John may be making the same association. It will be seen below that John vi 31 seems to recall Ps lxxviii 24. This same psalm mentions in vs. 13 how the Israelites passed through the sea. Thinking of the Johannine scene as a divine epiphany, we note that the Midrash Mekilta on Exodus (cited by Gartner p. 17) mentions that God made a way for Himself through the sea when man could not. Gartner, p. 28, connects the *ego elm!* formula with the divine action in delivering Israel from Egypt; the formula "'I am the Lord' of Exod xii 12 is dwelt upon in the Passover *Haggadah*."

²¹ Walter. A. Elwell ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, "Dark Night of the Soul" by P.H. Davids, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 293-394.