

John 6:1-7 "This is a Test..... This is Only a Test"

JOH 6:1-7 "Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), 2 and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. 4 The Jewish Passover Feast was near. 5 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?" 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

"Some time after this." This is one of those statements here in this gospel which designates how the curtain has closed on one scene and how a new one is opened. Previously, our Lord Jesus had to contend with jealous and hate filled Jews who condemned Him for healing a man on the Sabbath.

Most of chapter five is our Lord's response to their legalistic and unreasonable approach to the law and how He has come to fulfill the law as the One sent from the Father, the Messiah.

It is some time after this incident, which had taken place in Jerusalem, where Jesus now crosses to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee. This is actually the third preaching tour of Galilee and is part of the narrative we see in the other three gospels that deal with the feeding of the five thousand.

JOH 6:1 "Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias)..."

According to Luke, the far shore that Jesus along with His disciples end up in is Bethsaida, prior to our Lord feeding the five thousand.

Luke 9:10 ¹⁰ When the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done. Taking them with Him, He withdrew by Himself to a city called Bethsaida.

Luke 9:14 ¹⁴ (For there were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, "Have them sit down *to eat* in groups of about fifty each."

You'll remember that Galilee was the area in which our Lord began his public ministry with the miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. And so, after having gone to Judea and then through Samaria He is now back ministering in this region of the sea of Galilee.

The Sea which is mentioned is actually a large fresh water lake fed by the Jordan river, known as the Sea of Galilee which is in northeastern Israel. It's about 13 miles long, by 7.5 miles at its widest point. It lies 696 feet below sea level and has a maximum depth of 157 feet. And so, it's no small body of water.

But you'll notice that John then adds, (that is, the Sea of Tiberias). This lake was known by a number of different names depending on who was in control of the region.

Prior to Israel entering the Promised Land the Canaanites had called this body of water the sea of Kinnereth. The word Kinnereth means lyre, for the stringed instrument which is shaped somewhat like a dulcimer. And the lake seems to resemble this.

During Christ's earthly ministry the name was known as the Sea of Galilee, but by the time John writes this gospel it also became known as the Sea of Tiberias, named in honor of the emperor Tiberius, since the area at this time was under Roman rule.

It is on the far shore, or the eastern part of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus now moves to so as to carry on His ministry which is Bethsaida.

JOH 6:2 "and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick."

Now this is very instructive because it gives us some insight into the motivating factor for these people following after Jesus. Keep in mind that our Lord had compassion and mercy on many people as He healed them. But that's not the only thing He did.

In fact, Matthew gives us some insight into what Jesus was doing, along with healing many people, during His earthly ministry.

MAT 4:23-25 "Jesus went throughout Galilee, ***teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom***, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. 24 News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he

healed them. 25 Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him."

You can imagine the excitement that was spreading all through Israel and regions beyond like Syria, which Matthew mentions, when many who are afflicted, and those who have friends and relatives who are ill, hear that a Prophet is making people well.

It's not unlike similar phenomena we see today with so-called "faith healers." When people have not been healed through doctors or other means and someone holds out hope that an individual can cure them miraculously you'd be surprised at the level of hope these hurting people place in some of these "miracle workers."

This is why there are so many scam artists who claim to have such power and authority from God. There's money to be made as they prey on desperate people. But imagine the real deal coming into your town and he doesn't charge a dime or take up a collection but instead ends up feeding you in the process.

The people in the region of Galilee and beyond weren't stupid. They knew there was something different about Jesus which is why such large crowds followed Him.

Now John doesn't mention it in our text but Matthew does as he points out that Jesus was not just healing people, but was teaching and preaching about the kingdom of God.

And so, there was a connection to the God of Israel as Jesus did these things in the name of the Father. We'll see later how this connection excited these people who knew that Jesus was not just a Prophet and healer but also their answer to the bondage they felt from the Roman government.

But at this point Jesus has got their undivided attention for the specific reason of teaching them about the kingdom of God and their need to repent and seek the Lord. And, by the way, this should always be the objective of any ministry, be it a ministry of helps, or mercy or whatever.

If what we do for the Lord does not include the reason we know and serve the Lord then our ministry becomes more important than the One who put us into ministry with His message of hope. And Jesus bears this out all throughout His own ministry. He tells the crowds that He has come to do the Father's will not His own.

What this means is that His agenda is that of the Father's which is to save people from the penalty of their sin. And this needs to be our desire as well. If one takes the attitude of promoting themselves and their ministry, as they sprinkle in some watered down form of the gospel, then they are being counterproductive to the work of Christ.

As John the Baptist would say, we must decrease and He must increase. And that includes the way we serve Christ. It keeps us humble and focused on what is most important and that is others, not ourselves. And this is precisely what Paul points out to the Philippians.

PHI 2:3-5 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:..."

And the attitude Jesus had for these people in the area of the Sea of Galilee was to meet their needs, both physical and spiritual, and they sensed His genuineness. And yet, their attitude, by and large, was what can we get from this man?

I can't tell you how many people have called the church over the years who would never step foot in a church and yet will not think twice about calling for help because they know Christians are known for their compassion.

And we are to show compassion to even these types of people, yet with wisdom as we use our Lord's resources. We don't simply throw money at people who say they have a need.

I'm reminded of the phone call I got from Ft. Lauderdale a few months back as the person on the other end claimed to be a local Pastor here in Port Charlotte, who wanted me to send him money to help get him back here, because he was having car troubles and couldn't reach anyone in his congregation.

The whole conversation sounded a little suspicious and so when I hung up after telling him to call me in about a half hour as I tracked down potential help, I called the church he claimed to be the pastor of, and guess who answered the phone? The Pastor.

It turns out this guy in Lauderdale called him as well and tried to pull the same scam on him.

And so, it's easy to become cynical and unwilling to help people in need because of parasites like this, but we still need to be used by God even if there are those out there whose intentions may not be the best, even as they were here in Christ's day. He still reached out to people even if their only concern was for the physical things they could obtain from Him.

JOH 6:3-5 "Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. 4 The Jewish Passover Feast was near. 5 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?"

Now again, keep in mind that Jesus wasn't just cruising around the Sea of Galilee waiting for people to notice Him. He had been very busy teaching people before this apparent need of having to feed the crowds. The parallel passage to this incident can be found in Mark where he fills in some of the gaps.

MAR 6:34-36 "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. ***So he began teaching them many things.*** 35 By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. 36 Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

What is intimated here in Mark is that Jesus had spent a good part of the day teaching these people. As I've said before the ministry of Jesus Christ is never characterized in the New Testament as one of healing, though He healed many. In other words, He is never referred to as Good Healer.

Rather, what is He called on many occasions? Rabbi. Good Teacher. This is what characterized our Lord's ministry because it was the focus of His time on earth as He came to teach people about the kingdom of God as He expounded the Scriptures wherever He went.

And apparently He spent most of the day doing this near the Sea of Galilee. But as the day came to an end it was obvious that those who traveled quite a distance probably were very hungry and had not brought provisions with them.

And this is where Jesus is said to have gone up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples, according to verse three of our

text, so as to strategically place Himself in a position of having the crowds hear His message.

Now, when it says He went up on a mountainside it doesn't mean the kind of mountain we might have in the Rockies, but rather a high place in relation to the water.

In fact, this area, which is near the east side of the Sea of Galilee, is what is known today as the Golan Heights where so much of the tension between Israel, the Palestinians and the Syrians have taken place over the last 50 plus years, especially after the 1967 war between Israel, Egypt and the Syrians, where Israel beat the Arabs and took a good portion of that land as the spoils of war.

This is the disputed peace for land deal that has been going on ever since where Syria has made promises of peace if they get the Golan Heights back. A short editorial note: you don't give land back that you won in battle for a peace deal when those same people were the ones who initiated the hostilities, unless you can know for certain you'll get the best part of that deal.

Right now Israel doesn't feel they can get the best part of the deal as long as her neighbors show no sign of easing up on the bloodshed. But back to our text.

JOH 6:4 "The Jewish Passover Feast was near."

Now the reason that John mentions this is to put some chronology into the picture. Remember, that our Lord's public ministry was about three years. And within that three years there would have been three Passovers He would have attended with His disciples, the first one being found in John chapter two.

JOH 2:12-13 "After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. 13 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem."

This you'll remember was the Passover associated with the driving out of the merchants and money changers from the temple.

The one we have before us would then be the second Passover of Christ's ministry. And so what this tells us is that Jesus was at the halfway point in His earthly ministry. The third Passover, by the way, is found in John 11:55 which was the Passover associated with our Lord's Triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey and

subsequent death that same week, being our Passover Lamb who came to take away the sin of the world.

JOH 6:5-6 "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?" 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do."

Again, it's the end of the day and the people are not willing to go home and so Jesus has compassion on them and desires to feed them after He has fed them spiritual food for most of the day. Thus the question to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"

Now, verse six tells us clearly that Jesus didn't ask this question as if to get some input from Philip to help solve this problem. The question was asked by our Lord specifically to test Philip.

Now, we might ask how Jesus could do this to Philip when He knew Philip didn't have an answer, and whatever answer he gave certainly wouldn't be sufficient. And in light of the fact that Jesus already had a plan leaves us to wonder, why the question?

Well, this is very important because it gives us some insight into the mind and will of God, not just for Philip, but for all of God's people.

There is a tendency for some Christians to think that once they embrace Christ life will become a bed of roses where if you want anything from God you just ask and He's there at our beckoned call.

Trials and testing's therefore, as some of these Christians think, come only because of Satan's involvement in our lives as he tries to tempt us and lead us away from the Lord. And it is certainly true that Satan does try and tempt us and lead us away from the Lord. But to suggest that God Himself doesn't test us is to miss the point of what it means to live by faith.

One classic case of Satan, for example, being used as a tool in the hands of God to test one of God's people, of course would be the testing of Job's faith. However, Satan doesn't have to be involved at all for God to test us.

But it should be noted that it is important for God to test our faith periodically. How else will we know how we're growing in our faith unless it's tested? How does an NFL football player ever find

out if he's up for the task unless he's put on the football field after days of practicing?

How are the Special Forces in Afghanistan today ever to find out if their training for such missions is adequate if they're not tested on the field of battle? In fact, these guys who have been interviewed all claim that they can't wait for the opportunity to carry out the mission they've been trained for. They welcome the test.

And so it should be for a soldier of Christ. But it's important to keep in mind that our testing does not preclude the need for training. And what our Lord is doing with Philip, in a very small way, is testing to see if Philip has been paying attention to the way the Lord has previously trained him.

Keep in mind that Philip has seen quite a few miracles from the hands of Jesus. That was part of Philip's training, if you will. Now it was time to see if he would respond to those things he's been taught.

'Philip, how are we to feed so many people?' And you can almost hear our Lord's tone as He has a somewhat quizzical expression on His face. What do you think Phil? What should we do? The ball's in your court.'

And here's Philip's answer.

JOH 6:7 "Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

The NASB puts it this way. "Philip answered Him, two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little."

A denarii is the plural of denarius. A denarius was a day's wage in those days and would be the equivalent of maybe 15 to 25 cents today. And so, 200 denarii would be about two thirds of a year's wages which is why the NIV uses the expression, "eight months wages."

And the point here is that Jesus has looked to Philip to give Him an answer consistent with his former training; that training being in the firsthand experience of watching Jesus do miraculous signs and wonders to help people.

Instead, what does Philip do? He gets out his calculator, his portable abacus. He's doing the math and he figures that there's no

way to feed all of these people with the limited resources they have in their possession.

And I'm sure Jesus is looking at him with amusement on his face as He's probably wondering how it is that people can be so thick. Well, let me restate that. I would probably be wondering how people could be so thick. Praise God our Lord is much more patient with us.

But what we have before us is really typical of how most of us would react to a situation like this. We might accuse Philip of being less than spiritual when he has been in the very presence of Jesus Himself, who has done many miracles, but we really need to consider our own lives and the ways our Lord tests our faith.

We may not have been there with our Lord, but do we have to be, to know that He is the Almighty God and Savior? Wasn't it the risen Jesus who said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."?

JOH 20:28-29 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; ***blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.***"

Jesus was speaking about you and me who have not seen His resurrection and yet have believed that He actually rose bodily from the grave, according to the testimony of all the witnesses who were there and have recorded that event in the word of God. And if we have placed our faith in Him as Lord and Savior we have said Amen to His bodily resurrection.

Well, if we have said Amen to His resurrection then we must be able to say Amen to every other aspect of His being and power and will, by faith.

In other words, how are we different from Philip when a trial or test comes our way, sometimes from the direct hand of God; others through the indirect hand of God as He allows certain trials in our lives?

When you and I are in a pinch monetarily, what is the first thing we do? Go to God or to our calculator like Philip? When there is a situation beyond our control do we try to control it through our own strength, or do we first go to God who controls all things?

Now, don't misunderstand me here. The Scriptures do not teach being irresponsible when it comes to money or the lack of it, or any other aspect of life. But the test God places before us is not always as much about our involvement, or lack of involvement in a matter, as much as it is, what place does God have in our lives?

And along with that, do we understand the spiritual implications of the most mundane aspects of our lives? I mean, what is so spiritual about feeding a bunch of people? I mean, think about it. In what way do we approach our own needs when it comes to eating, for example?

We go to Publix and push a cart up and down the aisles and pay the cashier. What's so spiritual about that? I don't know. But, do we acknowledge God in all things like buying groceries? Are we thankful for all things He provides? Are we appreciative that He placed us in a country where for the most part most Americans don't ever have to go hungry?

Do we understand and acknowledge that God will work out all things to our good to we who love Him and have been called according to His purpose? Do we live our lives with the understanding that He is personally involved with every detail of our lives, and does that have any effect on our attitude about Him and our situation?

Do we respond to life with the hope that He is with us even when walk through the valley of the shadow of death, or are we first and foremost asking Him to get out of the way as we impose our will on His, and then spiritualize it by saying, God opened a door for us when in fact we used a crow bar to force our way in?

Again, I'm not suggesting we be inactive when it comes to life. But our activity must also embrace, by faith, the God who promises that He will never leave us or forsake us, along with His word which is His will for our lives.

Only when we have this attitude will we be able to say Amen to what would appear ludicrous to anyone but a Christian who trusts the Lord for all things and then acts on that by faith.

JAM 1:2-4 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

If we can begin to see tests from God in this way; as a strengthening of our faith and perseverance, so as to be better soldiers for Christ, then we'll find that tests and trials don't have to cripple us as they are so prone to do at times.

And in fact, we'll be able to find ourselves trusting that even if we don't see a solution we know that God does. And in that we'll be able to rest and actually learn to be content in Christ as did Paul.

PHI 4:11-13 "... I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

Trusting and obeying Christ has as its by-product contentment which leads to joy even in the midst of the trial because we know our great God is for us even as He was with David.

PSA 95:1-7 "Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. 2 Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. 3 For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. 5 The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. 6 Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; 7 for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care."

Philip, along with the rest of the disciples, is about to learn a very important lesson in this test from Jesus, and we'll pick up there next week.