

John 6: A Significant Meal and a Difficult Teaching

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Session 8

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. David Turner examines the complex narrative of John 6, which shifts from the miraculous feeding of the five thousand and Jesus walking on water to a challenging discourse on the Bread of Life. Jesus utilizes these miracles to draw typological parallels with the Old Testament manna in the wilderness, presenting himself as the spiritual sustenance that requires intimate, faith-filled appropriation. This demanding teaching acts as a spiritual filter, causing many superficial followers to walk away while prompting a loyal confession from Peter and foreshadowing Judas's betrayal. Ultimately, the session highlights the theological themes of divine sovereignty, the symbolism of biblical meals, and the distinction between physical satisfaction and spiritual life.

Outline

I. Introduction and Geographical Setting (John 6:1-24)

- A. Transitional setting from Jerusalem to the northeast Sea of Galilee (Golan/Golani region)
- B. The geography of John 6
 - 1. Sea of Galilee (Kinneret) and the mountain setting
 - 2. Capernaum and the movement of the crowds
 - 3. Tabgha and the Byzantine mosaic at the Church of the Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes

II. Two Miracles and Three Conversations (John 6:1-24)

- A. Primary Miracle: Feeding of the Multitudes (John 6:1-15)
 - 1. Only miracle recorded in all four Gospels
 - 2. Crowds try to forcefully make Jesus a king (Second Temple messianism and 'The Prophet' of Deuteronomy 18)
 - 3. Jesus' withdrawal to the mountain
- B. Secondary Miracle: Jesus Walking on the Water (John 6:16-21)
 - 1. Disciples face a serious storm while rowing to Capernaum
 - 2. Jesus approaches walking on the sea and comforts them ('It is I, do not be afraid')
 - 3. Miraculous arrival at the shore

C. Transitional movement of the crowds and people from Tiberias to Capernaum

III. The Discourse and Debate on the Bread of Life (John 6:25-59)

A. Challenging the crowds' physical motives (verses 25-27)

1. Working for food that endures to eternal life
2. The Father's seal of approval on the Son of Man

B. The Sign of Manna and True Bread from Heaven (verses 28-34)

1. Crowd requests a sign, citing ancestral manna in the wilderness
2. Jesus points to the Father as the giver of true bread from heaven

C. Jesus as the Bread of Life (verses 35-47)

1. The 'I am' declaration and the necessity of belief
2. Divine sovereignty and election (verse 37: 'all that the Father gives me will come')
3. Typological parallel with Moses lifting the serpent (John 3:14 reference)
4. Old Testament allusion to Isaiah 54:13 ('taught of God')

D. Eating the Flesh and Drinking the Blood (verses 48-59)

1. Contrast between the manna (where ancestors died) and the living bread
2. Explicit demands to eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood for eternal life
3. Metaphorical nature of eating and drinking as personal appropriation by faith (comparing John 6:35/40 with 6:51/54)
4. John Calvin's exegesis: 'lucid brevity' and framing discourse metaphorically because the crowd 'ran to their fodder like cattle'

IV. The Spiritual Filtering: Disciples, the Twelve, and Betrayal (John 6:60-71)

A. The complaint of the disciples regarding the 'difficult teaching' (verses 60-65)

1. Jesus addresses their stumble with the promise of ascension
2. The Spirit gives life; the physical flesh counts for nothing
3. Enabling by the Father as a prerequisite to faith

B. The Departure of many disciples and Jesus' query to the Twelve (verses 66-67)

C. Peter's Confession of Loyalty (verses 68-69)

1. 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'
2. Identification of Jesus as the 'Holy One of God'

D. The Foreboding Conclusion and Foreshadowing of Judas (verses 70-71)

1. One of the chosen Twelve is a 'devil'
2. Judas as the ultimate negative example of turning back and betraying Jesus

V. Broader Theological Themes

A. The 'I am' (Ego Emi) Statements in John

1. Qualified statements (predicated: Bread of Life, Light of the World, Door, Good Shepherd, True Vine)
2. Absolute statements (unqualified 'I am' in John 8, with background in Deuteronomy and Isaiah's 'I am he')

B. John 6 and Eucharistic Connections

1. Verbal similarities between John 6:11 and Synoptic institution texts (taking, giving thanks, distributing)
2. The absence of the Eucharistic institution in John 13 (foot washing instead)
3. Historical theological debates on the real presence (Low church symbolic views vs. High church/Roman Catholic real presence vs. Reformed/Calvinist dynamic sanctifying grace)

C. The Theology of Food and Meals in Scripture

1. Genesis 1 and 3: God's provision of sustenance and the forbidden food
2. Deuteronomy 8: Humans do not live by bread alone but by God's word
3. Historical key meals: Passover (Exodus 12, Joshua 5, 2 Kings 23, Ezra 6) and Manna (Exodus 16, Nehemiah 9:15)
4. Eschatological fulfillment: The Marriage Feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19, Matthew 22, John 2, Ephesians 5)