

BIB203 NT1 Life of Christ

Unit 6b Johannine Synoptic Example 2

Presented by the



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So in the last segment, we dealt at length with the John 2:13-22 passage. We correlated it with Mark 11 and Matthew 21, crunched the content. I know that the normal expression is “crunched the data.” We crunched the content of these passages and it seems as though these are two separate events. To be fair, customarily, those are accounted as one singular event. Either position is workable. I’m simply going with the context of the Gospels. But you are free to assume that they are or to adhere to the argument that they are one event. That’s normative. But in this segment, we’re going to be doing John 6. And the first part of John 6 that we want to look at is verses 1 through 15. And it’s a familiar passage. It’s the feeding of the five thousand. And of course, to make a long story short, the feeding of the five thousand is correlated across the board. It’s present in all four Gospels. The Synoptics have it. John has it. But they are arranged somewhat differently, and that is essentially the nature of our exploration in this particular segment.

So let’s begin. John 6:1-15. “After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. 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?’ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, ‘Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.’ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?’ 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. 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. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the leftover fragments, so that nothing may be lost.’ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, ‘This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!’ 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.”

So let’s deal with the content of John 6:1-15 first. Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. And of course, that’s in contrast to the prior context of John 6:1, which we don’t need to get into at this moment. There was a large crowd following him because he was healing the sick. Jesus went up on the hill. Mountain is probably too strong a translation for the term *oros*. He sat down there with his disciples. Probably a prominent hill where you had a wide panoramic view of the whole crowd. Now, the Passover, the feast of the Jews was near. You can correlate 6:4 with 2:13, which we dealt with at length in the last segment.

So this is his second year of ministry, as it were, into the second year of ministry. He lifts his eyes. (Verse 5) He sees a large crowd coming toward him. Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” Jesus asked the question to test Philip because he already knew what was going to happen, what he was going to do. And Philip answered him in a practical fashion. He said, “Well, two-thirds of a year’s worth of pay (or slightly less than two-thirds of a year’s worth of pay) is not enough to buy food for this whole crowd.” Two hundred denarii. Usually about 300 to 360 denarii was about a year’s worth of wages. Andrew said, “A boy’s got five barley loaves and two fish. And that’s all we’ve got. What are they for so many?” Jesus commands that people be made to sit down. They sat down. There was plenty of grass. The men sat down. They were about 5000 in number. What we will find from

the Synoptics is that the men were about 5000 in number, and that didn't include women and children, so the number was closer to anywhere from 10,000 to 15,000 people, which is remarkable. Jesus took the loaves. He gave thanks. (Verse 11) He distributed them to those who were seated, as well as the fish. When they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, verse 12, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." And they gathered them up and they filled 12 baskets worth of fragments from five barley loaves and two fish. Verse 14, the people saw what he had done. Jesus had just broken up five barley loaves and two fish and fed 10,000 to 15,000 people. The response is understandable from the human standpoint. "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" And Jesus perceived that they were about to come and make him king. They were ready for revolution. Jesus withdrew to the mountain by himself. He refused to entertain any of those sentiments.

So that's the content generally of 6:1-15. What we want to do now is we want to correlate that with the requisite passage in Mark. So that would be Mark 6:35-44. So let's hold our place here in John 6 and let's go to Mark 6 and see what content we're dealing with there. Starting in verse 35, we read, "And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.' But he answered them, 'You give them something to eat.' And they said to him, 'Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?' And he said to them, 'How many loaves do you have? Go and see.' And when they had found out, they said, 'Five, and two fish.' Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men."

The prior context to our Marcan passage, the closest prior context is verse 30, so Mark 6:30, and I'll summarize that. The apostles come to Jesus and tell him about their ministry that he had sent them out to do. And he tells them to come by themselves to rest in a remote place, a desolate place. There were many coming and going, and they had no leisure to eat. They went away in a boat to a desolate place. Many saw them going, recognized them, ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. So there was no time to rest. Jesus went ashore. (Verse 34) He saw a great crowd and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them. So there was no room, no time to rest. And in the midst of no room, no time to rest, you had the feeding of the five thousand. But what we find here when we read verses 35 to 44 is that there is no mention after verse 44 of the people seeing what Jesus had done, like you see in the Gospel of John, and then their sentiment to want to come and make him king by force. There's none of that in Mark.

So let's look at Matthew. What does Matthew do? That's the question. So Matthew 14. You can leave both passages in John and Mark, and let's go to Matthew 14 and we're going to be looking at verses 13 to 21. And you look at verse 13. "Now when Jesus heard this." So you go all the way back to chapter 14 in verse 1 and you hear about Herod the tetrarch, Herod Antipas, that is, and he hears about Jesus and thinks that this is John the Baptist because prior to Herod's supposition, Herod's daughter had danced before him and he had asked her what she would like him to give to her, and she went to her mother who was actually Philip's (brother of Herod Antipas) wife. And John had said, "It is not lawful for you to have her as your wife." So John had been thrown in prison. Herodias hates him. So this is her opportunity to get rid of him, so he is beheaded.

Jesus heard this. (Verse 13) “He withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. The crowds heard it. They followed him on foot from the towns. (Verse 14) When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them.” So Matthew is using Mark. He healed their sick. He says that Jesus healed the sick. Mark says, “He taught them many things.” Correlate both. He’s probably doing both. We see that in John that the crowds see what he was doing to their sick. So not just teaching, but also healing. Verse 15, “Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.’ But Jesus said, ‘They need not go away; you give them something to eat.’ They said to him, ‘We have only five loaves here and two fish.’ And he said, ‘Bring them here to me.’”

A little different. I mean, in Mark, it’s “Have the people sit down.” And they sit down by fifties and by hundreds. Here it’s “Bring the loaves to me.” Again, correlation is important. “Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children,” which is why we estimate 10,000 to 15,000 people in total.

So Matthew adds a little bit of detail that basically supplements Mark, and Mark supplements Matthew. It’s kind of a vice-versa relationship there. But all the essential details are correct. All the essential details remain the same. They’re accurate. What we find in Mark and Matthew so far is that right after that, Jesus puts his disciples in the boat to go before him to the other side while he dismisses the crowds. We see this in Matthew 14:22. “Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.”

If we go to Mark 6 (please come there with me), so Mark 6:45 and following, “Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida.” So we have detail in Mark that is obscured in Matthew. Matthew doesn’t feel the need to focus in on it. “While he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them (verse 46), he went up on the mountain to pray.” We’ll stop there. We haven’t looked at Luke yet, so we’re going to do that. We’re going to look at Luke 9:10-17. Please let’s go there. So verse 10. “On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.”

So Luke marries both of those threads in Mark and in Matthew. In Matthew, it’s he healed the sick. In Mark, it’s he taught them many things. But notice something else. Some of you may have noticed this already. In verse 10, the town that they withdrew to after John’s beheading (prior context of verses 7 to 9), the town they withdrew to was Bethsaida. But wait. We just saw in Mark, I believe, that they were supposed to get on the boat. Immediately he made the disciples get in the boat and go over to the other side, to a town called Bethsaida. So it seems like a little bit of a contradiction here. What gives? Well, it’s possible that in verse 11, the crowd is hearing him. I’m in Luke 9:11. “The crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.” They withdrew to a town called Bethsaida, so maybe this hill was near Bethsaida. There’s no easy explanation for this and I’m not going to sugarcoat it. But there seems to be a little bit of

a discrepancy between Luke and Mark. We'll try to deal with it in process, but right now I'm more concerned with getting through the passage of verses 10 to 17 of chapter 9.

So "The day began to wear away (verse 12), and the twelve came and said to him, 'Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place.' But he said to them, 'You give them something to eat.' They said, 'We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.' For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, 'Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.' And they did so." Now, one of the other Gospels, one of the other Synoptics says fifties and hundreds. "And taking the five loaves (verse 16) and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces." So the essential details again of the story are clear. Let's look at what happens with Luke, though, because we've looked at what happens after the feeding of the five thousand in Mark and in Matthew.

In verse 18, we suddenly jump. "It happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, 'Who do the crowds say that I am?' And they answered, 'John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.'" Luke doesn't continue the context. So with Luke, there's a cutoff. You have the feeding of the five thousand, and then it switches to Peter confessing Jesus as the Christ. In Mark and in Matthew, in both instances, the five thousand people are fed. Twelve baskets are taken up. And immediately Jesus puts his disciples in the boat to go over to the other side. So if indeed they come to Bethsaida and this open, grassy, desolate place is near Bethsaida, then the boat trip that these disciples were supposed to take was admittedly a short one. But that presents problems with the Gospel of John. And we're working these things through in process because it's useful to do that, but at this point, that is the working hypothesis that we are going to go with. Long story short, Luke does not continue the context the way Mark and Matthew do. Not to mention the Gospel of John.

Let's go back to the Gospel of John 6:1-15, which is where we started. So when you look at verse 16 of John 6, we find, "When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum." So we've got a little bit of a discrepancy there. And of course, the boilerplate explanation that works for everyone in the field of New Testament studies, in particular with respect to the Gospels, is that you have four different perspectives with respect to the Gospels, and so details do not line up perfectly. We're running up against the limitation, in other words, of a purely chronological approach to the Gospels. I mean, some chronological structuring is possible, but as I've said in earlier segments in the other units, it is not exhaustive. We should not press that too far.

So what we have is, are they in Bethsaida? We're told in one of the Gospels that he puts them in the boat and sends them to Bethsaida. We're told in another Gospel that they came to a place, a town called Bethsaida. But in all the narratives that are parallel, they are in a desolate place, taking the sense of desolate as meaning a wide open space with no buildings around, basically an open field with a hill nearby perhaps. Here in John, his disciples go down to the sea. That's consistent. They get into a boat. That's consistent. They start across the sea to Capernaum. It is dark. Jesus has not yet come to them. Verse 18. "The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 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. But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.' 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 something that someone could possibly do because the two towns that have come up in consideration are Bethsaida and Capernaum. So is it possible that we can look at the positions, the geographical location of Bethsaida and the geographical location of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee? We can look at that. And let's say they are contiguous to one another, that they basically are beside one another. Well, then that would explain the seeming discrepancy. That probably would be resolved to some degree, but it still wouldn't be completely resolved, right? The important thing to note is that in John, the feeding of the five thousand is immediately followed by the disciples getting on a boat. You see that in Mark. You see that in Matthew. And Luke does not continue that trajectory. He simply talks about the feeding of the five thousand. We will look at the rest of John 6 in the next segment.