

Today's "Jesus Encounter" occurs the day after Jesus feeds the 5,000, as he encounters the large crowd that follows Him. Here is the course of events that lead to this encounter:

1. THE CROWD IS FOLLOWING The Jewish crowd has been following Jesus because of the miraculous "signs" of healing the Jesus has been performing. We learn this in John 6:2. They are fascinated and want more. He has caught their attention with His wonderful provision. Do you know anyone who has had wonderful provision given by God? These are the kind of people Jesus encounters, and desires to reach.

2. JESUS FEEDS THE 5,000 Jesus goes to the east side of the Sea of Galilee (also called Tiberias – 6:1). There He miraculously feeds the Jewish multitude of 5,000 men, and certainly more counting women and children – likely closer to 10,000. It is worth mentioning that this is the only miracle of Jesus (other than His own resurrection) that is recorded by all four gospel writers.

3. THE CROWD BELIEVES JESUS IS THE PROMISED ONE The crowd sees this feeding as another miraculous "sign." They believe that this Jesus is the "Prophet who is to come into the world." (John 6:14). This "Prophet" is equivalent to "Messiah." They are believing that He is the One promised by God to "save" them from their circumstances (but not save their souls).

4. THE CROWD WANTS TO MAKE JESUS A KING Jesus realizes the people want to seize Him by force and make Him their king – meaning to make Him their ruling provider of all things physical. Therefore He hides from them in the mountain. (John 6:15)

5. JESUS WALKS ON WATER AND CALMS A STORM That evening Jesus' 12 disciples cross the lake in a boat, encounter a great storm, see Jesus walking on the water and calming the storm. (John 6:16-21) This is a metaphor for the spiritual storms of our life that Jesus will calm if we but only trust Him and keep our eyes focused on Him, and not the storm of our problems.

6. THE CROWD FOLLOWS JESUS ACROSS THE LAKE Utilizing many boats that "came" there to shore (another miracle?) the crowd (again, 1000s strong) cross the lake the following morning to pursue Jesus. Amazing – they are persistent, but for the wrong thing.

Multiple miracles of healing, a miraculous mass-feeding, the calming of a storm, and a persistent, pursuing multitude all join to pave the way for a tumultuous encounter with Jesus on the west bank of the Sea of Galilee.

What to the people seek? - a "magic genie" Messiah who will heal them, feed them and provide for all their physical needs.

What does Jesus offer? – Himself, as all they ever will need to satisfy their spiritual need.

What do many, if not most, of those we encounter seek from God? Is it not a God who will satisfy and meet their physical, emotional and social needs – who will save them from their circumstances? Jesus is not unaware of these needs, but His offer is far greater – the offer of life-long spiritual provision and eternal life through believing in Him.

So the multitude that had been miraculously fed by Jesus the previous day finds Him on the other side of the sea. Jesus knows exactly why they have followed Him. And here our text begins:

John 6:26 *Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.*

The miraculous "signs" were performed to point those who observed them to the deity of Jesus – the reality of Who He truly was. But this multitude was not seeking Jesus, they were seeking the "stuff" of Jesus – that which He could provide for them.

WORK OR FAITH?

And then Jesus turns the issue into physical vs. spiritual – just as he had done with Nicodemus (not

physical birth but spiritual birth), and with the Samaritan woman (not physical water but living water), and with the Bethesda cripple (“do you want to get well?” – not only physically, but spiritually).

John 6:27 *Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life , which the Son of Man will give to you ...”*

And the word that the people pick up is “work” - what must we work, or do?

John 6:28 *Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?”*

I find that this is often the question with people I encounter – what must I DO to please God, or encounter God, or receive God? This is the same question the rich young ruler asked of Jesus. (Matt. 19:16) We realize that it is an uninformed question, because it is not about DOING something but about BELIEVING and ACCEPTING. But if it is a sincere question, it is a perfect open door to share the truth of Jesus. No, it’s not about going to church, or cleaning up one’s lifestyle, or giving of charity that will ultimately please God. It must begin with FAITH in who Jesus is, and in ACCEPTING what He has done for you. Jesus’ answer:

John 6:29 *“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.*

It is so simple, and yet so hard to understand – that nothing we DO can save us, but only BELIEVING and ACCEPTING Jesus as our salvation – this is the only “work” that saves.

And now Jesus hits the first bump in the road of this encounter. They respond, essentially, “prove it” – prove you are the answer by performing another miracle.

John 6:30 *So they said to Him, what then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?*

And what if Jesus had done another miracle right then and there. Would there ever be enough to satisfy and persuade? Remember Jesus said, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.” (Luke 16:31) In His death and resurrection Jesus gave the ultimate sign, and if this doesn’t persuade a person, nothing else will.

We might think that if God would only do this or that for our unbelieving friend, then maybe they will believe and accept Jesus. But if they will not be persuaded by Jesus death and resurrection for them, nothing else will persuade. That’s why we must always emphasize the “first importance” of that death and resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

MANNA PLEASE

The multitude persists by essentially saying “God gave us manna by Moses, why won’t you do the same for us?”

John 6:31 *Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.”*

Little did they know that Jesus was doing that very thing – providing daily sustenance for their souls through Himself. Jesus corrects their thinking on two counts: **(1)** It wasn’t through Moses, but through God that the manna came, and **(2)** God’s true bread is not manna, but Himself.

John 6:32-33 *Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.*

John 6:34-36 *Then they said to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. But I say to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.*

MANNA OR ME

Jesus wants each of us and each of those we encounter to know that God is the giver of all good things. This is an easy way to turn our encounters into spiritual opportunities. Someone is happy over some recent good circumstance, and we can remind him that this is God's goodness.

Just as the woman at the well asked Jesus for the living water He spoke of, so the fed multitude asks Jesus for the living bread He speaks of. And then Jesus proclaims that He is the living water; He is the bread life. And note it well, that when Jesus says "I am the bread of life" He is affirming that he is the "I AM." This "I AM" affirmation of Jesus is considered to be the first of 7 such "I AM" affirmations in the gospel of John (7, God's perfect number of completion).

1. I AM the bread of life (*John 6:35*)
2. I AM the light of the world (*John 8:12*)
3. I AM the door of the sheep (*John 10:7*)
4. I AM the good shepherd (*John 10:11, 14*)
5. I AM the resurrection and the life (*John 11:25*)
6. I AM the way, the truth and the life (*John 14:6*)
7. I AM the vine (*John 15:5*)

In each of these instances, Jesus is not only saying he is something special, He is saying none other that He is the great I AM – God in the flesh as the Son of Man.

Spiritually, we will never hunger for another spiritual source, once we have found the true source of life, which is Jesus Himself. All who have spiritual longings are searching for Jesus whether they know it or not. And this is something we can tell those we encounter.

ELECTION AND FREE WILL IN ONE SENTENCE

I find 6:37 to be an amazing doctrinal gem, for it teaches election (God's choosing of those who would be saved from the beginning) in the same sentence as free will (God's receiving of any one who comes to him in faith). Here it is:

John 6:37 *"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."*

This helps me to understand that both election and free will are true and in play. I see election as God's perspective on the matter – that He predestines and calls those who will be saved, and they will surely come to Him. And I see free will as man's perspective on the matter – that "whosoever will believe in Him will be saved." From our perspective, we just don't know who it is who will believe in Him and be saved until we see the miracle of transformation – and then we realize that that one was elected by God from the beginning.

If you want more affirmation of this, look on to see that verse 39 reaffirms election and verse 40 reaffirms free will. So which is it, election or free will? Answer: both!

John 6:39-40 *"This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."*

THE RESULT OF THE ENCOUNTER

The text of the encounter has ended, but the end of chapter 6 gives us the result of the encounter: mass desertion by most all but the His twelve disciples.

In verse 54-56 of chapter 6 Jesus gets very explicit about the importance of spiritually feeding on Him and Him alone. But His metaphorical verbiage leaves many confused and even repulsed.

John 6:54-56 *"He who eats my flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise*

him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."

By the Spirit, we understand that we must spiritually feed upon the person of Jesus and drink spiritually of His atoning blood which washes away our sins. But for those who take this literally, or for those who are looking for the "stuff" that Jesus gives rather than a relationship with Jesus Himself, this brings great confusion.

And so we read the result of all this in verses 66-68.

John 6:66-68 *As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."*

But Jesus had accomplished His purpose of the some two years of "sign" miracles He had performed affirming who He truly was. Namely, those who had been truly called of God – his disciples - had come to know who He was. All that is except Judas Iscariot . (see 6:70-71)

Have you discovered this great, spiritually essential truth: that Jesus is indeed the Holy One of God, God Himself, deserving our full and lifelong attention and devotion?

And can you help those whom you encounter to discover the same?

Work or faith? - Answer: by faith only can we please God. (*Ephesians 2:8-9*)

Manna or me? - Answer: Jesus is the One whom we must desire above all else, not only the provision He provides. When we have Jesus, we have His gracious provision. But without Jesus, we have nothing to prepare us for life after this life.

"Manna" after all means literally "what is it?" And "Jesus" literally means "Savior."