

## John 6:1-15 How big is your vision?

### Introduction

What kind of person are you? An optimist or a pessimist? Some people can look at a situation and see how what is proposed might work, but someone else with a different temperament might simply see only the potential for things to go wrong? It is important that we know ourselves and what our natural reactions are to the real-life situations we face, but we it is even more important to know our great God and Saviour of whom Paul wrote: *Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us,*<sup>21</sup> *to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen* (Ephesians 3:20-21). Paul says some simple yet profound things about our God. First of all concerning: *Him who is able*; There are lots of things you and I would like to be able to do, but we do not have the power or resources to do it. There are other things for which we do not have the gifts with which God has blessed other believers. Yet we need to always remember when we come to Him in prayer that *He is able* he is the God of all power and might. May the Holy Spirit keep us from ever having too small a vision of our great and glorious God! May we be filled with praise and glory at the majesty and awesomeness of who He is. May we be thrilled that this amazing God has chosen to reach out to us as sinful creatures by His amazing grace and draw us to Himself, through the all-sufficient substitutionary sacrifice of His beloved Son. Secondly: *to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine* – When you pray or when I pray –do we ever think I cannot ask for this....it is too difficult for God? Let these words of Paul for these followers of Jesus in western Turkey who were a small minority in a country passionately devoted to other faiths, sink deep into our hearts. No heartfelt prayer is too big-if we pray according to his will He will hear and answer our prayers, because He is able. Thirdly here the how - *according to His power that is at work within us*, in other words here, the Holy Spirit. John will put it similarly in I John 4:4: *The One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world*. In the light of this reminder of the greatness of our God –let us turn to John 6:1-15.

### 1.The Occasion and the Context (John 6:1-4)

<sup>1</sup> *Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias),* <sup>2</sup> *and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick.* <sup>3</sup> *Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.* <sup>4</sup> *The Jewish Passover Feast was near.* John gives only a vague reference of the timescale of the ministry of Jesus in this passage, but approximately twelve months have passed since the cleansing of the Jerusalem Temple (John 2:23). The Fourth Gospel has little record of the Galilean ministry during this year, though the other Gospel writers by contrast cover more of the Lord's work in Galilee at that time. However, in John six we have a detailed account of our Lord's ministry in that region, in which He performs both a notable miracle and follows it with important teaching on the significance of what He has done for these people. It is important to remember that Galileans had more simple lifestyles than their more prosperous fellow citizens in Judea, especially around the capital city Jerusalem. Most Galileans were peasant farmers or fishermen or carried out some other manual trade such as builders and carpenters. They lived hand-to-mouth, most probably bartering for services and goods, rather than the cash economy with which we are more familiar. The vast majority of these people had no savings or insurance and like the majority of people in the world then and a proportion today were very vulnerable to climate changes or unseasonable weather that could mean the difference between getting by and risking starvation or the endurance of real hardship. Unlike the comfortable Pharisees and Sadducees in the south whose concerns about Jesus' teaching

were academic and often theoretical (For example, a women with seven husbands on earth because six died-whose wife shall she be in heaven? (Luke 20:27-33)! Galileans wondered where their next meal was coming from? Or could they provide for their families essential needs, not abstract ideas and academic debates. What happened on this hillside was so important that it was only the third sign identifying who Jesus is, alongside the Lord's death on the cross and His bodily resurrection that appears in all four Gospels. Yet this miracle would take place unexpectedly. Jesus had consciously taken time off he was exhausted. He had gone away to this rural location with His disciples for a break. Yet in this unsolicited moment one of His most profound encounters with His fellow Galileans would take place. Do you realise the significance of what happened here for our witness in this century? So often we focus on our formal evangelistic meetings and schemes as our means of sharing the good news of God with people around us –or at least those who are willing to attend the events we put on. Yet in the New Testament evangelism was, most of the time, one-to-one sharing of personal faith in the context of everyday life by Christians in their families or their workplace; it was through the personal initiatives of countless unknown Christian men and women, old and young alike, every bit as much as Peter and Paul and James and other apostolic leaders. The most powerful witness for Christ this church can offer is not inspiring worship services (though praise God for them); not edifying and relevant sermons (though praise God for them when they meet that criteria!); not beautiful, appropriate and well cared for premises (though praise God for them); rather it is when the people of God practice in daily life the principles we proclaim, in a way that the people who need Jesus see their relevance to their own lives and want to follow Jesus too. This is one of the reasons why as Baptists we proclaim the principle of the priesthood of all believers. Every church member has an equal responsibility to be a witness for Jesus Christ, wherever we are found throughout the week, every bit as much as the pastor or deacons or other congregational leaders. It is good to plan intentional evangelistic events, I was not for a moment criticising them, but we can so often forget that the most powerful witness is your daily life.

How big is your vision to see and to pray for opportunities to speak for Jesus and to show, maybe through a small act of kindness something of the love of God to people around you. Ask the Lord to prompt you whom you might call on the phone or e-mail or via one of the even newer forms of personal communications. Have a sense of expectancy that God can use you to be His representative to someone –even this week. In the United Kingdom, but especially in England just now, we have an increasingly secular country. Christians can feel pressured to stay silent and not share their faith when a small but increasing number of workers have lost jobs and careers simply for following Jesus in the last decade, as a result of hostile policies put in place by the previous Government. Faith –steps can be a risk and they can be costly, but they can also be exciting as the Holy Spirit works through the people of God.

*The Jewish Passover Feast was near* (John 6:4). John reminds us that a special Jewish festival was about to take place. Apparently nationalist feelings were at their highest during this time of the year. Large crowds gathered, especially at the Temple in Jerusalem, to affirm their Jewish faith and identity during the Feast of Passover. This feast and its significance to the Jewish nation serves as a backcloth to this Gospel. How did John the Baptist describe Jesus? *Behold* [NIV 'Look'] *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World*' (John 1:29; 36). At the heart of Passover a lamb was sacrificed but in the celebrations, participants were warned: *'Do not break any of the bones'* (Exodus 12:43-50); the blood of the lamb, marked on Israelite homes had caused the Angel of death to pass over the homes of the Israelites in Egypt and spare their first born sons (Exodus 12:13), but the Egyptian homes not covered by the blood paid the price of their sin and experienced the last plague on the firstborn (Exodus 11); later in John 6 as Jesus speaks of the bread of life and eating His flesh,

which so many on the day misunderstood as physical eating, rather than a spiritual act of identifying with what Jesus had done for them by faith; it points forward to His extraordinary death in the place of sinners and despite His execution being by the gruesome mode of crucifixion, prophecy was fulfilled at that Passover festival, on the day the lambs were slaughtered in their thousands for the sins of the Jewish nation. Jesus the Lamb of God was slain for us. *These things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled; Not one of His bones will be broken* (John 19: 36 –see also Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:20); we look back in the Gospels and see a pattern of God at work through Jesus. We rejoice also as we look back and see how God has been at work in your life and mine over the years we have followed Him.

## **2. The Problem or the Opportunity** (John 6:5-9)

(a) **The Problem is too big (Philip)** (John 6:5-7) *When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards Him, He said to Philip, Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? <sup>6</sup> He asked this only to test him, for He already had in mind what He was going to do.<sup>7</sup> Philip answered Him, Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!* There are times when God allows our faith to be tested. This situation, like the one when Peter was invited by Jesus to join Him in walking on the water, required an active response from the disciple in question. The theory was good, but Peter could only practise his faith in Jesus when he got out of the boat and kept his eyes on Jesus. Matthew records that part of that account in this way: *Lord, if it's you, Peter replied, tell me to come to you on the water.<sup>29</sup> Come, He said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus.<sup>30</sup> But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, Lord, save me! <sup>31</sup> Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. You of little faith, He said, why did you doubt?* (Matthew 14:28-31). In John 6 Philip is the disciple facing the challenge Jesus had allowed him to address. Philip was a very practical believer and a great man to have in the apostolic group. He was a worker who could be relied on to get things done and a great witness who brought his friend Nathanael to Jesus (John 1:43-51); he was good at maths and starts to calculate the cost of providing dinner for such a large gathering. Imagine after church today everyone here showing up at your home for a meal –how would you handle that? Multiply that several times over, John 6:10 indicates there were approximately 5,000 men; given that they would have come in family groups add a similar number of women and a couple of children per household is not unreasonable and you have approximately 20,000 people. Philip is doing mental maths on a scale beyond anything his teacher had taught him at school. Maybe you are brilliant with figures and working out such numbers would be easy for you; I was at the other end of the scale at school struggling with mathematics! Factor in the reality that there were no supermarkets or other large food stores at which to buy food; in fact not even a corner shop or convenience store to buy a pint of milk and a loaf of bread. In addition, I doubt if Jesus or the disciples carried much cash on them in any case-in fact a certain Judas carried any money they possessed. The longer Philip thinks about the situation the bigger the problem grew and the less likely it looked as if a solution could be found. Have you had that experience in your family recently? Maybe in church life or in your employment an issue has come up that seemed too big to handle and you struggled to get a sense of perspective? It might even be something you had taken in your stride in the past, but this time it emotionally blew you away! In such times as this we need to remember how big is our vision of God? *Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us,<sup>21</sup> to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations* (Ephesians 3:20-21). We can so easily take our eyes off the Lord and our sense of perspective goes completely and we panic. Lord, I cannot handle this! God has placed us in church families for a purpose, many purposes actually, but including this one; there are times when you and I will need the wise words and encouragements of a brother or sister to get us

through tough times. On other occasions other believers in the congregation will be helped by you supporting them through their times of hardship or discouragement. We all have our moments, like Philip here, where our eyes are off Jesus and on the situation and we need help. Are you in that place today? Do you need a sister or brother to pray with you into your situation? Actually the situation was under control. Jesus knew exactly what He was going to do (John 6:6). Do you need to be reassured today that your life is secure in the hands of your Saviour and Redeemer? Things are never out of control when He is in charge. This does not mean they are easy, often far from it, but in your trials remember this promise from Isaiah 26:3-4: *You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!*  
<sup>4</sup>*Trust in the Lord always, for the Lord God is the eternal Rock.*

(b) **The Opportunity to resolve the situation (Andrew)** (John 6:8-9) <sup>8</sup>*Another of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, <sup>9</sup>Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?* The situation hadn't changed yet here was another disciple Andrew who was also very practical and good at resolving problems. His approach was so different. Instead of scheduling a panic because he cannot solve the problem on his own he makes a conscious choice to involve other people and hopefully together their problems can be resolved. Philip's natural instincts were to try and solve the problem on his own Andrew was a more natural team-player. In a church family we need both people who can be trusted to get on with a task given to them without having to check up on them, but also we especially need team-players believers who consciously look to work together, to involve other people, so as to accomplish a goal that needs to be met. Andrew also came up with a solution that was unexpected. It was not an adult he brought to Jesus with a large supply of food. –enough for a family group; instead it was a young boy with an older child's lunch. Here was an adult willing to use what a young person in their midst offered to resolve the problem. Had the young boy offered his lunch to Jesus? Or had Andrew spotted it and asked if he would give it to Jesus? We will never know the correct answer. What is important is that he was willing to offer himself and all he had to Jesus and trust Jesus to do the rest. What a wonderful picture that presents to us of what it means to follow Jesus. It is a person who knows themselves with their strengths and weaknesses, but who recognises their need to respond to the call of Jesus on their lives. Has there been a time in your life when under the prompting of God the Holy Spirit you gave your life to Jesus? Is today the day? There are no accidents of timing with the Lord. He brought you here today to hear His Word and respond to the promptings of His Spirit in your heart and mind? If you have never put your faith in Jesus can I encourage you to take that step of faith today? As a Christian does this boy and his offering to Jesus all that he had speak to your heart about some step of obedience He has been calling you to make in recent weeks or months or maybe very recently, will you respond: 'Yes Lord, I am willing to obey You'. The boy in offering His lunch did not know what difference it would make, but he offered it all the same. You may think that the money you can afford to give in tithes and offerings is so small to make a difference in the work of this church –what's the point? The Lord who noticed the widow's offering of two copper coins of negligible worth (Luke 21:1-4), honoured her and said that her father in heaven had noticed. It may be our time that we struggle to prioritise and church or family loses out unduly to work or social choices and we need to ask the Lord to give us mastery over our weekly schedules. For other people it may some gifts that are needed in God's service and we may be reluctant to offer for a variety of reasons. Sometimes we think someone else is more gifted they could volunteer –maybe they could but has God asked you? I thank God for Andrew and people like him in our churches today. He did what he could and trusted Jesus to do the rest –which of course He did! This is Christian discipleship in action. We, for example, cannot convert anyone –only God can do that, but He uses people to be His witnesses to pass on the good news to people who need it. We need to pray that God will

open the hearts of people around us that they may be receptive to hearing God's truth, that we or other Christians will share with them, and most of all that in God's time we may have opportunities to pray with them to put their trust in Jesus and start following Him as His disciples. There will be many times in our Christian service when the problem seems insurmountable but how often when we step out in faith the Lord supplies our need in unexpected ways. May we be people of faith like Andrew here.

### **3. The Blessing and the Response** (John 6:10-15)

(a) **The Miraculous Provision** (John 6:10-11) <sup>10</sup> *Jesus said, Make the people sit down. There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them.* <sup>11</sup> *Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.* We know what Jesus planned to do from the benefit of hindsight. His disciples genuinely had no idea. In addition, this was meant to be time off work and a rest in the countryside, so this whole incident may have taken them by surprise. Can you imagine the scene as Jesus gave thanks for the food? Do you imagine some people near the front thinking, or even saying to their friends, there's not much food there it will run out before it gets to us? Can you sense the excitement as the food kept on replenishing itself and feeding an ever larger number of people. What about the sense of awe and wonder at this mighty miracle from God? The best view of proceedings was in the midst of the apostolic group who were organising the food distribution. If I had been in their midst, I would have been very nervous organising people into rows to sit down for a meal for which, self-evidently, there was not enough food. Do we have a similar attitude when we come to church on a Sunday that nothing special will happen? Rather than praying that God will use the service to bring someone to faith in Christ, or trusting that a backslidden Christian can be restored or that we may grow in our knowledge and understanding of the faith and be prompted to apply it better in daily life? Jesus is totally trustworthy. Here we read in John 6:11: *Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated **as much as they wanted**.* *He did the same with the fish.* This was not a tiny morsel suitable for a snack rather than a meal. Nor was it a small or medium portion –extra-large was on the menu for the person who sought it! Do you have a particular need just now? Jesus can meet that need and will assist you in every way to live for Him. Our God is a generous God and gives us this promise as Paul relays in Philippians 4:19: *And my God will meet **all** your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.* Notice the *all your needs*...Paul writing from prison means what he says. We must be careful to state needs not wants – there is no statement in the Bible indicating that the Lord will give us everything we want, no wise parent on earth would promise that either to their children! God has not changed –this is our great God and Saviour who is so generous to us with the resources we need to be witnesses for Him.

(b) **The Careful Stewardship** (John 6:12-13)<sup>12</sup> *When they had all had enough to eat, He said to his disciples, Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.* <sup>13</sup> *So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.* God's provision is generous. He is the God of all grace. Sometimes as His people we miss out on His blessings because we have not asked Him. James 4:2-3 reminds us that though sometimes God says no to our requests because our motivation for the request is not pleasing to Him, on other occasions, he writes, *You do not have, because you do not ask God.* It is appropriate from time to time to examine our own hearts before the Lord as Christians to see if we have retained a sense of expectancy of God working in our lives and through us in the lives of other people around us; the same can happen sometimes in churches who give up hope of ever seeing unchurched people coming to faith or having any expectancy of growth in Christian maturity of those who have professed faith; over the history of the Christian Church

in these last two thousand years each generation of believers has faced a different set of challenges that could undermine our witness for Jesus. The powerful message from John 6:12 is that God's provision for our need is always sufficient –as Abraham found on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:14 *So Abraham called that place 'The Lord will provide'. And to this day it is said 'on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided'.*) This passage also teaches careful stewardship of resources the spare food was collected so it could be used on another occasion. One small lunch given to Jesus was used by God in ways beyond the giver's wildest imagination. When you and I make ourselves available to God to be witnesses for Him in sharing our faith in word or action we never know what impact that might have in the lives of other people, to the glory of God. Sometimes pressures from other people outside the faith can cause us to withdraw into the safety of our church communities and neglect our witness to people who need Jesus. William Carey's great sermon with the points, 'Expect Great things (from God)' and 'Attempt Great Things (for God)', in context about world mission, but applicable in all areas of Christian ministry, is a wonderful inspiration to the Baptist family. What is more he followed up his sermon with a lifetime of service in India. Who knows what God might do in coming days through you and me –if we are wholeheartedly available to Him? (c) **The Misunderstanding and the Withdrawal of Jesus** (John 6:14-15) *After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world. <sup>15</sup>Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make Him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by Himself.* How did the people respond to this amazing miracle? In two ways they praised Jesus as *the Prophet* and wanted to force Him to become their earthly king and messiah. Unfortunately it was on their terms not His. Nationalist feelings ran high at the time of the Passover festival commemorating the foundation of their nation, in the time of Moses. Yet they failed to acknowledge Jesus on His terms. Where do you stand at this moment in time? Are you here as someone yet to come to faith and you have wanted to keep control of your own life, on your terms; Jesus' message to you is trust Me today. Allow Me to take charge of your life and you will accomplish things in the power of My Spirit that you never thought possible. Will you make that response today? Are you here as a Christian, but having lost your vision of what God can accomplish through you? Will you ask the Holy Spirit this morning to fill you afresh with God's power so that you may once more regain a greater vision of what God can accomplish through you? In Paul's words, in *Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us...* To those here with a real passion for the Lord and faithful in His service, may the Lord give you greater blessings and joys than you have yet experienced in this church. Despite the trials and challenges that cross our pathways, may He enable you not only to continue stepping out in faith, but to see God's kingdom extended in ways He will put in your hearts in the days to come. To Him be all the glory and praise, for Jesus' sake, Amen.