

“The Major Miracles of Jesus”

Mark 6:33-56

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Opening Prayer

Whether the world would admit it or not, Christ’s teachings and His miracles are a part of our very fabric. You cannot understand world history, world politics, or culture without talking about Christ. It was always a part of the Lord’s design that the Gospel would spread the world over, and as a testament to this there are more Christians today now than there ever have been. As Christianity has grown for two thousand years, the miracles of Jesus have been baked into our society to the point where even in our “post-Christian modern” world, most Americans can still tell you who walked on water or who fed five thousand with nothing but some loaves and some fish. The major miracles of Christ, of which we looked at two this morning, are there for a reason Beloved. They stick out, they are impactful, and they show exactly who Jesus really is. He is fully God and fully man, the Messiah, the Savior who calls any and all who would listen into repentance and eternal life. The miracles that Jesus performs are there, mercifully, to show us that Jesus really is who He says He is. All throughout the Gospel of Mark, and this season of Lent, that has been the underlying theme. Today we turn that up to eleven.

Up until this point in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus’s miracles have been impressive. They have been public, they have been broad, and they have shown that Jesus has full control over them. All throughout Mark, everywhere He goes, He is healing people and casting out demons. He has done the impossible many times over. The healing of a leper through physical touch, the healing of a crippled man through word alone, the casting out of a legion of demons from a possessed man, all of these and so many more have been astonishingly grandiose. But these two miracles we are looking at today go even further than the amazing things Jesus has already done. While there is no questioning that Jesus is empowered by God already, there will be no question after He performs these two miracles (at least for the disciples) that He is in fact God in human flesh afterwards. Feeding the five thousand and walking on water are rightfully well remembered, for they are a part of God’s plans to change the world.

The first of the two major miracles we read about today is the feeding of the five thousand. Out of all the miracles Jesus performs, this is the only one that is recounted in all four Gospels other than the resurrection. Matthew 14, Luke 9, and John 6 along with Mark 6 recount what is perhaps the most visible miracle Jesus ever did. There is good reason why this miracle stands out, why we remember it, and why the entire countryside comes to Jesus after hearing of it. Two things set this miracle apart. The first, as mentioned, is its visibility. Five thousand men, plus many thousands of women and children (perhaps up to 20,000) eat of the food provided. This is a miracle that is impossible to fake. They are in the countryside, there are no hidden food trucks to call from, everyone can see what Jesus is doing and where the food is coming from. That, Beloved, leads us into the second factor that makes this miracle so special. Jesus CREATES the food that is eaten... it is a miracle that only God could do. No prophet, no matter how great, ever could do this on their own. Jesus, Beloved, performs this miracle out of compassion for the many lost folks there. He also, if we dig a little bit deeper, performs this miracle so that many would later believe in Him as Messiah, even though nobody would at that moment.

“When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things. When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, ‘This place is desolate and it is already quite late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.’” There is the setup. There are thousands present, they have been listening to Jesus preach all day, and there is a great need for food. Our Savior, it should be noted, is not blind to what we need. Food, clothing, love, shelter, etc. are all well understood by our Heavenly Father, and He does promise to give us what we need. Think Matthew 6, or Romans 8. Of course, persecution and evil does result in death by needs for many Christians over the centuries, but even in that the Lord gives His children what they need to persevere into eternity. After all, man does not live on bread alone right? Back to the account, after some discourse with the disciples, who struggle to understand when Jesus tells them to give the people something to eat, He then commands the thousands to sit down on the grass. The only food found amongst the people was a young man who had a knapsack with five little barley loaves (think biscuit sized) and two fish (think sardines.) It isn’t much food, it is more akin to a snack. But Jesus breaks the bread and the fish while blessing them, and instructs the disciples to begin passing out that which was

broken. To everyone's amazement, there is not only plenty to go around, but there is enough for everyone to eat until they are engorged, with leftovers besides. The word used here for "full" literally means to gorge... think overfeeding a cow to get fat. It is that kind of fully satisfied that these people could eat to, in a world that never had enough. It is a miracle of creation, and it is astounding in its scope... it is something only God could do.

To quote another pastor, Jesus feeds these people with bread that has never been baked and fish that have never swam. In John's gospel, the people who are a part of this miracle immediately want to make Jesus king. With the background given, we can see why. But their focus was all about the bread, and even as we read in our reading from Mark, the disciples "had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves..." This miracle's impact wasn't felt right away, as all would abandon Jesus shortly thereafter, but in time it would become essential to understanding who Christ is.

For those of you who have been here for a little while, I think it was my third or so sermon where I preached on the feeding of the five thousand. The phrase I used over and over again was "It wasn't about the bread!" I had a baguette that I waved around and broke into pieces and such. That phrase holds true. This miracle isn't about the bread, it is about the One who created it. Only God can Create. We take created things and make them into other things, but only God can physically make something from nothing. Because Jesus creates, He is God as He claims. This miracle moves Jesus from the realm of great prophet into Lord Almighty, and while nobody will get it right then, they will later. The disciples, the first ones to understand that Jesus really is God in human flesh, need more than just this miracle. While it is public, while it shows His almighty power, while it is creative, there is a salvific piece that is missing that will tip the scales for eleven of Jesus's closest friends. They, and by extension us too, needed not only the feeding of the five thousand, but also Jesus to walk on water.

We read "Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray." Jesus would often do this, we know from the four Gospels. He would go off to pray alone, to be refreshed, and so at times the disciples would be without their leader. The disciples, Beloved, are in the boat at night by themselves. At least four of them

were fishermen, well accustomed to being on this exact sea. Piloting a boat on the Sea of Galilee should have been something that was well within their means, yet when Jesus comes to them they are out in the middle of the water. That certainly wasn't part of the plan, and it shows the jeopardy they found themselves in. Most smaller boats, the like one they were in, would have traveled near shore. Think smaller fishing boats on Lake Superior or Michigan, or even like Leech Lake or Lake of the Woods. You fishermen can probably attest, if those smaller boats are in the center during a storm it is bad news... especially with no lights and only oars to pilot. The reason for their distress, obviously, is the storm and the wind that had come up. For seasoned fishermen to find themselves in this situation, it is do or die. Their lives are on the line, and being in the middle of the sea at the fourth watch of the night (3-6 am), it would have been absolutely pitch black. With no light, except what may have been given by the storm, the disciples are in so much peril. When they see Jesus walking by, they cry out in terror.

Understandably so, they think He is a ghost. Who has ever heard of anyone walking on water, either before Christ or since? In Matthew's account, Peter asks Jesus to allow him to walk on the water too, and when Jesus calls Peter out, Peter also walks on the water. Peter though, after seeing the waves, begins to lose heart and to sink, and Jesus saves him, puts them both in the boat, and the wind stops. This miracle, Beloved, changes the hearts of the disciples. He who had previously been their leader and prophet, has now moved to being their Messiah... and Savior. From here on out the disciples, with the exception of Judas, will claim Christ is the Lord. Even when they abandon Jesus and flee, they will still acknowledge Him as being God. This act, walking on water and saving them, has changed them. It is personal, impactful, and salvific. Beloved, both the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus's walking on water are marvelous... but they are not the end goal in and of themselves. Jesus's miracles then, and even still now, are done for the sole purpose of bring folks into relationship with their creator.

In my last church, there was a retired pastor named Ken. Ken was, and still is, and absolutely wonderful man. There are some people who were just born to be pastors, to lead well, and he has this gift in spades. I talked with Ken one time in his home about his story, how he came to know the Lord and how the Lord had worked on him. This humble man talked about how, in his younger years, he had been so greatly impacted by the Billy Graham crusades. Coming and seeing that fellow preach and hearing the call into eternal life, Ken had changed course from

being placid in his faith to taking it seriously. While there was no miracle of feeding thousands at that crusade, there certainly was a miracle present. The Lord had reached Ken's young heart, and had opened the door for his ministry through him.

Speaking closer to home, many of you have heard the name Fred Spading here in town. I was blessed to know the man, and honored to do his funeral in 2020. Before he passed, I found myself alone in his home at one point while Lorraine was in the hospital. After some conversation, Fred brought up a marvelously individual miracle the Lord had done for him. He said "I haven't ever seen God, but I know for a fact He is there. I have seen Jesus, and I know He is there too." A miracle he never boasted about or shared, I don't think ever, in any way, was a time Jesus had miraculously saved his life. In the 50's he was disking a field, and while on his tractor the seat broke. The tractor being stuck in gear, and the disk being pulled close behind, Fred found himself hanging on for dear life to the backside of his tractor. He was in the process of being pulled into the discs when he looked up, saw some sandaled feet that he recognized from paintings of Christ he had seen. He felt a strong arm grab his shirt, pull him up, and then he found himself alone once again. He said from that moment on, he never questioned Jesus. Beloved, Jesus still comes to us individually to save us today.

As we get near the close of today's message, let's bring this into our world. We all know about the feeding of the five thousand and that Jesus walked on water, but there are many miracles that He has done in our world and time today too. He proved Himself marvelously in the past, so that the church would begin on solid ground. Today He still proves Himself, to remind us in our seasons of doubt or anguish, that He is still Lord. I would have you think about large public manifestations of the Lord's power that you have seen. No, I am not talking about a miracle of healing or something, but rather large numbers of people being fulfilled and brought close to the cross. You could think of things like the Billy Graham crusades of the last century, like those that changed Pastor Ken. Maybe you can think of a particular church service, or ministry, that affected many of which you were a part. Those sorts of times, where large numbers are pushed close to the cross, are similar to the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus still does that work today. That being said, maybe it is a miracle more like the walking on water of Christ that strikes a chord. Many of us can remember a time where we felt like we were lost at sea like the disciples. There was little hope, we had lost

our footing, we were in danger of drowning... and then Jesus walked in and saved the day. Maybe, like Fred, you can remember a time where the Lord preserved you. Many of you can relate a time where Christ pulled you out of despair, anguish, and pain. Maybe it was addiction, depression, loss, or massive anxiety. Maybe it was a time where He saw you through a massive difficulty in your life in a way you could have never expected. I would guess, Beloved, that for many of you this is why you have stuck close to Jesus even to today. Those personal actions that the Lord does for us, Beloved, they make all the difference. Praise the Lord that He still does wonderful things for us now, showing His power and love and salvation, both in large and public ways and also in the personal. Beloved, let's pray.

Closing Prayer