

Making Bread

John 6:1-21

The phrase, “Making hay,” gained a whole new meaning for me when we moved to Virginia some years ago. I had lived in many places over the years, including the cotton fields of the Mississippi delta and the corn fields of the midwestern plains. But I’ve never lived next to a hay field, as we did in Staunton. Actually, watching the hay grow during the months of the first spring we lived there, I wondered why it was never mowed, for I thought that the fields were just wild grass. Actually, at times, I was a bit frustrated at the willingness of my neighbors to let the grass get so high, grass that bordered two entire sides of our one-acre lot.

Then, one week in June, I saw the large mowing attachments to the tractors brought out. I was happy to see the fields cut, and was somewhat surprised to realize that everyone else along the street was mowing their fields at the same time. Being somewhat dense, it still hadn’t dawned on me what was happening, not until a few days after the first field was cut, and another large attachment on the back of the tractor came out, and all of a sudden there were large bales of hay sitting out in the fields.

Making hay.

But, of course, the farmers weren’t making hay, were they? They were cutting it. And baling it. But not making it. Not in the sense of creating something that didn’t exist before. You see, you and I don’t have that ability. We are bound to certain restrictions, certain limitations that are ours as creatures. And one of those restrictions is most definitely this, we cannot create something out of nothing. We can not bring into existence something that didn’t

used to exist. We can rearrange resources that already exist, and put them into new and “creative” forms, but we can’t create.

But God can. God can create. And he can work apart from what we properly should call “ordinary providence.” That is, the laws of nature. After all, God is God.

And Jesus, in the flesh, is God. Our text this morning is an account of Jesus, as God, performing the works of God. The supernatural works. I’ve combined two such supernatural works because they teach such a similar message, and they are so closely connected in Matthew’s inspired gospel. Those supernatural works are called miracles. Or with a related Greek word, they are called “signs.”

I. MIRACULOUS SIGNS.

v.1-2

The signs. The attesting miracles. The miraculous testimony of the power of God. As Peter would preach at Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2, Jesus of Nazareth was “a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know.”

He was a man attested by God to be God. And that attestation, that validation, that proof of his deity, was his ability to perform miracles.

Two specific examples are before us today. Jesus took five barley loaves and two small fish and fed 5000 people. They were fed unto satisfaction, “as much as they wanted.” And when it was all done, the disciples gathered up the fragments that remained and filled 12 baskets!

Then, while his disciples were out on a boat that became threatened by a great wind storm, Jesus walked out to them on the water, and when he entered the boat, according to Matthew and Mark, the winds stopped.

Now, let me state the obvious. And because of the spirit of the age in which we live, the obvious needs to be stated. Faithfully, and forcefully. Here it is, in all its obviousness to you. These things actually happened!

There actually were 5000 people fed with abundance when only five loaves of bread and two fish were in existence. Jesus performed a miracle. And Jesus really did walk upon the water. He performed a miracle.

They really did happen. There really are miracles. And a belief in the historical accuracy, or historicity, of these miracles is a fundamental part of our Christian faith. You can't properly claim the name of Christ and in same breath deny the historical reality and accuracy of these descriptions of miraculous signs, for it was the miraculous signs which attested that Jesus was GOD!

I say that because of the obvious unbelief of those who would fall under the label of liberal. Liberal churches, liberal preachers, liberal commentators don't believe these things happened, and they will go to great lengths to tell you what really happened. But let me assure you, upon the authority of God as he reveals himself in the inspired pages of Scripture, what really happened is what is described in these verses. What really happened is that Jesus performed miracles! They are the greater works which bear witness of Jesus, as we studied last week.

John 5:36

Specifically,

A. Miraculous signs are a public demonstration of Jesus' supernatural power.

A public demonstration. A public witness. Intended for everyone to see, so that everyone would see that he was God. That was the whole point. Notice just how public all these signs were.

v.1-2

He had already done other signs. Miracles of healing. And a multitude gathered, following him because of it. Now, don't think for a moment that that multitude had been duped. They were real miracles. Real healing for real people who were really diseased.

And even upon separating himself from the crowd, in order to be with the disciples, the multitude followed.

v.3-5a

Again, let me emphasize the obvious. The multitude followed because Jesus had performed miraculous signs, signs which were public demonstrations of his supernatural power. And very much related to that, we see that,

B. Miraculous signs are an accurate demonstration of Jesus' supernatural identity.

They demonstrated that he had supernatural power. And, therefore, that he had a supernatural identity. In other words, that he was from God. That he was God.

And so we read in,

John 20:30 "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

That is why a belief in the historicity of the miracles is a fundamental belief within the Christian faith, because if you doubt or deny the miracles, you are doubting or denying the person of Jesus Christ! Because it is the miracles that are used in Scripture to identify Jesus!

Notice how that identification is revealed here.

v.14

Now, the prophet was the prophet like unto Moses who was so specifically predicted in Deuteronomy 18. And the Messianic expectations of that prophet are so obvious, as we see in,

v.15

Jesus the mind of this crowd. He knew what they would want to do, if they were allowed to do so. They would take him by force, as if that were possible, and make him king. Given their own way, they would seek to enthrone Jesus as King, thus in their own minds reestablishing the great kingdom in the line of David. But, of course, at this point in his earthly ministry, in what theologians properly call his estate of humiliation, he would not be king. So he withdrew from the crowd. But don't miss this revelation of their intentions. They saw the miracles, and they recognized him for who he was. They recognized his supernatural identity, because they saw his supernatural power.

And so must we!

You see, he is king now. He was crucified and died. He remained under the power of death for three days. But he rose from the dead and ascended to the right of God the father, where he is now seated above all authority in heaven and on earth. He is the king, the one whose supernatural power and supernatural identity were proven, without a doubt, by the miraculous signs he performed while on this earth.

So, my friends, believe these things. And gain confidence in that belief, especially as you face the temptations and accusations of this unbelieving age in which we live.

The miracles really were miracles. So let's look somewhat briefly at what actually happened, what Jesus actually did. Let's study the demonstration of,

II. SUPERNATURAL POWER.

Jesus did essentially two things. Two things that we are completely unable to do. Two things that belong to his nature that are not in the least passed on to us. And those two things correspond to the two things that our catechism mentions as the two parts of how God executes, or carries out, his eternal decree. To use the words of the catechism, those two things are creation and providence.

God creates, all things out of nothing. And God governs and rules all the affairs of all his creation. And when it comes to the miracles, we see God going beyond that which is natural. We see God going beyond the laws of nature. We see go beyond our own existence, first by his ability to create. We see, in this first miracle,

A. The power to create.

Now, the original act of creation, at the beginning of the world, was a creation out of nothing. Out of nothing, God made something. By the word of his power.

And in this miraculous occurrence here in John 5, he does the same thing. He doesn't merely give each person a small piece of bread, so that the five loaves would last longer. No, he makes bread where it once didn't exist. As he distributes the loaves to the disciples, he performs a miracle. He acts apart from the

normal laws of nature and he goes beyond normal acts of providence. He creates bread. And fish. And that is a power that none of us share.

God, and God alone has the power to create. By the word of his power. And by that word, by that power, he can do whatever he pleases, even that which violates the so-called law of nature. Jesus has the power to do that which is beyond natural. That which is supernatural.

B. The power to act apart from the physical laws of nature.

In the case before us this morning, it is the power to walk on water.

v.19

Now, try as hard as we may, none of us can do that. Not one. Not even close. It's now a matter of physical training or athletic conditioning. It's not a matter of building strength and getting sufficient instruction. No. It's in the realm of the impossible. It is a violation of the laws of nature, the laws of chemistry, the laws of thermodynamics, the laws of physics, the laws of gravity.

It is super-natural. And only God can act super-naturally, above the very laws of nature which he, in his ordinary providence, governs in order to control all that goes on within this created order.

We cannot suspend the law of gravity, no matter how spiritual or how Christlike we become. We just can't! We can't the laws of physics and dynamics, denying the forces that would cause a man, every man, to sink when he attempts to stand on water. Our density is simply greater than the density of water, and we will sink. Every time.

But God is not bound by such natural restrictions. For God has supernatural power. But let's go deeper. And notice the connection between these two particular miracles. There is something particularly striking about both these miracles in our text this morning, something I really want you to recognize, and that is that they are both performed as,

III. A TEST OF FAITH.

Jesus doesn't simply perform miracles when they seem necessary or appropriate. Instead, he takes every opportunity to build the faith of his disciples. He makes every moment a teaching moment.

And how does he test their faith? By withholding the miracle for a season. By waiting before he performs the miracle. From both these occasions, we see that,

A. Jesus will withhold the demonstration of a miracle to test the faith of his disciples.

He with withhold the demonstration of a miracle. Intentionally. Purposefully. To test. We're told that here!

v.5-6

He asked them a question, to test them. To test their faith.

He didn't ask them that question because he didn't know what to do! He didn't ask them that question because he really needed their help. No, we are told unmistakably, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that he asked them that question to test them!

Now, this testing was a good thing. It was the test of a good and wise professor, wishing for his students to learn a valuable lesson. Tests are good and proper teaching tools, and we

shouldn't despise them in the hands of qualified educators. And Jesus was a master teacher!

His tests were not temptations, for God does not tempt a man. He does not tempt a man to sin, seeking to trip him up and cause him to sin. Satan does that. But he does teach us at times, at frequent times, by method of testing.

v.5b-6

He does the same thing when he walks upon the water.

v.16-19

He didn't immediately stop the waves, did he? And he often doesn't immediately stop the waves in our lives either, does he? It was dark, at night. The sea arose and a great wind was blowing. They had gone three or four miles, a long distance. And Jesus was walking on the water approaching the boat.

Now, they were still struggling perhaps for their very lives, struggling to keep this boat afloat. And there was Jesus, walking on the water. Testing their faith.

In Matthew's gospel, we read about the full extent of that test.

Mat.14:22 Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. 23 And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. 24 But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. 25 Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. 26 And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." 28 And Peter

answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. 30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" 31 And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

It was a test of faith. "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

To speak symbolically, there are times when Jesus calls us to walk on the water like Peter. There are times when he calls us to get out of that boat and walk to him. To to continue to speak symbolically, if we look down, if we look down at that water on which we're walking, if we fix our eyes upon the troubled waters of our own lives, we will be forced to react with the fear of Peter.

Mat.14:30 "[W]hen he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!'"

And at that moment, Jesus will say to us, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Can any of you identify with that? Has Jesus ever tested your faith in such a way? Jesus will most certainly use the storms and trials of this life to test your faith, leaving you in the midst of those storms for a time, to test your faith in order to make it strong. In the words of James,

James 1:2 "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into

various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

And in the words of Peter,

1 Peter 1:6 “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Tested by fire. Jesus will withhold the demonstration of his supernatural power to test the faith of his disciples, including you and me. He will withhold the answer to our prayers, to test our faith. He will deny the requests of our prayers, sometimes, to test our faith. As he did for Paul, who prayed for the thorn in his flesh to be removed.

He will order his providence in such a way as to cause us to endure trials, troubles, and all manner of difficulties. That our faith might be tested, refined and purified like gold, which is tested by fire. And in all those things, as in the situation of his disciples in John 6, there is one particular focus to the test. Above all else, above all other things that Jesus would have for us to learn from his wise and gracious tests, he would have us learn this.

B. Jesus will cause his disciples to recognize their total dependence upon him.

The purpose of the tests before us in John 6, the purpose of that question, “Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?”, the purpose in Jesus walking on the water out to the disciples in the middle of that great storm, is a very simple lesson. It was a test of dependence.

What was the answer to that question from the disciples?

v.7-9

There is great helplessness in that response, but not enough dependence. They were hopelessly helpless because they were looking only to their own resources. And those resources were clearly inadequate. Can any of you identify there?

They saw 5000 people, and the best hope they could find was five loaves of barley bread and two small fish. No hope at all.

Jesus has a great lesson to teach at this point, a lesson of dependence.

Think about how the disciples should have answered. Think about the most godly and the most faithful answer they could have given. I think it would have been something like this. “Jesus, there is no way that we could buy enough bread for everyone eat. There is no way that we can meet the needs and the demands of this situation. So, Jesus, we will have to depend upon you to do something.”

Now, although that isn’t exactly what they said, Jesus did DO something. He withheld the miracle until that point, then he performed the miracle, to teach them to be dependent.

Dependent upon him for everything.

I do believe that is the emphasis Jesus intends to communicate when he answers the question,

Mat. 18:1 “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ 2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, 3 and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are

converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

And,

Mat. 19:14 But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

I believe that Jesus is making reference to the dependence of a little child. That is humility. A little child knows that he is dependent, and knows that everything he needs in life will come from his father and mother. So it must be with us, as we go through all the affairs of our own life. We must learn dependence. Everything that we need comes from God.

Learning dependence upon God is a very difficult thing, because it is most effectively learned in the struggle of difficulties, in the frustration of weakness and helplessness.

To learn dependence, you must learn what God, in his providence, caused the apostle Paul to learn with his thorn in the flesh.

2 Cor. 12:7 “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am

weak, then I am strong.”

When you can say those words yourself, describing your own life, it is safe to say that you have learned dependence. Isn't that also the meaning of Jesus' words to his disciples as he walked out to them on the lake in that great storm?

v.19-21

In the midst of the storms of your own life, your faith is most certainly being tested, by a good and faithful tester. One who loves you. And the test is this, “Will you trust me?”

And in the midst of that great storm, Jesus will come to you and say, “It is I. Do not be afraid.”

“O you of little faith. Why did you doubt?”

So, let me ask. What do you fear? What causes you to be afraid? Whatever it is, let me urge you in the experience of that fear, to try and measure the extent to which your fear is caused by your inability and unwillingness to choose to depend upon God. To trust him.

Indeed, God will at many times give to us a test of faith. And that test often comes in the form of a necessity to believe that God has supernatural power to do something or to accomplish something that is impossible for us.

And so, when you need bread to feed 5000 people, God will provide it. And when you are in a great storm in the middle of the sea, and the ship is about to overturn, God will come to you and calm the storm.

In other words, God's grace is sufficient for your need,

whatever that need might be. And God's power will protect you in that great trouble, what that trouble might be.

So that you all can say with David, with the courage of his faith,

Ps.27:1 "The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid? 2 When the wicked came against me To eat up my flesh, My enemies and foes, They stumbled and fell. 3 Though an army may encamp against me, My heart shall not fear; Though war should rise against me, In this I will be confident. 4 One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple. 5 For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock. 6 And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD."