

A Hungry Crowd

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 June 2011

Preacher: Jonathan Smith

[0 : 01] All right, well, as Chris said, we're starting a new series tonight, Changed by Jesus. It's going to be four weeks in the book of John, particularly looking at four circumstances by which Jesus performs a miracle.

And the purpose of the miracle is to show the people then and you and I tonight that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus is the living God.

So that's going to be the focus of the next four weeks as we look in the book of John at these miraculous things that Jesus does. The reason that we gather together, as Chris said, the reason that around a billion people around the world today are gathering together to worship Jesus is because He is the Son of God.

We saw in the Crux series that we did, I think it was in April, that it was widely documented that Jesus is the most influential man who has ever lived.

More paintings painted of Him, more books written about Him, more songs sung to Him than any other person who's ever lived. We noticed that history is divided around His birth.

[1 : 17] B.C. before Christ, A.D. Anno Domini, the year of our Lord. That this man, Jesus, has influenced history more than any other man who has ever lived. And He has influenced individuals more than any other man who has ever lived.

More people on earth have been changed by Jesus than they have been changed by any other person of history. And so in this series, we're going to focus on how Jesus changes the lives of people in the book of John, but I want the focus for us, not to be so much on them, but on ourselves.

How has Jesus changed us? How can Jesus change us? If you want to know the central meaning of the book of John, it's where we're going to be in the next four weeks.

If you want to know why John wrote John, and particularly if you want to know why John recorded these miraculous things that Jesus did, you go to John chapter 20, I think it's verses 30 to 31.

And in that verse, let me just get it. That'll help us, just so that I'm accurate on this. This is the whole purpose that John wrote the book, John chapter 20, verse 30 and 31.

[2 : 41] He says, Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these, the ones that He has recorded, the miraculous signs that He has recorded throughout the book, these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

That's the whole reason He wrote that book. That's the whole reason He takes down and meticulously records these miraculous situations that Jesus finds Himself in, these miraculous deeds that He does, these signs as John refers to them as.

The reason John has recorded them, the reason He wants you to read them, the reason He wants you to listen during these sermons is so that you might realize that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that in believing you may have life in His name.

That's abundant life in this life as you follow Him and eternal life in the age to come. So that's why we're going to be here around this book in the next few weeks' time.

I hope you can stick with us for that. I want to pray for us now. Let's ask for God's help as we open His Word and then we'll get to work on this chapter 6 of the book of John. Let's pray. Father, we do thank You so much for the book of John.

[4 : 06] It is a fantastic book. We thank You for the clear picture that He paints for us of Jesus. We particularly thank You that John likes to focus in on encounters that individuals have with Jesus and the way that their lives are changed as a result.

So as we study these stories that John has written down for us, I pray that we would be changed by Jesus and that we would put our trust in Jesus and that You do all this through Your powerful Spirit at work within us.

Lord, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Just to give you a little bit of context as we come to the sixth chapter of this book of John, up until this point, John has been painting a very powerful picture of Jesus.

And remember, everything that he is writing is serving that central purpose that we might know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. So in chapter 1, he just goes straight at it from the start.

He says that Jesus is God in human flesh. He has existed for all eternity. Everything that is came about through His creative power at work as a member of the Godhead, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

[5 : 24] That is Jesus, the eternal Son of God. And then he explains how the Word became flesh, how Jesus really came and dwelt amongst us. He became a man.

And then he goes on to explain and to retell and to recount Jesus' earthly ministry. So in chapter 2, he'll tell us about how Jesus went to a wedding in Cana and they ran out of wine.

So Jesus took a bunch of water and turned it into wine so that the party could continue on. And he demonstrated in that His creative power as the creator of all things.

This is God amongst us. He can turn water into wine. Chapter 3, he sits down with a guy named Nicodemus, who is a very religious man. And he explains to Nicodemus about how we must be born again in order to follow Jesus, in order to live eternally with God.

He says those famous words to Nicodemus, God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that's Jesus, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life.

[6 : 28] Then chapter 4, he has that great encounter with the Samaritan woman. And he just sits down with this woman and lets her know that a new age has begun.

With His coming, this new kingdom age has come, whereby she could be a member of the people of God. She could worship God in spirit and truth. And it doesn't matter whether she's in a temple or on a mountainside.

It doesn't matter if she has the right background. It doesn't matter where she's coming from. She can follow the one true God. It's the power of Jesus. And she responds with faith in Him.

Then we get to chapter 5, and Jesus demonstrates His miraculous power in healing. Throughout the book of John, you'll see Jesus going around and healing people through this power that is within Him as the Son of God.

And comes into contact, as He often does throughout the book, with religious leaders of the day. And they don't really get along with Him. Because He proclaims a day of salvation for all who believe, not just the super religious good people.

[7 : 35] And so we come to chapter 6, and here John is going to give us a very famous account, isn't he? The feeding of the 5,000 men, 15,000, 25,000 people in all, with five loaves and two fish.

So let's get to it. Turn up to John chapter 6, and we'll take off at verse 1 to 3. It says, sorry, we'll start with 1 to 2.

It says, If you read a lot of Christian literature, a lot of commentaries that kind of expound this passage, there'll be a lot of writers who really condemn this crowd of people.

They say, they're not legitimately following Jesus, they're just following Him because they've seen His miracles, they've seen Him heal the sick, and they're really only following them because they want to see some more magic tricks.

But I don't actually agree with that interpretation of this passage. I don't think that John is condemning them in saying that they were following Him because He'd been performing these miracles. I think it's a legitimate thing for this large group of people to have heard or perhaps seen Jesus' works, His signs, His miraculous powers, and want to follow Him because of that.

[9 : 00] I think that's a legitimate thing. And you might be here tonight because you've heard something about Jesus, something about the Bible, perhaps something that this church has been doing, and you're here because you want to find out more about who this Jesus is.

I think that's a perfectly legitimate thing. You're welcome to be here as long as you like. The question is, what are these people going to do once Jesus reveals Himself to them?

When they see, like John has said, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, what will they do with that information? That's the question. Unfortunately, we're going to see by the end of this chapter, when we touch on it at the end of the talk, that many of them turn away from following Jesus.

They really were just there for the ride. They really were just there for the show. They have no staying power. They don't really want to follow Him. But there are some who followed Him because of His healings, because of His miracles, and they end up following Him for the rest of their lives.

So if you're here tonight, you're not a Christian, but you've heard about some of these things that Jesus does in people's lives, you're welcome. It's legitimate if you want to know more. So let's move on.

[10 : 14] Verse 3, I will go through verse 6. He says, So Jesus went up a mountain and sat down there with His disciples. Now the Passover, a Jewish festival, was near. Therefore, when Jesus looked up and noticed a huge crowd coming towards Him, He asked Philip, where will we buy bread so these people can eat?

He asked this to test Him, for He Himself knew what He was going to do. So this is the situation. Jesus has withdrawn to a mountain.

He does this a lot with His disciples, small group of people, best friends, students. He gets away to a mountain, like a little retreat, and He's going to sit down and teach them there.

And He looks up from where He is on the mountain and He sees a huge crowd, this huge crowd who have heard about what He's been doing and they've followed Him up this mountain to see more about what He's been doing, what He's on about.

So He sees them there, this huge crowd, and He makes a split-second decision. He's going to do something phenomenal. He decides on the spur of the moment, He sees the crowd and He decides He's going to do something big and it's going to be something big that has effect on these people.

[11 : 27] And this thing that He's going to do, this miracle that He's going to perform, is going to exist kind of on two different levels. It's going to have purpose on two different levels. It's going to have an immediate earthly purpose and it's going to have a much more significant eternal purpose.

So first of all, let's take a look at what He does. Verse 7 through to verse 13 says, Then Jesus said, sorry, verse 7 says, Philip answered, 200 denarii worth of bread wouldn't be enough for each of them to have a little.

It's a lot of money and a lot of bread and it's not going to be enough. One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?

Then Jesus said, Have the people sit down. There was plenty of grass in that place, so they sat down. The men numbered 5,000, so probably upwards 15,000, 25,000 people.

Then Jesus took the loaves and after giving thanks, He distributed it to them, to those who were seated. So also with the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were full, He told His disciples, Collect the leftovers so that nothing is wasted.

[12 : 50] So they collected them and filled 12 baskets with the pieces from the five barley loaves that were left over by those who had eaten. So again, this miracle, and it is a miracle, right?

This miracle has kind of a split level purpose, two purposes. There's an immediate, earthly, this worldly kind of purpose and it's just merely Jesus wants to feed these people.

He sees them there, He knows they've travelled a long way to see Him and He has pity on them. This miracle is reported in all four of the Gospels and in some of the other accounts, they highlight the fact that Jesus has pity on these people.

He feels for them. He has compassion and He wants to feed them. And again, commentators and preachers will try and play this aspect down of Jesus' miracles.

They'll kind of say, well, Jesus feeding people or Jesus healing people or Jesus raising people from the dead or Jesus turning water into wine. That doesn't really matter. What is at the heart of it is what it points to, that Jesus is God.

[14 : 02] And they play down the earthiness of Jesus' miracles. I don't want to do that. I think Jesus deliberately and conscientiously and compassionately wants to feed these people.

In the same way, He doesn't just heal people so that they'll say, oh, this is the Messiah. He has compassion on them. He doesn't want them to be sick. He's at a wedding and they run out of wine.

He's not just turning water to wine so that people will think He's God. He wants them to enjoy themselves at this wedding. That's why God created wine. So, don't miss the earthiness of Jesus' miracles.

He's responding to people's felt needs and He's doing it as a loving, compassionate God. So, that's the earthly, this-worldly, immediate effect of His miracle.

And then, there is a much more significant side to this. And it is more significant and it is deeper and it is much more important. And that side of this miracle is the eternal, Messiah-revealing aspect of it.

[15 : 16] If you were listening earlier to Georgie doing the reading, the Old Testament reading, you would have heard from Exodus 16. You can also read about it in Numbers 11. This account of God providing bread for His people in the wilderness, in the Old Testament.

If you're not familiar, the people of Israel, if you've seen The Prince of Egypt, that is a good movie. And it explains kind of biblically the way that God rescues His people out of the land of Egypt.

So, God's people, the Israelites, are in bondage in the land of Egypt and God, through the agency of Moses and Aaron, rescues them from this bondage to slavery.

And He brings them out of that land in a miraculous way. And then they find themselves in this wilderness. They're disobedient, stiff-necked people. And so, God just lets them spend 40 years in this wilderness just so that they can be disciplined and understand who He is and what His purposes are.

And so, they haven't been there long in the wilderness when they start grumbling. They start grumbling to Moses and they start grumbling against God. And they start saying things like, at least in Egypt we had food.

[16 : 33] I mean, we were slaves and they hated us and they killed us but at least we had food. Now we're in the wilderness and we've got nothing. Has God abandoned us? Is Moses just a kind of crackpot?

So, we read in Exodus 16 and you can read in Numbers 11 that God miraculously provides for them. In this wilderness, in this desert where there's no food, He provides this manna, this bread from heaven.

We're not exactly sure what it is. I think the word manna really just means what is it? It's a translation of what they were saying when they saw it on the ground. What is it? Tastes alright. So, that's the way that God provided for them.

He provided quail, He provided water from a rock, He provided for them in this wilderness because He is the creator God, because He is the redeemer God who brought them out of Egypt and is able to provide for them in this wilderness.

And so, while our minds might not hear the story of the feeding of the 5,000 and go straight there, these people definitely would have. They were Jewish people. They had the account of the Exodus very firmly in their minds and particularly at this time as they come to the Passover.

[17 : 49] And so, in their minds and in our minds if we can be educated by God's word, we need to see the parallels between God's provision of manna in the wilderness to those people and God's provision to these people in this situation.

See, these people were in a wilderness area in a mountainous countryside area. It was a massive group of probably 15,000 to 25,000 people.

Their tummies were grumbling because they had travelled this far and had nothing to eat. Philip and Andrew both witnessed themselves that there is nothing that they can do to provide for these people.

There's no shops. There's no food anywhere. They're in the middle of the wilderness. They're in a desolate place. And so, Jesus steps forward and shows himself to be on the same level and indeed the same being as the God who provided for the Israelites in that wilderness.

Jesus is the God-man who provides abundantly. You remember in that reading in Exodus that Georgie read, there was a provision there to collect up what was left at the end of the day.

[19 : 07] God's abundant provision was to be collected up at the end of the day and that's what we see here in this story as well. Once everyone had eaten, they collected up 12 baskets of bread.

Probably symbolic and representative of the 12 tribes of Israel. Again, pointing us back to that situation in the wilderness with God providing for his people. And so, what Jesus is doing in this, in this split-second decision to feed all of these people, he's not just providing for their earthly needs but he's proclaiming himself as John says in chapter 20 to be the Christ, the Son of God.

Only God, the Creator who redeemed his people out of Egypt can provide for people in this way. and that's who Jesus is showing himself to be.

The question is how are people going to respond to this incredible miracle? And not just to the miracle but the meaning behind the miracle, right? The messianic meaning.

How are they going to respond? Check it out, verse 14 and 15. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, this really is the prophet who has come into the world.

[20 : 31] Therefore, when Jesus knew that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. And here's the thing, this response that they have when they call him the prophet who has come into the world and when they want to make him a king, that response isn't wrong.

They're not wrong in proclaiming to be a prophet. They're not wrong in wanting to make him a king. They just undervalue him massively. They undervalue him.

He's more than a prophet. He's more than a king. He is the Christ, the Son of God. That's the mistake they make. See this over and over again today.

People see Jesus in the gospels. Maybe they hear about him at a talk. A friend tells about how Jesus has changed their life and recounts some of the acts that he did and what people do quite often is ascribe something to him that undervalues him.

Maybe they say, you know, he was a good teacher. Maybe they say, you know, he was a great socialist or a great social organizer or perhaps they say he was a great freedom fighter. Maybe they just say he was a great example.

[21 : 56] But they undervalue him because although all those things might be true, they fail to see that he is the Christ, the Son of God. When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, this really is the prophet who has come into the world.

I think they're thinking back to Deuteronomy. I think it's chapter 18 verse 15. Check it.

It's one of those. 15 verse 18, 18 verse 15. Anyway, it's in Deuteronomy where Moses himself says to the people, a prophet will come and you need to listen to this man, this prophet.

This is the great hope of Israel that a Messiah would come, that a prophet would come, that they ought to listen to. These people have undervalued Jesus in merely seeing him as the prophet and not as the Christ.

Similarly, Jesus is a king. They want to make him a king but unfortunately, they don't see him as the king of kings and the Lord of lords, the one true God. Rather, they see him as a king who might be able to overthrow the Romans for them, the Romans who are oppressing them.

[23 : 15] So, they undervalue him. I had this in my own experience. Let me personalise it for you. Many of you know that I had a really powerful conversion experience, a real change by Jesus experience when I was 19, working in the States and going through a real tough time, a lot of suffering, really sick at one point and really struggling with a lot of spiritual oppression, demonic, dark oppression against me.

And, it was really amazing in this period, someone came in and laid their hands on me and prayed for me and I was healed. Another situation where we had this real full-on demonic manifestation like physical, spiritual oppression and someone came in and prayed about that and saw that disappear.

And so, I responded to these situations of healing and of defeat of demonic powers and what I did was I saw Jesus who was powerful to overcome darkness but I didn't see him as my God who could forgive my sins.

And so, this really showed itself in the devotions. So, I used to take devotions with these kids each day even before I knew what I was talking about.

But, after this, this strong conversion experience, I used to tell them stories from the Bible and in thinking about it, I remember now that all the stories that I told were of these great events where God would overcome the enemy.

[24 : 47] Like, the great story I used to tell these boys is about Gideon Gideon and the Medianites. Do you know this story? Awesome story where God just managed to use like 300 people to kill thousands.

Unreal. God showing his power to defeat the enemy. It was similar with the stories that I told that I'm mainly about Jesus healing people because that was my experience as well.

But, I found within me that there was a reticence to accept Jesus as my God, as my Redeemer. as the one who died to forgive my sins.

And so, I undervalued him. Many people undervalue Jesus. I want to ask you tonight, are you undervaluing Jesus? Do you just see him as a good example for you?

Do you just see him as a good teacher with words to live by? You're undervaluing him. He's the Christ, the Son of God.

[25 : 51] And John wrote this account so that you would see that and so that you would have life, abundant life, in his name. I want to focus in just a little bit to finish now on what these people do with Jesus.

This is so important. You might be here tonight and you want to respond to Jesus, you want to follow Jesus. There's a little warning for you here in this passage, in this chapter.

It's a long chapter and it finishes up, you can flick there if you want to, but I'm just going to mention a couple of things towards the end of chapter 6 where it explains the experience of many of these people who have been following Jesus after he explains in more detail who he is.

So after this miracle, Jesus goes and walks on water as another demonstration of his divinity and then he sits down and he talks to people about how he is the bread of life.

He's the bread from heaven. He's the bread that can satisfy their souls. That he has come, as he explained in chapter 3, so that we might have eternal life with him.

[27 : 08] And he goes on to say that only those who trust in him will have eternal life. He's very exclusive, very un-PC. He says, I am the true God. You can have no life in anyone but me.

And their response, these people who are following after him, his disciples, his followers, verse 60, on hearing it, many of his disciples said, this is a hard teaching.

Who can accept it? The teaching about Jesus' exclusivity, about Jesus being our one true God and Redeemer, that teaching is hard.

Who can accept it? And then it says, many, many of them, grumbling, left him. They turned their back on him and followed him no longer.

It's a brutal verse, verse 66, from this time, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. They wanted to see the show.

[28 : 18] They wanted to see God's power at work. But when it came to putting their trust in Jesus as their Redeemer, as their Forgiver, as their King, as their God, they couldn't do it.

It was too hard. That's an option for us. It's a possibility for us that we might follow Jesus for a period of time, that we might come to church regularly, that we might even read our Bibles and pray, but when it comes down to it, we refuse to humble ourselves and admit that we are sinners and that we need God's forgiveness.

For some others, it might be the fact that we find it very offensive that Jesus is the only way to God. We don't like that exclusivity.

We want there to be room for other gods and other faiths. We say this is a hard teaching and we turn our backs on Jesus. I want to encourage you tonight to be like Jesus' disciples.

Check it out in verse 67. Jesus says this to His disciples, You do not want to leave too, do you?

[29 : 37] Simon Peter says a beautiful thing. I hope you can line up with this. Verse 68, Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

We believe and know that You are the Holy One of God. They're the words of a true disciple.

I hope they can be Your words tonight. In this account in John chapter 6, John is not just showing us something cool that Jesus did with five loaves and two fish.

He's showing us that Jesus is the Creator and Redeemer God. And then He gives us a choice. He says you can be like some of these disciples who saw this to be a hard teaching and left, or you can be like Simon Peter who confesses that Jesus is God.

I'm going to just put that choice before you tonight. I'm going to invite you to respond to it. Tonight we're going to share the Lord's Supper in just a minute. And in coming around the Lord's Supper or communion, what we're saying is that we're identifying with Jesus.

[30 : 54] We're identifying with Him in His death as we remember His body and blood. So if you're in a situation tonight where you're like the crowds and you're just, you're following Jesus to see what He's like.

You want to learn more. You're welcome. It's legitimate. It's a wonderful thing. But this meal isn't for you to share. If you're here tonight and you're thinking to yourself, this is a hard teaching.

I can't accept Jesus as my one and true God. Again, this meal isn't for you tonight. This is for those who, like Peter, confess Jesus to be their God and King.

What you can do now as we come to share this meal together and remember Jesus' death for us, you can sit there. Sit quietly. Sit as these people, these seekers were seated on the grass.

Sit in that pew like they were seated on that grass and think about what you've heard. Think about the words of Jesus. Think about the acts, the mighty acts of Jesus. Think about what I've said about Him and what this means for your life.

[32 : 02] We'd love to chat to you after the service. We'd love to pray with you after the service if you'd like to. And that's what I'm going to do for us now. It's a response to hearing God's Word. I'm going to pray to Him on our behalf.

Let's bow our heads. Father, again, we just thank you for this account of Jesus' miraculous sign that He took five loaves and two fish and fed thousands of people.

We thank you for the compassion of Jesus wanting to meet people's felt needs. We ask that you would meet our needs today.

Like Jesus, we ask, give us today our daily bread. Father, Father, I pray that we wouldn't leave here tonight thinking only about this worldly effects of that miracle and that we wouldn't leave here tonight undervaluing Jesus merely as a prophet or as a wise teacher.

God, please help us to leave here tonight knowing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that in believing we can have life and eternal life in His name.

[33 : 30] And it is in His name we pray. Amen.