

January 25/26, 2020

“It is I; Do Not Be Afraid.”

These Things are Written that You May Believe Series

John 6:1-21

Pastor Bryan Clark

Every one of us in the room this morning has legitimate longings and desires. They're a reflection of what it means to be made in the image of God. The pursuit to satisfy those deepest longings and desires, in many ways define the pathway and choices we make through life. What gets us into trouble is when we are determined to meet legitimate needs through illegitimate means. In other words, we're unwilling to trust God with this area of our lives, so we're determined to do it ourselves, which raises the question, “What are you looking for?”

I meet with people every week who have made disastrous choices and made a mess out of their lives, so it's a legitimate question, “What are you looking for?” “What are you seeking?” “Why are you doing that?” “What are you hoping to find?” “Why can't you trust Jesus with this area of your life?” For others, maybe days are filled with anxiety and fear or anger. It's the same question. “What's going on? What's going on in your life that you can't trust Jesus with this area?” “Why the anxiety?” “Why the fear?” “Why so much anger?” “What is it that's going on in your life that you feel like it's just too much for Jesus?” The truth is no one becomes a giant of the faith overnight. It just doesn't work that way. It's a lifelong process of learning to trust. But it's really important to understand that you have to learn to trust Jesus in the everyday moments of life, as He grows you and strengthens you and prepares you today to handle what may be one of the worst moments of your life tomorrow.

That's what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter 6. John chapter 5 started with a miracle—the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda, followed by a lengthy discourse from Jesus. We would refer to that as the third major discourse in the Gospel of John. The first one with Nicodemus, second one with the woman at the well, third one with the Pharisees. Chapter 6 is organized very similarly, in that it opens with a miracle and then moves to a lengthy discussion or discourse with the people. One of the interesting dynamics of John chapter 6 is the chapter opens at a place where most scholars feel like this was the height of the popularity of Jesus. But by the time chapter 6 comes to an end, most of those people will have dwindled away, and only a few followers will be left. So it's a significant chapter in the life of Jesus. Chapter 6, verse 1 opens with the words: **After these things...**

One of the interesting dynamics of the Gospel of John is John records very little of what we call the Galilean ministry of Jesus. That would be up north around the Sea of Galilee. It is a significant part of the ministry of Jesus; maybe as much as sixty percent of His ministry happened up there. Yet John chooses to record very little of that. Most of what John records is South, down around Jerusalem. Perhaps he felt like the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—had thoroughly covered that. Perhaps it just wasn't as relevant to his particular theme. So, we know at this point, from the end of chapter five to the beginning of chapter six, roughly six months have passed. We know that John the Baptist has been executed. We know that was very emotional for Jesus. We know there's been quite a bit of ministry, including the sending out of the twelve doing ministry. They have now returned, and Jesus wants to take them to have a little rest, have a little teaching and training, and prepare them for what's ahead.

After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias).

(*NASB, John 6:1)

So consistently John assumes both a Jewish and a Galilean, or a non-Jewish, reading audience. So consistently through his Gospel, he refers to things two different ways. In AD 26 the Romans built a city on the bank of the Sea of Galilee called Tiberias. At this point it's new and it's fancy and it's impressive, and so the sea was referred to as the Sea of Tiberias. But for the locals—for the Jews and for us today—we still understand it to be the Sea of Galilee. So it's the same sea. They're going from Capernaum across to the East, on kind of the northern end of the Sea of Galilee, kind of the Northeast, which is much less populated, much more remote and would be right at the base of what we would today referred to as the Golan Heights. So they go away hopefully for a little quiet time. Verse 2:

A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who are sick.

So the crowds are following Jesus because Jesus is doing miracles, that John consistently refers to as **signs**. We don't really know more than that. Obviously there's a lot happening here that John chooses not to record, but it is creating a significant following. When John uses the term **signs**, it's to remind us that these miracles were not an end in themselves. It's a good reminder that every single one of these people that were healed of their disease, still died. It was only postponing the inevitable. It was a temporary solution. The reason John refers to them as **signs** is he wanted them to reveal to the people that Jesus is God in the flesh. Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. What Jesus came to offer was not temporary solutions. But until they would come to understand Jesus as Savior and experience eternal life, all they would experience were these temporary solutions that made life a little bit better for a short while. So John consistently uses that terminology.

You remember in John chapter 2, John said that *the people believed in Jesus but Jesus did not believe in them*. It was a way of saying they like the miracles; they like the show. They're benefiting from the miracles and that draws a crowd, but they were not understanding Jesus to be the Savior. They weren't interested in dealing with their sin. They weren't interested in repenting. They weren't interested in surrendering to Jesus. They just wanted to watch the show and benefit from the miracles. So at this point, Jesus has done a lot of miracles and the crowd has become significant. Verse 3:

Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples.

It could be translated just *higher ground*. It's unlikely He went clear to the top of the mountain. That would be a long way up, but the Greek reads just went to *higher ground*. So imagine Jesus and the disciples—spring of the year—it would have been grassy there. They're looking down on the Sea of Galilee. It actually would have been a very beautiful setting just to relax, have some teaching, have some training. Verse 4:

Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near.

Again, same thing: two readers. So the Jews would know what **the Passover** meant. But for the Gentile readers, it was a **feast of the Jews**. So that's why he says it that way. This is what we would refer to as an editorial comment. What that means is they are not details that are necessary to advance the story, but rather he's telling us it's a comment of something we need to know to understand the point of the chapter.

One of the benefits of the Passover references is they help us date the chronology of the ministry of Jesus. The first Passover in the Gospel of John is when Jesus cleanses the temple, and that was kind of the launch of His public ministry. In chapter five, verse one, it talks about a feast, and there's quite a bit of debate as to whether that was another Passover or not—and there's really no way to settle that debate. This, then, we know for positive, is one year out from the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. This particular Passover, Jesus will not go to Jerusalem. It's simply too dangerous. He'll stay in Galilee. But we know this begins the countdown, that the next Passover He will go to Jerusalem; He will be arrested and executed. So Jesus has twelve disciples, and He now has twelve months left to train them...to teach them...to pour into them, because He is going to ascend, and they're going to be commissioned with the responsibility to change the world. So, there's a lot of work to be done. Verse 5:

Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him...

Literally the language is *continuously coming*; maybe we'd use the word *streaming*. So you're way up on the side of the hill. You're looking down over the Sea of Galilee. It's likely people were coming across the sea on boats, the majority probably around the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. There are thousands of people streaming in, so the possibility of a nice, quiet rest and relaxation is gone, and they're left to figure out what to do with the crowd. (So Jesus...

...said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?" This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. (Vs. 5b-6)

One of the unique things about the feeding of the five thousand—or the thousands—is that it's the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels, other than the resurrection of Jesus. Each gospel writer has different details because they're writing from different angles and with a different purpose. John is the only gospel writer that includes this conversation with Philip, which is actually quite interesting. We know from the other gospels that it's at some point here when it became obvious it was getting late in the day, and this was a lot of people. The solution from the disciples was to send the people away—send them home, let them find some food. So where exactly that happened in the story is hard to say. In John's account, Jesus specifically looks to Philip and asked him the question, "*Where are we going to find food for all these people?*" Some people think it was because Philip was from Bethsaida, which was the closest town. He's the local boy; maybe he would know. But I think it's more than that, because the text even says Jesus said this **to test him**. This is the beginning of the countdown—twelve months to go! There are things these disciples have to learn. We would refer to this as a "teachable moment". It's an opportunity for Jesus to teach something they need to know. The fact that He was doing this around the time of the Passover is also significant. That's certainly not coincidental but doesn't become clearer until we get into the discourse, which will be next week.

One of the interesting things to do is to go back through the Gospels and try to formulate kind of a profile personality and temperament of each of the twelve disciples. For some of them, there's quite a little information; for some there's almost no information. But you can go back and see how they're consistently presented and get some sense of their personality. For sure Philip was not charismatic. He was not zealous. He was not a strong leader. He was not a visionary. As a matter of fact, every time Philip is presented, he's kind of a methodical, conservative plodder that struggles to understand exactly what Jesus was saying. You remember in the upper room, it's Philip that says to Jesus, "Show us the Father," and Jesus seems frustrated by that when he says, "Philip, have I been with you so long

and still you don't get it?" That's a pretty good picture of how Philip is presented through the Gospels. Philip would be the guy that puts all the information in the spreadsheet and decides if we can do this or not. So Jesus specifically chooses Philip. "Philip, look at all these people. How are we going to feed them?" "Well, Jesus, I put all the relevant information into this spreadsheet (*laughter*) and I've come to the conclusion we can't do it." Maybe that's when the others said, "Send them home; that's the solution. Send them home." Verse 7:

Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little."

Now **two hundred denarii** is quite a bit of money. The Galilean area was full of poverty, and these people were very poor. That would represent about eight months wage for the average worker, so it's a significant amount of money. It's not even saying they have that much. Philip is just saying, "I've run this spreadsheet; I've put that in. Even if we had that much, we can't do it." Verse 8:

One of the disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad over here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?"
(Vs. 8-9)

The idea of **loaves** is really misleading. You see pictures that depict this story, and often they're long loaves. They look like French bread. These are cakes, and they're small cakes. The idea that it is **barley** bread is reflective of the fact these people were very poor. That's the lowest quality of bread imaginable. An average young boy could eat about three cakes, so they're very small. He has five of these little cakes and two fish. Again, when you see pictures of this, it looks like five long loaves of French bread and two ten-pound bass. (*laughter*) The fish would have been small, pickled fish, an average lunch for a young boy. That's what they have, so Andrew comes forth, "That's all we have." Verse 10:

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

So, in order for this miracle to be obvious to the crowd, there has to be some level of organization. If it's just mass chaos, no one would know. So Jesus is organizing the crowd. They're actually reclining on the ground, leaning on their left elbow, eating with the right hand. That would be the typical Jewish posture. One of the interesting things about this particular miracle is how involved the disciples were. This is a very important, hands-on, teachable moment. Think how different it was when Jesus turned the water to wine. Boom! There it is. When Jesus healed the Roman official's son in Capernaum. Done! When Jesus healed the man at the pool of Bethesda. Done! But this is different. The disciples are going to be involved in this every step of the way, which is a very teachable moment. So, "Go out; organize them; get them seated. I'll take care of the rest." This is the first that we as the readers know how big the crowd is. It's referred to as the feeding of the **five thousand**. But that's misleading, because the text says five thousand **men**. All the Gospels record it that way. In that culture, that's how you recorded the number of people in a crowd. But that is not to say it was just men. So historians who understand the dynamics, figure it was somewhere between ten and twenty thousand people. So this is a massive crowd! The disciples are out there getting them in groups, getting them organized for Jesus to do His thing. Verse 11:

Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks...

The Greek there is the word from which we get our word *Eucharist*. The reason I mention that is there are those who try to read a lot into that term. But it's really helpful to understand, that is just the garden-variety, everyday term for giving thanks. It's used all the time in the Gospels. There's no reason to think it's other than it was common for Jews to offer **thanks**, a blessing for the food before they distributed it.

Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. When they were filled, (Vs. 11-12a)

If you look at the end of verse 11 and the beginning of verse 12, (and you just kind of get that number 12 out of the way), the point the author is making is these people had all they wanted—all the bread they wanted, all the fish they wanted. When they were completely filled, then they're going to collect the leftovers. Verse 12:

When they were filled, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost.”

This would have been a common Jewish practice. We're so used to a throwaway culture, where we throw away our leftovers. But in a culture where people were so poor and survive day to day, this would have ended up being a significant amount of leftover food that people would have eaten certainly the next day. So that's part of it, but probably more to the point is how would anyone know that there had been a miracle unless you collect the leftovers and it's obvious?

Again, stop and think about how actively involved the twelve disciples are. It's a unique miracle, in that they're so involved in the activity. Certainly as they're filling their baskets, they're becoming more and more aware of the miracle that has just occurred. Verse 13:

So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

I like that John in verse 13 makes sure we remember, “By the way, when we started, there were just five barley loaves, and now there are twelve large baskets full—more leftovers than we started with in the first place.” Again, when you see pictures of this story, the baskets with the leftovers often look like little small baskets you'd put on your dresser to throw your keys in. These were large, significant baskets that the people used in order to transport things when they travel. So large baskets, lots of leftovers.

Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.” (Vs. 14)

So they realize this is a miracle and they identified Jesus as the **Prophet**. You remember, this is who they thought John the Baptist was. “Are you the Prophet?” John says, “No, I'm not the Prophet.” It's going back to Deuteronomy 18, and the promise of a prophet who would follow Moses. Jesus is the ultimate Prophet, the long-awaited Messiah, but they're struggling to understand that and come to grips with it. You see that then in verse 15:

So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

So Jesus, being God in the flesh, knows what's coming. Things are about to get very dangerous so He just slips up higher on to the mountain by Himself. These people were determined to take Jesus by force to Jerusalem **to make Him king**. Now part of that may be because it was Passover season, which would have a high nationalistic flavor to it, and it's time for change, so let's make Jesus the king. One of the sobering thoughts is that if they would have succeeded in forcing Jesus to Jerusalem, do you think King Herod would have sat by and watch them do this? It would have been an absolute bloodbath in Jerusalem. But all of that is avoided because that's not why Jesus came. One of the interesting dynamics that you see repeated throughout the Gospels, is people want Jesus on their own terms, and they want Jesus in order to push their agenda, and often times it's a political agenda. So they're wanting to capture Jesus, haul Him to Jerusalem, in order to further their personal political agenda. But that's not why Jesus came.

So Jesus avoids that and moves by Himself higher up into the mountain. One of the things that I think is interesting about this particular miracle—we've already talked about how involved the disciples were in this—uniquely so, but it's also true, this was not a life and death moment. The people were hungry. “How are we going to feed them?” “I don't know.” But no one was thinking, “If we don't feed them, they'll die. They'll get disgruntled. They'll be hungry and they'll go home and tomorrow morning, they'll have bread to eat.” It was not a life and death situation. But it was a moment where Jesus was wanting His disciples to understand, “I can handle this.” What do they need? They're hungry. They need food. “I got it.” “Well, Jesus, we ran the numbers on this spreadsheet. This is not gonna work.” “I got it. I'm Jesus. Just trust Me. You're going to need to learn to trust Me in a moment like this today, because there's going to be life-threatening moments to come, where you're going to have to understand what it means to trust Me.” Verse 16:

Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, and after getting into a boat, they *started* to cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. (Vs. 16-17)

The details of this part of the story are a little hard to figure out. Did Jesus tell them to wait? Did Jesus tell them to go on ahead? Those details aren't given. What we do know is Jesus is somewhere up higher on the mountain. They go down—the disciples go down—to the sea, and get in a boat. It's now dark, and they decide they're going to go home. So when they're going to Capernaum, they're going back home. So they leave. Verse 18:

The sea *began* to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing.

So this is not at all unusual on the Sea of Galilee. When the sun sets, the air gets cooler. There's a mix of airs in the area, and it's very common at night that on the Sea of Galilee, the wind picks up and can be difficult to manage. Sometimes it even turns into big storms. So again, these are professional fishermen. These are people who make their living on the Sea of Galilee at night. So this was not at all unusual. Verse 19:

Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, (which would be about halfway across) they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were **frightened.** (...literally terrified! The Synoptic Gospels say they thought it was a ghost!)

Now this is really important to understand. There are stories about the disciples being in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, in the midst of a storm, fearing they were going to perish. That's *not* this story. There's nowhere in this story where that's what it says. It was windy; they were rowing into the wind, but these were professional fishermen who are out on the sea at night all the time. There's nowhere where the text says they were terrified. They're just working hard to try and get to the other side. What terrifies them is not the storm. What terrifies them is Jesus, because *He's walking on the water*.

This is a whole other level of, “Who is this guy? He's strolling on the windy sea like He's taking a walk through the park, and they're terrified as they're trying to figure out, “Who is this guy that even walks on the water?” They're in a process of learning who Jesus is. The countdown has begun. They've got twelve months to get this figured out. They're going to be assigned to the task to change the world, but right now they're still figuring it out.

Think how different this is from the other miracles. Nowhere does the text say when Jesus changed the water to wine, they were terrified. They're like, “Oh, that's cool.” Nowhere, when Jesus healed the official's son in Capernaum, does it say they were terrified. “Wow, it was a miracle!” When Jesus healed the man at the pool of Bethesda, there's no mention of them being terrified. “Wow, that was a miracle!”

Now Jesus had just fed between ten and twenty thousand people with one little lunch. It was an amazing miracle that they had participated in, but nowhere does it say they were terrified. This is a whole other level of, “Who is this man that's walking on the water?” What Mark says at this point in his gospel is that they had not gained insight from the feeding of the five thousand. In other words, Jesus did a miracle with them highly engaged to show them, “I can handle this. I know it's not life and death, but trust Me. It's a legitimate need. I can take care of it,” in order to prepare them to trust Him when the stakes were much higher.

Even today, think about this. There are a lot of preachers that claim they have miraculous powers and there are healings, and it's always hard to figure out who was healed and were they really healed and what were they healed of? And these arguments will go on until Jesus comes back, but it's a whole other level of miracle to walk on the water.

If you believe you have miraculous powers, fine. In the springtime we'll all gather at Holmes Lake and walk across the water. (*laughter*) Let's see it. This is a whole other level of miracle, and this absolutely terrified the disciples! “Who is this guy that He even walks on the water?” They're going to have to get this figured out and there isn't a lot of time left. Verse 20:

But He said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.”

I can almost imagine Jesus wanting to say, “Hey, it's Me—the feeding of the five thousand guy—and now I'm walking on the water.” Verse 21:

So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

A lot of scholars think this is just another miracle—the boat is immediately at its destination! It's an amazing moment, as these disciples are learning who Jesus is and what that means to trust Him. Jesus

will have much to say to unpack this. We'll talk about that next week. As we close I want to circle back to where we started.

So you tell me, “What is it that's going on in your life today that's just too much for this Jesus?” “What are you looking for? What are you searching for? What are you trying to find?” “What is with all the alcohol?” “What is with all the drugs?” “What is with the pornography?” “What is with all the money and the stuff and the relationships and all this stuff we chase after?” “What are you looking for and why is it you don't think you can trust Jesus with this area of your life?”

For those who struggle with anxiety and fear and anger, “What are you so angry about?” “What are you so anxious about?” “What are you so fearful about?” “What is going on in your life this morning that is just too much to trust Jesus with?” “Why can't you trust Him with this?” “Why can't you believe Jesus will be enough?”

At the end of this chapter, the crowds will all dwindle away and there will only remain a few followers of Jesus. Jesus looks at them and says, “Do you guys want to leave too, and Peter answers by saying, “*Lord, where are we to go? You alone have the words of life!*”

No matter what it is you're going through, no matter what it is you're facing, Jesus is enough. It's really important to understand that faith starts by trusting Jesus with the most ordinary, everyday stuff of life. “What do I need?” “Can I trust Him?” Because He's growing and strengthening your faith to get you ready to handle what might be the most difficult moment of your life...tomorrow! Whatever it is you're going through, may you believe, “Jesus is enough!”

Our Father, we're thankful that You patiently teach us again and again that in the most ordinary or the most difficult moments of life, Jesus will be enough. Lord, may we trust You. In Jesus name, Amen.

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It Is I; Do Not Be Afraid

That You May Believe

John 6:1-21

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What are some crazy things you have done or people around you have done that you look back on and wonder what you or they were thinking?
2. Think about the question, “What are you looking for?” as it relates to the discussion from question #1. People do really dumb things because they are searching for something. How do you see this play out in our culture?

Bible Study

1. Read John 6:1-14. This is the only miracle other than the resurrection that’s recorded in all four Gospels. You can read Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:33-44; Luke 9:12-17 for comparison. Notice how each Gospel writer focuses on different details consistent with the point that writer is wanting to make.
2. John does not include much from the Galilean ministry of Jesus. Here he simply refers to the signs from the healings but doesn’t go into detail. The signs draw big crowds, as one would imagine, but that doesn’t mean people really believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Review what John said in 2:23-25. It’s sobering to realize that by the end of the chapter most of the big crowds will have gone away. How might this be similar today?
3. Since Jesus was “testing” Philip and had the others so involved in this miracle, what do you think Jesus was trying to teach his disciples with this miracle?
4. Read John 6:15-21. According to verse 15 what did the people want to do with Jesus? What would’ve been the consequence had Jesus given in to their wishes? In what ways do people try to use Jesus to pursue their own agenda today? What does Jesus’ response to their intentions teach us about how Jesus views this selfish behavior?
5. What do you think is the point of John 6:16-21? What does Jesus want His disciples to learn? Why are they afraid? Compare what Mark states in Mark 6:52.
6. What are some similar ways Jesus may teach and train us so we’re ready to trust Him when difficult times come?

