

John 6.1-21 Sermon / COB / 05.04.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** How many of you are interested in the end times. Both inside and outside the church, there is a lot of debate about what might happen, but all Christians agree that Jesus is coming back.
- He has to come back! He still has some promises to keep, especially to Israel. He still has some prophecies to fulfill. He still has some work to do.
- † It's been about 2000 years that we have been waiting. That's a long time. You would think we would give up! Instead, we like to try to predict when the end will come.
- One doctrine of the church has always been that Jesus could return at any time. He could have come back while the New Testament was still being written, when the knights were jousting for honor, or anytime up to now, and anytime in the future, we just cannot know when it will be.
 - Yet we often think we see signs that it will be soon. This isn't new to our culture: we have evidence that people have been predicting the end for hundreds of years; and even in the New Testament some people were saying then that the end was near.
 - Sometimes we are funny about it, right? We say, "So-and-so gave money to the church this week; the end must be near." Sometimes we wonder based on our concerns: we think, "If we're starting to clone people, God's gonna have to put an end to things soon."
 - Most often, we look for a sign in political events to predict what the Bible says is unpredictable. E.g., Israel has been a political state again for almost seventy years – and that event fueled a lot of speculation – but Christ has not returned. Every expert so far has been wrong, you know, but that's ok, it's just reason to write another book with new predictions and new analysis. And because we keep looking, we buy a lot of those books about prophecy and the end times.
 - False Messiahs have been appearing, people who claim to be the returned Jesus. There are a surprising number of these crazies, and if you look at a list of them you will notice several cults have started with this sort of nonsense.
- † There was a similar situation in Jesus' day. Moses had predicted that a greater prophet than he would come. That was about 1400 years before Jesus was born. There had been many prophets in Israel between Moses and Jesus – some even had made it rain, which is life-giving in this country of few natural springs – but none had made it rain bread, as had happened with Moses in the exodus.
- † 1400 years is a long time to wait, and by the time Jesus was born, it had been over 400 years since there were any true prophets from God. During that time, when the land was under the control of the Persians, then the Greeks, then the Romans – which seemed to be fulfilling prophecies of Daniel about the restoration of Israel – there developed a genre of literature known as apocalyptic, which dealt with expectations of the end times and the coming of God's promised deliverer.
- They sold a lot of scrolls back then too, and false Messiahs were appearing. In hindsight, it looks like all this was part of God's plan to create an expectation in the people, in anticipation of the coming of the true savior. Maybe when Jesus comes back, we will say the same thing about what is happening today...

- † Let's take a look now at the beginning of John 6, when Jesus did a "sign" miracle that gave the Jewish people some real cause to wonder if he was indeed the one Moses predicted would come.

[Slide 2: 6.1-3] ^{NET} ¹After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (also called the Sea of Tiberias). ²A large crowd was following him because they were observing the miraculous signs he was performing on the sick. ³So Jesus went on up the mountainside and sat down there with his disciples.

- † Back in John 5, we heard Jesus teaching the religious leaders in Jerusalem, where he had gone for one of the religious festivals. Sometime after that, Jesus left the region of Judea and went back north to the region of Galilee.

- **[Slide 3: Map Bethsaida]** The gospel of Luke tells us Jesus and his disciples went first to Bethsaida [9.10], which we believe was on the northeast shore of the lake.
- The lake sometimes now was called the Sea of Tiberias, because Herod Antipas – the appointed ruler in Galilee – had built the town of Tiberias on the southwest shore a few years earlier as a tribute to the Roman emperor Tiberius.

- † **[Slide 4: 6.2-3]** Jesus went up onto the plateau east of the sea. The Greek word means "hill" or "mountain," but can refer to any high place; there is a steep rise up from the sea to the plateau, as you can see. I don't know that this is the exact spot, but this is along the east shore of the sea.

- We learn in the gospel of Mark that crowds of people had hurried around the north shore of the lake to catch up with Jesus [3.33-35], and we see here that they were very excited because of his healing miracles.

[Slide 5: 6.4-9] ⁴(Now the Jewish feast of the Passover was near.) ⁵Then Jesus, when he looked up and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, said to Philip, "Where can we buy bread so that these people may eat?" ⁶(Now Jesus said this to test him, for he knew what he was going to do.) ⁷Philip replied, "Two hundred silver coins worth of bread would not be enough for them, for each one to get a little." ⁸One of Jesus' disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹"Here is a boy who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what good are these for so many people?"

- † **[Slide 6: 15000 pentagon]** V.10 will tell us that there were 5000 men in this crowd, and the gospel of Matthew makes clear there also were women and children [14.21], so this was a large crowd, twice as many people as in the Parkersburg zip code, more than in all of urban Coatesville! There might have been 20,000 people in this crowd! That's almost as many as at the last Phillies home game, half filling Citizens Bank Park!

- Think of how that would look, to have thousands of people closing in on your hilltop. This picture shows about 15000 gathered for a 09-11 memorial service at the Pentagon. They were pretty orderly as crowds go. The crowds near Jesus were been massing all over the hillside.
- **[Slide 7: 6.6-9]** On Easter, we served breakfast to about 120 people. Think of trying to feed 20,000 at one time! It seemed overwhelming to the disciples. Phillip says he could work for eight months just to give each person a little bit to eat. Andrew knows they brought no food for themselves, and the only food available is a boy's lunch.
- These barley loaves were probably little round "cakes" and the fish would have been pickled small fish. The movie does a good job of showing that these are tiny.

- † Now, it is not the main point of this miracle, but Jesus obviously is “testing” the disciples for some reason. What do you think he is trying to teach them? That what is impossible for people is possible for God? To rely on Jesus instead of ourselves? This week’s devotion, which you should have received when you came in, goes a little further into that question. I hope you will take a look this week.

[Slide 8: 6.10-13] ¹⁰Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” (Now there was a lot of grass in that place.) So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. ¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed the bread to those who were seated. He then did the same with the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were all satisfied, Jesus said to his disciples, “Gather up the broken pieces that are left over, so that nothing is wasted.” ¹³So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces from the five barley loaves left over by the people who had eaten.

- † Back then, even when they were in houses, people ate lying down on the floor, propped up on an elbow. So Jesus had them all recline on the grass. The English translations usually say they were seated, but the Greek word means “to recline.”
- † **[Slide 9: give thanks]** Getting the people settled down also allowed Jesus to pray for all of them, to thank God for the provision. I don’t want to spend a lot of time on this, but let’s note a few things.
- First, Jesus gave thanks to God the Father for the provision of food. Jesus, the Son of God, Messianic Savior, and Ultimate Davidic King gave thanks to God the Father for the food. Does that suggest we maybe ought to do likewise?
 - Second, Jesus sees the food as being a blessing, so he does not ask God to bless the food to his body, as we sometimes do. What does Jesus do? It says here he gave thanks. I have friends who will pray on and on and on before a meal. I never ask them to pray at the table! My thinking is we should pray long and hard and deeply at other times; when the food is hot, we should sincerely express our thanks and dig in!
 - This week’s devotion discusses this prayer more thoroughly, sharing some cultural insight and even giving you a little Hebrew to say out loud! Take a look, and let me know what you think.
- † After giving thanks, Jesus provides food for everyone. How do you picture this miracle working? The movie shows the miracle happen right at Jesus, as he hands out hundreds of baskets filled with the bread of five loaves and just the two fish. I suppose that makes sense. Obviously then, one part of the miracle is how many baskets they had on hand; I mean who would carry around hundreds of baskets but no food? What was wrong with these disciples?
- As a child, I always pictured one basket of bread and another basket of fish going around, and after each person took some, as they passed the basket what they had taken was miraculously replaced. But that would take a long time to pass just the two baskets around to thousands of people. Can you imagine if you were sitting at a Phillies game and they were passing around one basket of hotdogs and another of peanuts, and you had to wait; how frustrating would it be to see it going around and around the stadium, but always a few rows in front of you?
- † **[Slide 10: leftovers]** Again, this is not the main point of this miracle, but do you see how well Jesus provided? They all ate until they were full, and there was more left over than when they started!

This week's devotion talks more about Jesus' promise of provision and his ability to deliver. You should check it out!

[Slide 11: 6.14-15] ¹⁴Now when the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus performed, they began to say to one another, "This is certainly the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵Then Jesus, because he knew they were going to come and seize him by force to make him king, withdrew again up the mountainside alone.

- † Moses had predicted that a greater prophet than he would come one day [Deuteronomy 18.15-19]. There are at least two factors causing the people to wonder if Jesus is this Greater Moses Prophet.
 - First, when Moses was leading the people in the Exodus, God miraculously provided manna [a bread-like substance] while the people wandered the desert wilderness. Now, Jesus was providing a miraculous supply of bread as the people reclined in the grassy wilderness.
 - Second, the exodus from Egypt was facilitated by a miracle, when God's angel struck dead the firstborn in every Egyptian house, but passed-over the Jewish houses. This was the event the Jews celebrated with the Passover festival every year.
 - John told us in v.4 that the Passover was near. This was a time of year when people naturally thought about God's deliverance of the nation and hoped the promised Messiah would come soon to deliver them again out of foreign oppression.
 - Now, combining the approach of Passover and the miracle Jesus just did, the people start to believe that Jesus is the Greater Moses Prophet, who will deliver them.
- † Whatever the people believed religiously, they were so encouraged by what Jesus had done, that they were eager to carry him off to make him their king.
 - Maybe some understood that Jesus was the rightful heir to the throne of King David, but most were just carried away by the emotion of the moment, hopeful that Jesus could deliver them to political independence again.
- † Jesus withdrew to prevent them from doing something foolish. He probably went up over the rim of the plateau, out of sight; there might have been taller hills to the south he could climb.
 - Jesus knew that this was not the time to declare him king. Jesus knew he had to die to pay the penalty for our sins and he knew that at this time Israel ultimately had rejected him.
 - If the people took political action now, Rome would send in the troops. Think how even this meal this looked to the political and religious authorities already, 15,000 people holding an unauthorized rally! Even today, 5,000 men could make a strong guerilla force; 15,000 people could have made a strong political push.
- † We will see next week, that the people didn't really understand the significance of this sign miracle, but they did understand the imagery enough to think that Jesus was the Greater Moses Prophet, the one Moses predicted would come to speak for God. And so they were excited to rally around him.

[Slide 12: 6.16-21] ¹⁶ Now when evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷got into a boat, and started to cross the lake to Capernaum. (It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.) ¹⁸By now a strong wind was blowing and the sea was getting rough. ¹⁹Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they caught sight of Jesus walking on the lake, approaching the boat,

and they were frightened. ²⁰But he said to them, “It is I. Do not be afraid.” ²¹Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat came to the land where they had been heading.

- † As a bonus, we get a second miracle! It is not common to see the Sea of Galilee get rough. I hear it could happen, if the wind was a certain type, but maybe it is best to think of the churning sea as part of this miracle.
- † **[Slide 13: map Gennesaret]** The disciples had been rowing all night, and were only about three and a half miles from where they had started, roughly half way to Gennesaret where they would land. They were off course from where they were heading at the start, either because of the storm or by God’s design.
 - While in the middle of the lake, they saw Jesus walking along, impervious to the storm, strolling on the top of the water! Jesus calmed the storm and they immediately were at land.
 - When the Jews were escaping Egypt, God allowed Moses to part the red sea, to control the sea for the benefit of the people. Here Jesus controlled the sea for the benefit of people, again indicating he is the Greater Moses Prophet.
- † **[Slide 14: ἐγώ εἰμι]** When Jesus calmed his disciples, he said “ἐγώ εἰμι.” Jesus might have meant, “I am the one before you,” but literally “ἐγώ εἰμι” means “I am.” John records Jesus several times saying “ἐγώ εἰμι” at key points. “ἐγώ εἰμι” is how God identified himself in the Greek translation of the Old Testament verse Exodus 3.14. The Hebrew form is where we get the name Yahweh.
 - So John is indicating that Jesus was hinting at his identity as the Son of God, as part of the triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit known as Yahweh.
 - We have learned earlier in this gospel that Jesus is both the Greater Moses Prophet and the divine Son of God who came to be the Messiah-Savior we call Christ. The greatest significance of these miracles are their indication that Jesus really is the savior whom God promised would come in several Old Testament prophecies.
- † We need to believe in this identification, and trust in Jesus for deliverance. Just as Moses saved his people from political and spiritual oppression, so Jesus will one day return to deliver Israel and the rest of us from political oppression, and Jesus right now saves his people from spiritual oppression.
 - As you might remember from Easter or our development classes, that Jesus offers us right now the opportunity to be righteous in God’s sight, set free from the claims of sin, death, evil, and guilt from the Law, forgiven by God and adopted into his family, to have eternal life that begins with regeneration in your spirit right now. If that is something you want, then come talk to me. We will meet together a few times to go over what the Bible says about salvation and Jesus as the savior.

Conclusion

† Let’s pray...

† **[Slide 15: crucifixion; keep this slide up for all of communion]**