

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## The “Work” of Faith John 6:16-29

**Intro:** Directly on the heels of the 4<sup>th</sup> miracle (or sign) recorded in John, comes the 5<sup>th</sup> miracle – Jesus walks on the water. The inclusion of this miracle at this point in the chapter seems a bit odd as it doesn’t appear to relate to the main theme John is going for. But, we must recognize that the purpose of placing this miracle here is more than just chronology; this episode is predicated on the mood of the crowd that results from Jesus miraculously feeding them.

Now, as we have stated, John only records 7 miracles of Jesus and he does so for a very specific purpose – to show His glory! While the feeding of the 5000 was for the benefit and instruction of the multitude as well as the disciples, this next miracle is exclusively for the benefit and instruction of the 12. We’ll look at some of the lessons learned from this miracle; then identify the motivations of that portion of the crowd that was still seeking Jesus. Before we close, we’ll consider Christ’s declaration in vs29, one of the many “golden sentences” that are found in the Scriptures.

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**16-17-** After the multitude was fed to satisfaction with the loaves and fish, Jesus slipped off alone to the mountain to pray. John tells us that the disciples then went down to the shore, got into boat and started off for Capernaum, on the other side of the lake. We mustn’t think they were rude in doing this as tho they had mistakenly left Jesus behind. In Mark’s account of this story (6:45), he says Jesus made the 12 get in the boat and go to the other side without Him.

We know Jesus knew what was going to happen to them out on that lake that night, so why was He in such a rush to send them away? I propose that there were 2 reasons for this: 1) for their protection and 2) for their instruction.

Protection? Yes, Jesus knew the disciples would be safer out on the lake in the middle of a storm than on the shore with a wrong concept of who He is. Remember, after Jesus fed them, the multitude began to put 2 and 2 together and realized He was the Prophet God promised Moses would come. Then they decided to make Him their King. We should also

remember that the disciples were pretty much ready for Jesus to reveal Himself as Israel's long awaited Messiah and King as well. If given half a chance, they would have jumped on that same misguided bandwagon right along with the crowd. Jesus acted quickly to disperse all of that thinking. Mark tells us that He immediately made the 12 get into the boat. He didn't want the selfish motivations of the crowd to influence His disciples so He ran them off!

**18-21**- As night came on them, so did a great wind storm. The wind and the waves were against them. This storm was dangerous, it made rowing difficult. They left the shore at dusk and by 3AM, had only gone about 3 – 3.5 miles. I wonder what the disciples were thinking during those 6-7 hours of hard rowing. Did they think of Jesus and His power to help them? It should've been still fresh in their minds. Jesus had just fed the multitude and they had 12 baskets of leftover bread in the boat with them! Did they realize even then that they were still in His care?

They had already witnessed the power of Jesus to calm troubled waters. There was another time when they got caught in a storm so bad, they thought they were going to drown. So, they had the presence of mind to wake Jesus up and tell Him, "Look, if we don't make it out of this, we just want to let you know it's been great serving with You."

Actually, it was their crying that woke Him up. But, Jesus calmed the storm then questioned them about their faith. Did the disciples remember this in the middle of this new storm? Did they trust Jesus to protect them? I'm not sure those questions can be answered definitively but it does appear in this instance that their faith had grown. John doesn't say that they were frightened by the storm; he just says that they kept on rowing.

Understand, this was not a storm of correction; it was a storm of instruction. Jonah faced a storm of correction. God told him to go to Nineveh and he decided to go the opposite direction. He didn't get far. But this is not the case for the 12. They are in the middle of the Sea, in the middle of a storm and they are in the middle of the Lord's will. Jesus told them to go there; Jesus told them to be there. So, although it appears they'd learned from their previous storm experience, there was still more that the disciples needed to learn.

This should be a warning to us. There's a large section of "the Church" that

believes a Christians life should always be blessed and prosperous. Thus, if any believer is going through difficulties, they always assume it is the result of sin. Now, if you see a brother or sister consistently making bad choices, consistently ignoring Scripture and living a self-centered life, you can pull them aside and lovingly tell them they are headed down the wrong path and that at the very least, they will reap what they sow – that’s Bible! But you cannot come upon a believer in the midst of some great difficulty and automatically conclude that they are there because of sin. That is wrong and dangerous (Job)! The 12 were in the middle of that storm because they were obedient, meaning: they were in the middle of His will!

Instruction? What lessons did the disciples learn from this episode? 1<sup>st</sup> thing they learned was that, even tho they weren’t aware of it at the time, Jesus was watching; He knew what they were going through! Mark tells us (6:48) that Jesus saw them straining at rowing. Do we cling to this truth: Jesus is watching and knows our circumstances?

He doesn’t make things too easy for any of us. He knows muscles that are never used will atrophy. We must row in rough weather at times. There’s work to be done. But as we do the work, do we know that Jesus’ eye is upon us? His eye is on the sparrow, how could we be less important? Besides, He promised to be with us always (Matt 28:20)

2<sup>nd</sup>: the disciples learned that Jesus helps. He watches us but it’s not a detached, unconcerned viewing. No, Jesus watches us in order to help! And He does help – at all time, but most particularly when life becomes too burdensome and when spiritual victory seems way beyond our grasp. Now, His help may come in a way that scares us to death but its still help nevertheless, and tho it may scare the living daylights out of us but it certainly won’t kill us.

3<sup>rd</sup>: The disciples learned that Jesus is able to bring them home. He not only helped, He got them to their intended destination! Jesus is also able to get you where you’re going. He’s able to get you to the place He’s called you to. If He’s called you to be a missionary, He’ll see that you become one whatever the difficulties. If He’s called you to an unexciting life of quiet witness, He’ll give you strength to that too. He’ll help you wherever you may be as long as you are obedient to His call on your life and His will for your life.

The disciples were in the middle of Christ's will and they were struggling against futility! But were they really? Jesus was watching them, praying for them and He came to assist them in their struggles. Oftentimes, when we are in the midst of a difficulty, we just want a way out. "What did I do to deserve this and what do I have to do to get out of it?" But, when it comes to a storm of instruction, there is no easy way out! Jesus has us right where He wants us to be and all we can do is hang in there and learn to trust Him more!

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**22-25-** In the morning, the crowd realized Jesus was gone so they went looking for Him. They figured He went over to Capernaum to meet up with His disciples and, tho they found Him there, they were curious of when He'd arrived.

**26-** Jesus gives them no direct answer to gratify their curiosity; in fact, He ignored their question all together, much like He did with Nicodemus' polite greeting. Jesus is not much for small talk; He immediately informs them that their motive for seeking Him out was an unworthy one. They were attracted to Him because He had fed them and they thought they had finally found in Him the powerful political leader they had been looking for all along. But they had missed the real significance of the miracle of the multiplied bread and fish which was spiritual in nature.

Had they come seeking Him solely on the basis of the sign they had seen, it would've at least indicated that they had a measure of faith, no matter how small. Faith that is based on miracles is not the highest kind of faith but it is still better than no faith at all. These people weren't seeking Jesus out of faith; they were crass materialists. They hadn't stopped to consider the spiritual significance of the miracle at all. Instead of seeing the sign, they only saw the bread. Herein lies their problem: Jesus didn't come to fill empty bellies, Jesus came to fill empty hearts!

Many people come to Jesus solely on the basis of their needs. Of course, everyone needs Jesus but there are some who only seek Him to meet some physical need. Sadly, the current culture of American Christianity is to focus on human need rather than God Himself. "Isn't Jesus the only One who can meet those needs?" Yes. "Then what's the problem?" the problem is that its possible to focus on our needs so much that we actually focus on ourselves more than on Jesus. The tragedy of that mindset is that we never get to the

solutions to our problems that Jesus wants to bring. This happens in different degrees to different people, of course, but the result is settling for less than His best!

These people had their mind on material things. The point of the miracle was to point their minds to Jesus. They were to see from the miracle that He was that spiritual bread who alone could satisfy the spiritual hunger of the soul. Instead they had their minds on material things alone and so missed the greater blessing. Even tho they came seeking Jesus, they only sought Him half-heartedly, they only sought Him out of a mercenary spirit.

27- Jesus pointed out that there are 2 kinds of food: 1) food for the body, its necessary but not the most important and 2) food for the spirit, the inner man, which is essential. The contrast between perishable and spiritual food is similar to the contrast between physical water and living water that we saw in ch4. Jesus tells them that the food they are seeking for would perish and He calls them to seek for the right food; that which is both the source and the substance of eternal life. They didn't need food, they needed life. Food only sustains life but Jesus gives eternal life!

Jesus is not implying that eternal life can be earned. "Labor for" simply means to give your time and your attention to the things that are elative to eternity. Eternal life is not the reward for labor. Eternal life is always His gift. They can seek eternal life from Jesus with confidence because the Father had put His seal on Him. In ancient times, an official seal was commonly used as a mark of ownership. A seal could also be used to authenticate a document or at least show that the seal's owner approved. Jesus says that God has placed His seal of approval upon Him. The Father has appointed the Son as His sole certified and authorized distributor of this life-giving food. This is a beautiful truth and a wonderful declaration but even this clear and concise statement goes over the people heads.

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**28-29-** Some people have the ability to provide a statement or a saying that seems to sum up an entire movement or complicated event. Julius Caesar did this when, reporting on his successful military excursion into Gaul, he simply said, "Veni, vidi, vici!" (I came, I saw, I conquered). We all should remember Teddy Roosevelt's concept of effective American foreign policy: "Walk softly and carry a big stick." These are pithy statement or golden sentences and the Bible is full of them: [John 3:16](#); [Ps 23](#), [Phil 4:19](#). [Vs29](#)

reduces the entire concept of salvation to 1 golden sentence.

The people had picked up the word labor in vs27 and misinterpreted it to mean they had to work for salvation. They completely missed the word give. Steeped in legalistic religion, they thought they had to do something to merit eternal life. They wanted to do something to earn it. But this is not just a Jewish problem, it's a human problem.

The Samaritan woman didn't recognize the "gift of God" even when He was standing before her and talking to her. It was the same for the rich, young ruler, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 18:18). It was the same for the convicted Jews on the Day of Pentecost, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). It was the same for the Philippian jailer, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Even the prodigal son said, 'Make me as one of thy hired servants' who works for what he receives (Luke 15:19). None of these individuals knew exactly what they had to do or thought they had do, but they all were certain that they had to do something.

The human mind is always flattered when it is conscious of doing something for God. What's more, for all his doings man believes himself to be entitled to a reward. Just think how pleased we'd all be if we could just earn our own salvation! If that were to happen then we would have succeeded in bringing God into the humbling position of being in debt to us, and we would love it. But that is not the way of salvation, it cannot be.

What is the way? Jesus shows the way in our sentence: "This is the work of God; that you believe in Him whom He sent." It is not what we can do for God but rather what God has already done for us. All that is required of us is that we believe it. The Philippian jailer had asked Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" It was the question of the crowd that had sought Jesus. Paul answered just as Jesus had done before him: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). God doesn't require us to pile up merits in order to obtain heavenly credits. He only requires that we trust in Jesus. Jesus is the One that God has sent into the world to meet our deepest need. The work of God is to believe on Him. What God requires of us is that we give up trying to please Him by our own efforts and instead commit ourselves wholeheartedly into the hands of our Savior.

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Someone might ask, “Is it possible to enter heaven without Good works?” No! You can’t enter heaven without good works or good character. “If that’s the case, how good must my character be?” Without a flaw; your character must be perfect! In fact, nothing less than perfection could satisfy a holy God. Do you have perfect character? Of course not! Nobody’s perfect. Then where can you get it from? Only from God!

God graciously offers you the perfect character of Jesus Christ. This will apply to your account just as the money from a rich man would apply to your account if it were deposited in your bank account. Plus, God will then credit your sins to Jesus, who has died for them. All God asks is that you believe this, that you accept what Jesus has done.

What are you trusting in now other than Jesus Christ? Rites and ceremonies? Some people think their baptism will save them. But these are merely signs of what God has already done, not the means of salvation. You can baptize the devil all you want, but his end will still be the lake of fire. Some people trust their good works. They give to good causes. They help the poor. But these things, while good in themselves, will not satisfy the righteous demands of a holy God in the day of His judgment. What must you do then? The answer is that you must do nothing—you can do nothing—except believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and what He has already done for you.

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Christian, I won’t ask if you seek the Lord. You’re here today, clearly you do. What I will ask is: how do you seek the Lord? Do you only seek him for His provision of your physical needs? Are you only interested in what the Lord can do for you and not so much on what the Lord might want you to do in obedience to Him and His Word? The Lord can and will provide for our physical needs but all of them will one day perish. Are you seeking Jesus on a regular basis for those things that are eternal, that will never perish, those things that are only learned or acquired by fostering a close intimate relationship with Him?

Do you seek the Lord halfheartedly? Do you get discouraged when your prayer or Bible study is not all you had hoped it would be? Do you lose interest when you find that Jesus wants to lead you in a way that doesn’t really appeal to your expectations? Or do you press on?

The reality is, we are to hunger after Jesus as a starving man hungers for bread and to thirst after Him as a dying man thirsts after water. But how often do we do that? If we would, if we really would, it's difficult to imagine just how rich in the knowledge and fruitfulness of God we would actually be.

