

WHEN MIRACLES ARE NOT ENOUGH

John 6:15-40

Many years ago now, when John G. Paton first went out as a pioneer missionary to the New Hebrides Islands, he found that the natives among whom he began to work had no way of writing their language. He began to learn it and in time began to work on a translation of the Bible for them. Soon he discovered that they had no word for "faith." This was serious, of course, for a person can hardly translate the Bible without it. One day he went on a hunt with one of the natives. They shot a large deer in the course of the hunt, and tying its legs together and supporting it on a pole, laboriously trekked back down the mountain path to Paton's home near the seashore. As they reached the veranda both men threw the deer down, and the native immediately flopped into one of the deck chairs that stood on the porch exclaiming, "*My, it is good to stretch yourself out here and rest.*" Paton immediately jumped to his feet and recorded the phrase. In his final translation of the New Testament this was the word used to convey the idea of trust, faith, and belief. "*Stretch yourself out on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*" This is of course taken from Acts 16:31, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.*"¹

This simple process is not so simple for many. Far too many people see it as something equivalent to scaling Mount Everest, as we will see in the passage for today beginning in John 6:15 and ending with John 6:40.

John 6:15-25 NAS:

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.*

¹⁶ *Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea,*
¹⁷ *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.*

¹⁸ *The sea began to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing.*

¹⁹ *Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened.*

²⁰ *But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."*

²¹ *So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the*

¹ Bible Illustrations (Faith), #350, *What Does It Mean To Believe?* Word search Bible.

boat was at the land to which they were going.

²² *The next day the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but that His disciples had gone away alone.*

²³ *There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks.*

²⁴ *So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus.*

²⁵ *When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?"*

When it became apparent to Jesus that the people were going to try and make Him king, He may well have told His disciples to proceed to Capernaum where He would join them later, while He then went back up the mountain to escape the crowd. In fact this same story is told in Mark. The last thing Jesus wanted was an attempt to make Him an earthly king. He knew that He was in fact their King but the time for Him to rule over the earth was for His second coming. This time He had come to provide a way for mankind to be reconciled to God through the sacrifice He (Jesus) would soon make. Any attempt to have Him replace the Roman governing body in Palestine would interfere and draw attention away from His true mission. So He distanced Himself from the crowd. Besides, it was up to His Father to anoint Him king at the proper time. The crowd did not have the authority to do this.

We find some additional clarity on this story in Mark 8:45-52, and we get the clearest picture of what happened concerning yet another miracle performed by Jesus in Matthew 14:22-36 NAS:

²² *Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away.*

²³ *After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.*

²⁴ *But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary.*

²⁵ *And in the fourth watch² of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.*

²⁶ *When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.*

²⁷ *But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."*

² Between 3 and 6 o'clock in the morning.

²⁸ Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

²⁹ And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

³⁰ But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

³¹ Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said* to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

³² When they got into the boat, the wind stopped.

³³ And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

³⁴ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret.

³⁵ And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent word into all that surrounding district and brought to Him all who were sick;

³⁶ and they implored Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were cured.

As evening approached and Jesus had not returned, His disciples set out by boat first for Bethsaida and then on to Capernaum. After a while a powerful wind began to blow and the waves began to rise. The Sea of Galilee is notable for its sudden and severe storms. They became afraid thinking that the boat might capsize in the storm. They were already several miles from shore and in grave danger. But then suddenly a figure appeared, walking on the water toward the boat. At first they were frightened but when they saw it was Jesus their fear disappeared. What a sight for sore eyes He must have been. No sooner had they helped Him into the boat, in the John 6 account, than the storm stopped and the boat reached the shore. Jesus had come and told them not to be afraid and He removed them from danger. We too need not be afraid when we have placed our trust in Him. Hebrews 13:5 assures us of this protection:

5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (ESV)

The next morning a good part of the crowd that had experienced the miracle of the five loaves and two fish was still lingering near the place the miracle had been performed. As they looked toward Capernaum they noticed that there was only one boat docked there. They knew that Jesus had not left with His disciples and began to wonder where He was. They then boarded some boats that had come from Tiberias and went over to Capernaum in search of Jesus and His disciples. When they found Him they were curious as to when and how He got there. Jesus chose not reveal that information to them because the miracle of walking on the water had been for His disciples' eyes only, and so He moved on to the message He wanted them to understand.

Now we would like you to place what is happening here in clear perspective. These people have just witnessed and actually been directly involved in an incredible miracle.

Perhaps some 20,000 people were fed until they were full with only five loaves of bread and two fish.

It should be obvious to everyone that this man has the miracle-working power to be the Messiah that was promised to come into the world.

That must have excited them and stirred their spiritual curiosity. But not so fast; that is not what Jesus describes as happening here. They did not ask Him about His miracle-working sign, or about why He had come, or about spiritual things. They wanted to know how He got to the other side of the lake. Their thinking went no deeper than the human level on which they always existed. And Jesus knew their true motive for following Him, as we see when we continue reading in John 6.

John 6:26-27 NAS:

26 Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

27 "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."

Jesus' answer is a sharp rebuke of their lack of spiritual concern. Jesus quickly pointed out that all they were thinking about was food. They may have seen a source of food here comparable to the manna God provided to feed the Israelites in the desert for forty years during the time of **Moses**. Many of these people were probably poor and they saw Jesus as the source of a free lunch on a daily basis. And they wanted to confirm that He had the ability to provide this free food. Jesus knew what was motivating them and He tried to use the subject of food to help them understand who He was and what it was that He was truly offering them. He tells them that they should be more concerned about the kind of food that never perishes but continues to provide for them eternally. Jesus offers them food that will give them eternal life, not just fill their stomachs temporarily. He can offer them that kind of food because He brings it from His Father in Heaven.

John 6:28-29 NAS:

28 Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

So because they had this religion by works concept, they asked Jesus what they would have to do to receive this eternal life. Jesus immediately told them that there is nothing anyone can do to earn eternal life. The only thing that God requires is faith and trust in the One He has sent to pay for the sin of the world. The *seal* is God's mark of authentication, and

Whoever holds the seal acts on God's behalf.

Jesus is the One who had **the seal of God** stamped on Him and that is what He is trying to make these Jews understand.

John 6:30-33 NAS:

30 So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?"

31 "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.' "

32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven.

33 "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."

Now there are times when the ignorance displayed by the Jews is hard to believe. And if it were not for the very same ignorance displayed by people in the world today, we might not be able to believe people could be so blind. But that is simply the nature of the unregenerate mind, a mind which has not yet been touched by saving faith. How could they ask for a sign or a miracle, so that they could believe what Jesus was telling them, when He had just the day before performed a most incredible miracle? We would have to describe these people as suffering from a "miracle deficiency disorder," or perhaps a severe case of first century "attention deficit disorder." **The sign had already been given!** No one else but God could have done what Jesus did. It is now time for them to believe and trust and listen.

But as usual they plod along, stuck in the same pattern of doubt and disobedience that they consistently seem to follow. They go on to bring up the subject of the manna that they claim was provided their ancestors by Moses during their forty years of wandering in the desert. The manna was "bread from Heaven" that provided for their physical needs, keeping them alive when they had no other source of food. But Jesus is quick to point out that the manna was not provided by Moses but by God, and that He (Jesus) was now the true "bread from Heaven" because the Father had sent Him from Heaven, and that it was He who could provide them with eternal life. It was God who fed the people from the five loaves and two fish using Jesus as His agent for working the miracle.

God is the source of all miracles and **He works those miracles through those who have His seal.** In the desert He worked through Moses and here He works through Jesus.

But the bread provided in the desert was merely for the body and was required daily for temporary nourishment. Jesus is telling them that He is the "bread of life" from Heaven and if they come to Him they will be fed forever. Jesus as the "Bread of Life" continually gives life to the world. But then in verse 34: "*Then they said to Him, 'Lord, always give us this bread.'*"

Apparently they still do not understand. They are still looking for physical bread that they

can eat. So it is necessary for Jesus to say this clearly so there will be no misunderstanding.

John 6:35 NAS:

*35 Jesus said to them, "**I am the bread of life**; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.*

Verse 35 records the first of the great “**I am**” sayings of Jesus, and the following verses (35–51) discuss in greater detail what the “bread of life” means. It was necessary for them to understand that Jesus was speaking of spiritual not physical food. The meaning of the phrase “*bread of life*” is bread which gives life, but such bread is available only to those who believe in Jesus, a condition which these people had not fulfilled.

John 6:36-40 NAS:

36 "But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.

37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

39 "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

40 "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

The old saying, “*Seeing is believing,*” apparently did not apply to these Jews. Here they had been given a sign to prove that Jesus was the One that God had promised to send and they simply ignored it. There could be no greater sign or one that could make it more clear that Jesus was the One. These people suffered from an inability to believe, or more likely, a refusal to believe. They had looked for a **Messiah** that would free them from Roman rule and establish Israel once again as a political and military power in the world. Surely this Jesus gave no indication of being such a conqueror. Perhaps they did not want to believe that this man was the one God had sent to be their Savior. Unfortunately there is probably a great deal of truth to such a claim. Why else would they not be convinced by the miracle they had just seen? And some of them may have seen many of Jesus’ previous miracles.

Jesus then proceeds to state that, although they did not believe him, yet his work would not be in vain, for others would come to Him and be saved.³

We have now arrived at yet another one of those passages in the Bible which is difficult to interpret, and where we take a different path than most scholars, interpreters, and so-called Bible experts. Some take Jesus’ words in verses 37 and 39, “*all that the Father gives Me will come to Me . . . of all that He has given Me I lose nothing,*” to imply the

³ Barnes, Albert, *Notes on the New Testament Explanatory and Practical*, (: ,) [what is this?], WORDsearch CROSS e-book, -1.

doctrine of predestination. Those who hold to this doctrine believe that God sat down before the world began and made a list of all the people that He would create throughout history. On this list He had two columns: One headed “Saved” and the other “Damned.” I have never been able to accept this doctrine as interpreted by most and I have written a number of papers explaining my reasons.

Such a doctrine, in my analysis, does not fit the character of God as He reveals Himself in the entire Bible. The Bible reveals God as a perfect being of love as well as a perfect being of judgment. He opens opportunities for love and forgiveness to all and He warns all that those who refuse His love will undergo His judgment. Judging a person without giving them an opportunity to believe in Him, repent, and accept the forgiveness God offers through Christ is contrary to the image that God has revealed to me through His Holy Word. It is also contrary to other passages in the Bible, such as John 3:16: “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*”

I would suggest that John 6:37-40 does not present a God revealing a doctrine by which He selects the people who will be saved to send to Jesus, and then sends the rest off to Hell, but rather a God providing all people the opportunity for salvation. In verse 37, every one that comes with the feeling that they are a lost sinner has been sent by God. This invitation encompasses all people. It shows the abounding mercy of God; and it shows, also, that the reason, **and the only reason**, why people are not saved, is that they will not come to Christ. Of any sinner it may be said that if they had been willing to come to Christ they would have been saved. If a person chooses not to come, they have no one to blame but themselves for their own damnation.

Let me see if I can make this even clearer with an illustration. Let us first turn to Romans chapter one and read verses 18-32 NAS. We will begin with verses 18-20:

¹⁸ *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,*
¹⁹ *because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.*
²⁰ *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.*

These verses make it quite clear that every person ever born was and is born with a knowledge of God within their inner being. They do not know exactly who God is by this feeling but in effect they know there is a God somewhere. Then God in His grace gives us even further evidence of His existence by making it evident within the creation itself that there is a God. All anyone has to do is look at a newborn baby, or a tree, or the stars, or a cloud to know that there is a Creator who made all of this, and a Creator that had supernatural power far beyond that of any human being. Now let's continue reading in

Romans.

Romans 1:21-23:

²¹ *For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

²² *Professing to be wise, they became fools,*

²³ *and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.*

Even though God had revealed Himself to all mankind through this inner presence and the evidence of His creation, and then finally to mankind itself through Adam and Eve and the others who first inhabited the earth, they rejected Him and replaced Him with other things that they preferred to worship and look to as their god or gods. This is blasphemy plain and simple. Open rejection of the true God and rebellion against His authority in order to replace Him with a false god or gods that they could be more comfortable with. If God says, "These are the rules," many people will not like to live by those rules, thinking that they will be more comfortable with a god that will wink at their sins. Well, that is their choice and once they made it, God will remain firm in His righteousness, which we see as we read on in Romans 1.

²⁴ ***Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts** to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.*

²⁵ *For **they exchanged the truth of God for a lie**, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

²⁶ *For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,*

²⁷ *and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.*

²⁸ *And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, **God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper**,*

²⁹ *being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,*

³⁰ *slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,*

³¹ *without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;*

³² *and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give*

heartily approval to those who practice them.

By the way, if you have any doubt about whether or not homosexuality is considered sin, these verses should make it clear that it is.

So God allowed such people who preferred to sin to have just what they wanted and the results of wanting that kind of life are those things that have just been described to us. What then can we conclude from these verses in Romans 1?

God wants **everyone** to know Him and consequently
He wants **everyone** to be saved.

Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:9 NAS:

⁹ *The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but **for all to come to repentance.***

In Romans 1:14-15, Paul reinforces this perspective by writing:

¹⁴ *I am under obligation both **to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.***

¹⁵ *So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. (NAS)*

Is there any doubt in anyone's mind what God's purpose is for **all of mankind**? [Omit: Now here is my closing illustration on this and it seems to me to be right on target.]

Imagine God directing traffic on a one-way road that everyone is required to walk down. Ahead you see a fork in the road. Everyone has a clear view and can see the One who is directing traffic up ahead. They all can clearly see God pointing people to take the road that is marked "**Kingdom of God.**" Just below this sign is another that says, "**This Road Leads To Salvation And Eternal Life Through Jesus Christ.**" God is telling everyone to take this road for their own best interests. God is directing everyone to travel the road that leads to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

But some also show interest in the other road, where they see signs that contain promises of sexual freedom, alcohol, drugs, and sensual pleasures that far exceed what they've ever had the opportunity to enjoy. Satan is standing there calling to people to come and experience all that they've ever dreamed of. Many look at this road and see that it is broad and inviting, and they quickly decide that this way looks much more enjoyable than the narrow road with the small gate to which God is directing the people. So they quickly take what they think to be the easier, softer way.

That, my friends, is not what I would call a description of predestination. It is rather an

outright rejection of God's provision for all those He loves. God points everyone to Christ and those who follow that direction will be received by Christ and given salvation that leads to eternal life. Instead of this passage teaching predestination, it rather provides assurance that those who trust in Christ are on the road to heaven and can be assured of arriving safely at that destination. Read John 6:37 again: "*the one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out.*" When a person accepts Christ, his or her salvation will never be lost because it is assured by the presence of the Holy Spirit that comes to indwell everyone who is saved through faith in Christ.

How do we know that? Because of what Paul writes in Romans 8.

Romans 8:31-39 (NLT):

³¹ *What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?*

³² *Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?*

³³ *Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself.*

³⁴ *Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.*

³⁵ *Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?*

³⁶ *(As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.")*

³⁷ *No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.*

³⁸ *And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love.*

³⁹ *No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

And John summed it all up in verse 40 of John chapter 6: "*For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.*" The will of God is for everyone to invite Jesus into their life as their personal Savior. Those who do will receive salvation and eternal life by the grace of God. Those that do not will go to Hell. Those who truly believe in Christ as their Savior will never lose their salvation.

And when Christ comes again those believers will be given new and perfect bodies as a gift from Jesus that will last throughout all eternity. Such love should take your breath away! If you have not already accepted the work of Christ for you, if you are not sure you have a personal relationship with Him, don't let another day pass without choosing to take the road to eternal life. Speak with me following the service and I will be happy to help you be sure you are on the right road.