

John 6 v 16

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[0 : 0 0] five loaves and two fish, and one of the things that we saw was that when Jesus takes control of a situation, that you end up with more than you had at the beginning. And that's one of the great encouragements that we have with regard to the gospel work, because often we feel so inadequate, and whether it is in preaching, or in witnessing, or in sharing, or whatever we are doing for the Lord, we so often feel quite helpless and think, oh, well, what can I do for the Lord? But you know, if we're locked in with the Lord, and if we are seeking the Lord to do what's in us and through us, then we've got to look at this Lord who turned a tiny amount of food into a great feast, and he continues to do the same with the gospel. He continues to work through his people in this way.

Often we might not be aware of it, but this is what the Lord does. So it's one of the great encouragements. That's what we were seeing last week of how the Lord is able to take a little, and out of that little make an awful lot. And so we find then that when he had performed this, that the people saw here, they were saying, this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.

They were looking here as they saw Jesus, and they were saying, this is the very one going right back that Moses spoke about, the Moses-type character, though this is him. And Jesus perceiving and understanding what they were about knew that they were going to take him and make him king, that this was what they were wanting to do. So Jesus withdraws. That's what the word is. Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. And this actual word, withdrew, has the idea of Jesus being in a hurry. It's not quite that he ran away, but it's close to it. We find that Jesus is going to get away from him as fast as possible before they actually begin to take him and try and make him king. And I'm quite sure that at that particular moment that Satan would have been busy tempting Jesus and saying to Jesus, look, you can have the crown without the cost. Listen, they're wanting to make you king. Remember Satan before I'd offered him all the kingdoms of the world if he would just bow down before Satan. And I'm sure that Satan would again be saying to Jesus, look, your father has set before you a hard way. This is a much easier way. But Jesus knew that the crown that he was to receive was to be given to him by the Father, not by the world. And the crown that we will receive is also a crown that has been set aside for us by the Father and will be given to us by the Son, because we will inherit a crown of glory. That's one of the great and wonderful things that lies ahead. And it's not the world that will give us that, but it is, it's God who's going to give us that. And we've always got to remember that it's when God gives us something, it will be by the, it's by his appointment and by his way.

So Jesus knew that. And Jesus also knew that unless he went the way of the Father and followed what the Father had given him to do, then our salvation would not be complete. And the great hammer blow upon the powers of darkness would not take place. So it had to be God's way. So I'm quite sure, although it doesn't tell us this, I believe that Satan would have been whispering. Just as he was whispering, remember when Jesus said, who do people say that I am? And the disciples were saying, well, some are saying, you're this person or that person. And, but then he said to them, but who do you say I am? And remember how Peter said, you are Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus had said, oh, it's not flesh and blood that has revealed that to you, but my Father, which is in heaven. And Jesus went on to tell him a little bit about what lay ahead. And Peter, remember, tried to, tried to dissuade him and say, oh, no, no, no, that's not what you're to do.

[4 : 42] And straight away, Jesus recognized. That wasn't the voice of Peter. Well, it was the voice of Peter, but Jesus recognized the power that was behind Peter. And he said, get thee behind me, Satan.

He could hear Satan's whispering, Satan's attack coming through the very words of Peter. So I believe that here would be another instance where Satan would have been at work trying to derail Jesus and saying, no, just give yourself to the people. You are going to be the deliverer.

This is what they want. Deliverance from the tyranny of Rome so that they'll once again be free, the nation that God wants them to be free. But that's not, that's not the way. So Jesus, we find he withdraws. And there's no doubt that as he withdrew, that he, it tells us elsewhere, that he went up into the mountain and he went there to pray. He, he was constantly going to communicate with the father, to, to depend, he was depending upon the father and through the, the ministry of the spirit. He needed, he needed constant communion with God, the father. And so do we, we deny ourselves so much if we don't take time to be with the Lord. If there's one thing I think the Christian church today desires more of, it is time for prayer. And what I talk about, what I mean here is your own private, personal time of prayer. And we need to be alone with the Lord. And the more time we spend alone with the Lord, the more like him we will become and the more effective we will be in our work and our witness for him. Let us make, let us be quite clear on that. Because sometimes we can be so busy and we say, I don't have time. And it's almost like the Lord is saying, you've got it wrong. Yes, you're busy and the demands are huge, but it's my work. And unless you come to know me more and more, you can't do my work properly. And sometimes we can be so caught up in what we're doing with ourselves, with our own agendas, with our own work and fired on. The Lord is saying, take a step back and come aside with me. It's one of the great things. When we look at the life of

Jesus, that's one of the things he was always doing, was coming aside to be with the Lord, with his Father. And then we find that the disciples go away in the boat out into the sea. And there's a couple of things here, because that's one of the great things about the Gospels, is that one Gospel story sheds light on another. And we're told in Mark's account, for instance, there, that Jesus sent them away, that he made his disciples get into the boat. And where did Jesus send them? He sent them out into a storm. Now, a lot of people find that a very strange thing. And he sent them there on their own.

Now, of course, when he sent them on their own, his eye was still upon them. He was still with them. But he sent them away on their own. And he sent them on their own for a couple of reasons.

[8 : 14] First and foremost, I think, was they needed to learn a lesson or two. And one of the lessons that they needed to learn, or one of the things that had to be done to them, was their heart had to be broken.

They had to learn, again, to look to Jesus and see Jesus in everything. Because, again, in Mark's Gospel, it tells us quite an amazing thing with regard to the miracles, to the feeding of the thousands. It tells us, they considered not the miracle of their loaves, for their hearts were hardened.

I find that quite extraordinary, that the disciples, who were part and partial of that miracle, who were the ones who were giving the food out to all the people, that they were involved in this extraordinary miracle where there had been five little loaves and two fish. And they continued to feed thousands and thousands and thousands of people with that, and then pick up 12 baskets afterwards.

And it tells us, they didn't consider it. In other words, it just went, it drifted by. They probably weren't even talking about it. They went off into the boat, and I don't know what they've been talking about, but they weren't even considering. They didn't consider it. And they were at the very heart of it. It's quite extraordinary. So, one of the things that's going to be done is, they're going to have to get their hearts softened. Because, you know, a hard-hearted Christian is not a good thing. In fact, a hard-hearted Christian is really a contradiction. Because one of the things that characterized, there were so many things that characterized the life of Jesus. One thing was his compassionate, tender heart. And if we are to be like Jesus, it is one of the things that we must seek to have is a tender heart, a compassionate heart, a hard heart. A Christian who is hard-hearted is incredibly unlike Jesus. And so, these disciples had hard hearts, and we see that quite often throughout the, like chasing the women away who brought their babies to Jesus. We see it in many instances.

Send them away. Bring fire down from heaven. Consume these people, we hear James and John saying to Jesus. Hard hearts. Throughout the New Testament, these hearts were being broken to become softer and softer and softer. And may I suggest that if we too have hard hearts, the Lord may be going to send some storm into our experience. Because he doesn't want us to have hard hearts, to be judgmental, to be void of feeling and compassion. We ought to have hearts that resemble our Savior. And again, the other thing as we take note here, that as the disciples set off, it tells us in verse 17, as he got into the boat and started across the sea to Capernaum, it was now dark. And when you look at these disciples in this little boat, rowing, because it was a difficult, they had rowed about three or four miles. It tells us in verse 18, the sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. And you see this picture of this little boat with the disciples in the storm. What a picture we have of the church. Because that's just what the church is like. We are surrounded today with storms where every form of ism is trying to break down the church. The church is living in many ways in very critical times. And where atheism, where humanism, where secularism, where there's this driving force trying to destroy and obliterate

[12 : 28] Christianity out of our land. There are people, and it's their whole objective in life, is to try and make sure that every strain and strand of Christianity is removed from society. And that's tough for the church. We are living in a time where many people have moved from apathy and carelessness into being totally opposed. And then you have the march of all the various isms, whether it's Islam or whatever, and so opposed to the spread of the gospel and the work of the church. So you have the storm on the outside, but you also often have within conflict. The church has been throughout its history, has been riddled with internal conflicts. And this is like a picture of the church, this little group being thrown about in every way. And often the church feels alone. And they were, the disciples to a certain extent were alone, but they weren't. Although they couldn't see Jesus, there was no point when he couldn't see them. And it's going to be always the same for the church. His eyes are always upon them.

And he will come at the right time. And he came to the disciples at the right time. But again, do you know what's something else, I think, which shows their hard hearts? They didn't recognize him when he came.

They thought, again, when you read the other gospel writers, they thought it was a ghost. They thought it was a spirit. They didn't recognize their Lord coming to them. And you know, if our hearts are hard, we won't recognize the Lord either. Because the Lord comes to us in providence and in grace, constantly. And sometimes we're not seeing him. You know, you can have two people together, and two Christians together, and one saying, oh, these times are hard. You know, the Lord doesn't reveal himself anymore. These are hard, difficult times.

There's no spirituality whatever in the air. There's no nothing. And the other Christian, side by side, is enjoying the fellowship, the communion, who is seeing God's hand in everything, every day, in God's providence and in God's grace. Two people, side by side. The difference is, one has a hard heart and the other hasn't. And the hard-hearted one cannot see the Lord, who is every day working, doing, blessing, guiding, rebuking different things. So that's why it's so important that our hearts are tender, and they are soft, and that we're Christ-centered. Disciples didn't even recognize Jesus as he approached them. And so we find that Jesus comes to them in the water. And may I say to anybody in here who is without Jesus Christ as a Savior, maybe today the gospel means something to you, and I believe it does. I believe if you're here today and you're not a Christian, I believe the gospel means something to you, or you wouldn't be here. I'm quite persuaded of that. You might not have the greatest interest in it, but you still have an interest. I don't believe that anybody comes to church who is opposed to the gospel. I believe that there is a level of interest. For some of you, there might be a great interest. Some of you may be seeing Jesus far off.

My friend, if you're beginning to see Jesus, that's a wonderful thing. Continue to pray, Lord, Lord, draw close. Come close to me. I want to see you. I want more than that. I want you to come into the boat with me. In other words, I want you to come into my life.

[16 : 32] Might be somebody here today like that, and the very thing you want you're scared of. Deep down, it's a strange tension, isn't it? You want Jesus, and yet you're scared.

You want to be a Christian, yet you're scared. What will it do to me? What's going to happen? If I become a Christian, you want the safety. You want the security. There's enough within your heart that's drawing you to Jesus, and yet there's this holding back. My friend, please ask the Lord, take me. Break all that that's trying to hold me back. Because let me assure you, coming to faith in Jesus Christ will open up a new world for you. It's a release. The burdens will fall off. And that's what we find here when Jesus, of course, came into the ship with them.

Everything changed. That was a wonderful thing. Everything changed. The storm was gone. It was so, that's what it says. But he said to them, it is, I do not be afraid. Then were they glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at land to which they were going.

May I say to you today, it's Jesus. Jesus is speaking to you. It is I. Don't be afraid.

Put these fears aside and take Jesus into the boat, into your life with him. And so we find then that they had come over to the other side, and just to move on to see the time is going, we find that the people again, that they find Jesus, verse 25 and so on, and we find then that Jesus knows what they're about. And Jesus said to them, I know, he said, why you're seeking me.

[18 : 38] You're seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to life eternal.

Now, what is Jesus saying here when he says, do not labor for the food that perishes? Well, Jesus, let us be quite clear, Jesus is not here saying, look, don't work. Just as a Christian, the most important thing is that all the time you seek me. Now, don't get me wrong. At one level, that's what Jesus is saying. Your main priority in life is to seek me. That's your main priority.

That's what Jesus is saying. He's not saying don't work in life, not at all. Labor is one of the God-given blessings that we have. And when people cannot get work, it's one of the most difficult things that faces people. Because it can make a person feel worthless, make a person feel useless. It can seriously affect a person because God made us for work. And I always believe that it's one of the God-given blessings when God blesses up a nation is that he provides work. Now, I know that there are different times through industrial revolutions, and we have it with all technology today, which takes away from a lot of human labor. But I still feel that when we turn it back upon God nationally, it's one of the blights that will come upon us is that we won't do it. Let us seek that the Lord will provide, provide work so that people will have the satisfaction of working and will have the means for being able to have a fulfilled life. But that is not what Jesus is getting at here.

As we said, what Jesus is saying is the main priority is to seek me. Because everything in this world is going to perish, our homes, our cars, all that we have, even the very world itself is going to perish.

This world, let us remember, is going to melt with a fervent heat. That's what we're told. That it will melt with a fervent heat and the elements will pass away with a great noise.

[21 : 14] I wonder if we'll be alive that day. I wonder if we'll be alive at the coming, the second coming of Jesus. Quite a thought. Might be some in this church who will see the coming again of Jesus.

Something that the world is, I'm sure there are times like me, some days you look and you say, what an amazing thing it will be just to see Jesus return. And that's what he's going to do one day unexpectedly. There's not going to be a warning beforehand. Life is going to be completely normal.

Everybody's going to be going about what they normally do. That's what Jesus said. People will be eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. It will be normal and then I'll return.

We don't know when. It's going to be an amazing event, an amazing thing. But that's what Jesus is highlighting and he's saying to them, look, whatever you do in life, don't become obsessed with just life itself. You've got to look beyond that and above that and discover the full real source of life, which is in me. And the Jews, as they're listening to Jesus, they're still saying, but what must we be doing to do the works of God? You see, they still thought that to get salvation, you have to do something. And you know, it's still like that. Maybe there's somebody in the church here today and you're still thinking like that. And you say to yourself, in order for me to be a Christian, I really go, you know what I'll do? I'm going to get my life sorted. I'm really going to, I'm going to stop doing this and I'm going to start doing that. I don't know what it is. But you might be saying that privately to yourself. And that's what the Jews were saying. What are the works that you want us to do? There must be something to do the works of God. What is it? Well, you know, we can't do anything. We cannot make ourselves right with God in any shape or form. If we could, Jesus needn't have come. The works of God, Jesus tells us very clearly, are these. When he says to them, in verse 29,

Jesus answered that this is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent. That's it. You believe in him whom he has sent. Again, we're coming to Christmas time and it's a time where people, and I think one of the things we don't know, we don't know for sure when Jesus was born.

[24 : 10] But the one thing I am thankful for is that however irreligious our nation is, that there is this one time when people actually are focused upon the coming of Jesus into this world. Although, funnily enough, if we are to be biblical about things, it's not the birth of Jesus that we are required to remember. That's not what Jesus requires us to remember. It's his death. Because there are a lot of people who look at the birth of Jesus, and they don't go beyond the fact, or they don't go beyond looking a wee bit, and we're thankful for that. Let us have as much focus upon Jesus as is possible. But a lot of people only look at Jesus with regard to his life. Great teaching, and a lot of people think that Jesus came into this world to teach us how to forgive and how to die well in the face of cruelty and all these kind of things. Well, if that's as far as we go, we miss the whole point of Jesus coming into this world. Jesus came into this world to die. Jesus came into this world. God sent his Son into this world to be a sacrifice for sin. The whole thing is brutal. But this is what we've got to focus upon.

And that's why Jesus is saying, or the Bible says, it doesn't tell us to remember his birth, but to remember his death. That's why we have the Lord's Supper, the sacrament. This do in remembrance of me.

This is what it's all about. This is why I came into this world, to die for you. Because if I don't die for you, you will die yourself in your sins, and you'll be lost forever. So this is God's great gift to us. And yes, by all means, let us focus upon that. And I wish that the world would focus more and more and more upon the coming of Jesus Christ into this world, and that they would delve into why he came into this world. But let us always see that he came in order to be a sacrifice for sin.

But then we find the Jews, you know, it's really, really quite extraordinary what they're saying to him. We see here the amazing blindness, because they then go on and they say to him, like in verse 30, they said to him, then what sign do you do that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?

Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness. He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Here are the people, right? And Jesus has just fed them, thousands of them, with five loaves and two fish. And they're saying to Jesus, right, if you are who you are, who you say you are, show us a sign, and then we'll believe. We need a sign. They have just witnessed the most incredible sign.

[27 : 32] Where Jesus has fed them. They're talking about Moses feeding their forefathers in the wilderness. Jesus said, I've just done that. And Jesus is trying to show them, I actually am the bread from heaven.

That bread, the manna, was a picture of me. I am the fulfillment of that. And yet the Jews are still looking for a sign. You know, the Jews had it all the wrong way around. See what they say. What sign do you do that we may see and believe? That is the wrong way around. They wanted to be able to see first and then they would believe. That's not the way it works. We have to believe first and then we'll see. And if there's anybody here today who's wanting it the other way around, like the Jews, and you're saying, if I got a sign, if I saw something, I need to see something. If I see something, then I'll believe. I'll become a Christian. You've got it all wrong.

Jesus is saying, you have to believe in order to see. That's what the gospel sets out before us. That is the way of it. Remember what Jesus said in John chapter 11?

And so that's what we need. We need to accept. We need to receive. We need to believe. And when we do that, then we will see. Things will become clear. You know, that's one of the things when a patient becomes a Christian. And particularly if, I'm sure there's quite a lot of people here and they know exactly what I'm talking about. You might have for a long time been sitting under the gospel with desires to become a Christian. And yet it just, you couldn't quite get it. It seemed to be looking through this kind of haze and you're saying, you know, what, I just don't know how to believe.

But then when you actually do come to believe, it all appears so simple. It's so straightforward. And you say, how couldn't I? How didn't I get it? It is so clear. Well, that's exactly what Jesus is saying. You must first believe and then you'll see. And that's my great prayer today, that you will all come to believe and then to see. As we know, this is a time of year when people give gifts.

[30 : 27] And we know that the greatest gift of all is the gift of Jesus. That's what Jesus in fact is saying. That's what my Father has done for you. He has sent me. He has given me into the world for you.

Will you today accept God's great gift? Or are you going to turn away and say, no? Remember that a gift doesn't cost anything. If somebody says to you, hey, I've got a gift for you here, but give me 20 pounds and you'll get the gift. You'd say, well, that's not a gift. It's not a gift if you have to pay anything. And so it is the gift of God. We don't have to pay anything. We don't have to work anything. All we have to do is to believe. Let us pray. Oh, gracious God, we pray that we might indeed know your blessing, that we might know this salvation, that we might indeed believe and that we might receive and that we might see the glory of God. We pray to encourage us in the faith. We pray for any who are halting between two opinions, who are being drawn this way and that. We ask, Lord, to lead them to the place where they will close in with Jesus Christ as Savior. Watch over us, we pray. Bless a cup of tea in the hall. We pray to bless each and every one, taking us all home safely.

Be again with those who mourn, whose hearts are heavy. Be merciful to us and forgive us our sin. In Jesus' name. Amen. Our concluding psalm is psalm number 68 from the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 68 from the Scottish Psalter.

And we sing verses 7 to 11. And the tune is Glasgow. O God, O God, what time thou didst go forth before thy people's face, and when through the great wilderness thy glorious marching was, then at God's presence shook the earth, then drops from heaven fell.

This sign I shook before the Lord, the God of Israel. O God, thou to thine heritage didst send a plenteous rain, whereby thou when it weary was didst it refresh again.

[32 : 54] 7 to 11, the tune is Glasgow on page 302. O God, what time thou didst go forth. O God, what time thou didst go forth before thy people's days.

And there, within great wilderness, my glorious marching one, when I was present, sure, near and brought from heaven, this side I show before the Lord, the God of Israel.

O God, how true thy narrative didst send a plenced ring, where by the way it weary was is still refreshed again.

Thy congregationienst bre Adam, and the sea in which we do of that pondering the bush. O God, what decision and broad?

O God, Ch ace the part so in which we need The Lord himself did give the word, the word of God's prayer.

[35 : 28] Great was the company of them, the sick who punished it.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.