

John 6:24-35

²⁴ Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

²⁶ Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

²⁸ Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

²⁹ Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

³⁰ So they asked him, “What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?” ³¹ Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

³² Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “from now on give us this bread.”

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Have you ever wondered how the people of Israel could be so stubborn? How they could witness all the plagues of Egypt, walk on dry ground through the Red Sea, follow the glory of the Lord in a pillar of cloud and fire, eat and drink their fill of manna and quail and water even in the middle of the desert, how could they experience all of this and still rebel against God's simplest commands? Isn't that the kind of God you'd want to follow and never disobey? But in spite of these mighty acts, still the grumbling. Still the refusal.

Have you ever wondered how the crowds could fail to follow Jesus? Oh sure, they followed him around town, and out into the wilderness, and they followed him back to Capernaum, but they could never seem to follow his teachings or his commands. When Jesus said, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent,” they didn't believe in him. Even after all the miracles they had seen, how could they fail to believe? But toward the end of John 6, we'll see how many people desert Jesus in spite of his miracles.

Miracles never seem to produce the effect you'd expect. Christians sometimes think that if only God were to start working miracles again, then so many more people would start to believe. It just doesn't work that way. It didn't work like that for all the prophets of God or all the apostles. It didn't work like that for Jesus himself. Our own times wouldn't be any different.

So when Jesus calls people to believe in him, he uses something even more powerful than miracles. He uses his Word, and he uses himself. Instead of relying on the ice cream of miracles, he relies on himself, the true Bread of Life.

Aside from his resurrection, every single miracle Jesus performed was temporary in nature. Miraculous as they were, they wouldn't last. Jesus healed the sick, but that wouldn't keep people from ever getting sick again. Jesus drove demons out of people, but those people would still have to deal with the daily temptations of the devil. Jesus raised the dead to life, but those people would only die again one day. Jesus fed great multitudes of people, but for each person who ate it was only a single meal—and as these folks are talking to Jesus, it's probably getting on toward lunchtime.

But no miracle ever seemed to be enough for these crowds. Over the last several weeks, they had seen Jesus healing the sick, and that was the whole reason why they followed him out into the wilderness—they wanted to see more miracles. And when they had eaten that miraculous meal of bread and fish, they wanted to make him their king by force so he could keep on feeding them. And when they returned to Capernaum and found Jesus there, they figured he must have done some miracle to get there before them. And when Jesus calls them to believe, what is their response? “What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?” All those other miracles they had seen weren't enough for them. They demanded more.

Every miracle eventually demands another. There comes a point where miracles stop seeming miraculous to us and instead become commonplace. Just consider the things that are now possible or the things that have been done, the things that a hundred years ago people would have thought miraculous. We've been to the moon. We have an overabundance of food. Most households own two cars and multiple electronic devices. We use those devices to access a worldwide communications network that allows us to know about things thousands of miles away as they're happening *now*, or to research any information we can find. We've been

able to control or eradicate diseases once thought incurable, drastically reduced infant mortality rates, and extended our lifespan. We can live at a comfortable seventy degrees all year long. And many of these things we don't even give a second thought. They're not so miraculous anymore. So we keep looking for the next big thing, the next innovation, the next wonder, the next miracle.

So what happens when the miracles stop? What happens when the miracles stop being miraculous and become part of our everyday lives? Well, then we don't appreciate them anymore, do we? We take these great things that God allows us to do, or that God does for us, and we waste them. How much food do we waste in a week, in a year? How much of our time on the internet is spent on futile arguments or videos of cats or pornography? How often do we take for granted the miracle of life itself, or the methods God uses to sustain that life?

We even fail to notice the very real miracles that occur right here in these walls. Baptism? Well, it's so nice to see the babies dressed up and the family all together, but it's just something we do. Holy Communion? Well, it's been a while since we've taken it, so we'd better go up this week. God's Word? Oh, it's the same every week and we've got plans, but soon.

And God knows that. God knows that miracles alone aren't enough to overcome our sinful nature. And that's why he sent Jesus! That's why Jesus ministry was about more than just miracle after miracle.

Jesus didn't come into the world just to perform miracles. Jesus didn't perform miracles just to show people that he was a wonder-worker or a magician. He didn't do it for the entertainment value. His miracles were to help people, yes, but even that wasn't their final goal. It's true, a great deal of his ministry was spent in miracles, healing the sick, driving out demons, turning water into wine. But Jesus never performed a single miracle just to do a miracle. No, Jesus calls his miracles "miraculous signs," and that's exactly what they were: *signs*.

When you're trying to find a place you've never been before, what do you look for? The signs! And it's not because the signs themselves are all that interesting. The signs are only there to show you the way to your destination. Jesus' miracles were signs that pointed to greater truth. They were signs that revealed his divine glory. They showed people that this man truly was the Son of God. They reveal to us that Jesus is the promised Savior, and that just as he has power over the world, he has power over our sin too.

And that's why Jesus always emphasized his *teachings* over his *miracles*. That's why he said to the crowds, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Believe in the one he has sent. I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

When we put Christ first, then we properly appreciate his miracles. Every Sunday that we celebrate Holy Communion, Christ miraculously joins his body and blood to the bread and wine through his Word. Every time we baptize a baby, the Holy Spirit is miraculously granting that child new life through that same Word. And every time we read and hear and proclaim the Word of God, the Lord Almighty uses it to miraculously strengthen the faith of those who hear it! Our lives are filled with the Lord's miracles. We just don't always see them for what they are. God can and does work miracles for our benefit. But none of those miracles would be possible if not for Jesus himself, the true bread of life. Every one of those miracles is a miracle only because God's Word makes it miraculous.

So like his disciples before us, we put our faith in him who worked the greatest miracle of all: our salvation. Our Savior overflows with grace; he has filled the whole world with his grace by dying on the cross. He provided the holy life and the precious blood and poured it all out for us. And when he rose from the dead, he changed the world with his grace! He covered all people with his forgiveness and now calls all people to partake of that forgiveness by putting their faith in him.

Jesus is the true bread who comes down from heaven. Those who believe in him will never hunger or thirst for righteousness, for as often as they come they will be always be filled with the bread of life. The fuss over miracles fades, but faith in Jesus endures forever. Amen.