

“It is I; do not be afraid.”

John 6:16-26

Reading: Mark 8:34-38

Bethany Baptist Church
July 26, 2020

...pray...

This summer I watched a **documentary** with my family. In fact, I watched it *twice*.

American Gospel: Christ Alone is a critique, by conservative Christians, of the **Prosperity Gospel**.

The **Prosperity Gospel** teaches that Jesus came to make you *prosperous, healthy, and happy*.

All it takes is **faith**, and **if** your faith **isn't** making you *healthy, wealthy & wise*, then there's **something wrong** with *your* faith.

This **heresy** is the **heritage** of false teachers like E.W Kenyon, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, TD Jakes, Joel Osteen, and Todd White.

Because of these teachers (etc) you can find this false gospel from **South America** to **Africa** to **Europe** to **Asia**. In upscale neighborhoods and slums.

In fact, it is often said that the Prosperity Gospel is **the number one theological export** of American Christianity!

It is a **spiritual narcotic** and we are the world's **number one supplier**.

What an **indictment** against the Church!

Jesus **encountered** and **repudiated** the Prosperity Gospel wherever He went.

Read John 6:16-26

Chapter six is one long account, framed-up like this: a **miracle**, four more **miracles**, a **sermon** (*crowd*), a second **sermon** (*Jews*).

All the while, Jesus' **disciples** are *watching* and *listening*.

The **theme** (ch.6) is **faith: true faith** in the real Jesus vs. **false faith** in a Jesus of your own making!

Last Sunday we examined that **first miracle**: *feeding of multitude*.

The **crowd** was so **astonished** by Jesus' power that they rose up to **force Him** to be **Israel's king**.

He **dispelled** the mob, but they couldn't *shake off* the idea of a Messiah who *miraculously manufactures free meals*.

This morning we'll consider Jesus' **next four miracles** as the **context** for **three conversations**. And **faith** is never far in the background...

Jesus **speaks** to **three**:

1. His **Father** (v.15).
2. The **Disciples** (vv.16-21). .
3. The **Crowd** (vv.22-26). Application: Are you superficial?

Jesus wanted to speak His Father, *alone* (read v.15).

1. In fact, the need to be **alone** introduced this entire story (1): *After these things, Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.*
 - a. He wanted to hear about the **preaching mission** of His disciples.
 - b. He wanted to process the **cruel execution** of John the Baptist.
 - c. He wanted to **be with His disciples**.
 - d. He wanted to **be alone**...He wanted to *pray*.
2. But the great crowd had **interrupted** the retreat.
 - a. So Jesus had **fed** their souls by **preaching** God's truth...
 - b. ... then He **filled their bellies** from a little boy's **happy meal** – **five** flat loaves and **two** dried fish.
 - **Enough** for one – **enough** for **20k!**
3. But the **day** was over, the **crowd** was gone, and **Jesus** hiked back up into the Golan Heights. **Alone**...
4. But **not really alone**, of course, because Jesus went to **pray**. Which means He went to **spend time** with His Father.
 - a. **Matt 14:23** (Matthew's account of this story) – *After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray...*
 - b. Drawing away to **pray** was a **discipline** with Jesus:
 - i. **Luke 5:16** – *But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.*
 - ii. **Mark 1** – Jesus arose early to pray in a **secluded place**.
 - iii. **Luke 9** – Jesus prayed on the **Mt. of Transfiguration**.
 - iv. **John 17** – Jesus prayed in the **Garden of Gethsemane**.

- c. **What** did Jesus pray about? Perhaps...
- i. **John the Baptist**, the **progress** of His disciples, the **miracle** of the meal, the disciples' **lack of progress!**, the **sermon** He had preached that afternoon, the **sermons** He would preach tomorrow, the **confrontations** His preaching so often provoked.
 - ii. **Why** did Jesus pray? **Life!** Life has *plenty of reasons* to pray!
5. But why would the Son of God **need** to pray? There is some **mystery** here, but... **Submission** to His Father's *will*, a **longing** to be in the Father's *presence*.
- a. If **you** are a Christian, *you pray!* You have that **same longing**.
 - The American theologian **Jonathon Edwards** said, "*Prayer is as natural an expression of faith as breathing is to life.*"
 - b. Be **intentional** in your prayer life. Jesus had a **plan** to get away.
 - c. Be **determined** in your prayer life. Jesus was **interrupted** in v.2, but He **went back** to the mountain in v.15. Jesus **warned**, "*The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak!*"
 - d. Take your **Bible** to your prayer closet. God's truth **fuels** prayer.
 - e. **Pray**, beloved! "*Are you weary, are you heavy laden, tell it to Jesus, tell it to Jesus!*"
6. Yet you **can't stay** in the **prayer closet** all day long! Jesus was **determined** to pray, but **Jesus never stayed** there!
- a. Sooner or later, you need to **get up** and **walk the talk!**
 - b. It would seem that Jesus **began praying** sometime after **6:00 p.m.**
 - c. And soon **His friends** were **in the boat**, **crossing** the *sea*, and **in trouble!** The **clock** swept past **midnight**, and moved towards **morning**.

They **strained** at the oars in the *midst of the sea*, and Jesus **prayed** from the *top of mountain*. They were **battered** by the *storm* ... and then **Jesus** went to them!

Jesus needed to speak to His disciples, but that was going to take a *miracle!*
(Read vv.16-21)

1. Jesus sent **crowds** away, sent the **disciples** to the boat, then **started back up** to the heights.
 - a. It was about **6:00 p.m.**
 - b. It is possible that the disciples first **sailed north** to nearby **Bethsaida Julius** and **waited** for Jesus.
 - c. You notice in **v.17**, the remark: *...and Jesus had **not yet** come to them.* As if the disciples had **expected** Him.
 - d. But by **9:00**, Jesus was **still praying**. It was **getting dark**, and the **wind** was stirring up the sea.
 - e. So the **twelve** finally set off in the small boat, **across the north end** of the sea, towards **Capernaum** (east shore; six-seven miles).
 - f. If they'd have had a **cell phone**, they probably would have tried to **text** Jesus: *Where are You? Time to go!* ☹ ☹ ☹ But since Jesus was **praying**, He would have His **phone turned off!**

2. So the twelve sail off into the night, and the rising storm.
 - a. The Sea of Galilee is about **700' below** sea level. The immediately surrounding hills rise sharply to almost **2700' above** sea level. The effect is that often **cool air** from the hilltops rush **down the slopes** to the **warm sea surface**, resulting in **winds** and **white-capped waves**.
 - b. It was **treacherous** for small boats in **1st century**, and still is **today!**

- c. When you *collate* all the data from **Matthew, Mark & John**, you find the **disciples** in a **tough spot**.
 - i. They rowed from **Bethsaida Julius at 9:00**, on past midnight, to sometime **after 3:00 a.m.**
 - ii. The wind and waves **forced them off course**, into the **widest part** of the sea. They had **rowed three or four miles** (25-30 stadia = 1/8 mile).
 - d. We must assume **all twelve** were **straining at the oars**.
 - i. Perhaps as many as **seven** were *seasoned fisherman*, who made their living on the Sea of Galilee. They were probably **tired** and **frustrated**, but **not afraid**.
 - ii. But the **rest of this crew** was **not** experienced sailors! What about **Matthew**, the recently converted **tax collector** – how many **muscles** and **callouses** did Matthew have!?!
3. Sometime about **3:00 a.m.**, Jesus knew that His friends had *struggled all night*. I assume He **prayed** for them, but then He also **acted** for them.
- a. Jesus **walked** to the boat (3-4 mi.)! The grammar indicates His **hike** was **effortless**.
 - b. He emerged *out* of the **storm**, *on top* of the **whitecaps**, *gaining* on the **boat!** Maybe they couldn't recognize Him in the storm.
 - i. Instead of being **relieved**, they were **terrified!**
 - ii. **Matt 14:25** – *And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were frightened, saying “It is a ghost!” And they cried out for fear.*
 - iii. The **storm** they could handle, the **miracle** – *not so much!*

4. Jesus offered a **loving command**: “*It is I (lit. **I am**), do not be afraid!*”
 - a. We tend to think of commands as **negative**, but Jesus’ command offered **clarity** and **comfort**.
 - b. You know what **calmed** them? Just knowing it was Jesus.
 - c. There may be **more** here than a simple: “*It’s Me!*” From midst of the **storm**, our Lord cries “*I Am.*”
 - d. “*I Am*” is **Jehovah’s** name(Ex 3; God, Moses), the name by which **all of creation** (every **storm/all seas/each man**) is to know Him – *I Am*.

5. And of course, **walking on the waves** was a **stunning miracle!** In fact, the first of **four miracles** that took place in **rapid fire succession**.
 - a. # 1 – Jesus **walked** effortlessly *through* the storm *to* the boat.
 - b. # 2 – When **Peter** recognized Jesus, the **impetuous fisherman** *begged* Jesus to *call him* to walk on the waves. And Jesus *did*, but Peter’s faith was soon *all wet!*
 - c. # 3 – Jesus helped Peter back into the boat, then the **Master stopped the storm**. **Mark 6:51** - *They were all astonished!*
 - d. # 4 – Do you see it in **John 6:21.b?** ...*and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going*. From the **middle** of the sea, to the **beach** at Capernaum - *instantly*.

6. This beloved incident **speaks volumes** about Jesus!
 - a. It *highlights* Jesus’ **deity**, by *highlighting* His **divine attributes**.
 - i. **Omniscience**. From the **top of heights** Jesus saw His toiling friends, miles away. And it **didn’t** take Him by surprise.
 - ii. **Omnipotence**. Jesus’ effortlessly **walked** on the *waves*.

- iii. **Sovereignty.** Our Lord **commanded** the *wind*, the *waves*, and *Peter* to do His bidding – and they **all did**. Then He instantly **teleported** the boat, with **all** of them in it, from the *middle of the sea* to the *edge of the shore*.
 - iv. **OBTW**, our **author** was *there* for the **entire overnight cruise!**
- b. **Willim Hendriksen** writes that this account also describes the **protection** of Jesus.
- i. **Matt14:23-24** indicates that Jesus was **still praying** as the sea and wind was **battering** the boat.
 - ii. So our friends were **perfectly safe** because Jesus was on the hilltop **praying**.
 - iii. Beloved, I **couldn't** help but think about this **gospel promise** from **Heb7:25** - *Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (cf. 9:24),*

You know this hymn:

Just when I need Him, Jesus is near, **Just** when I falter, just when I fear;
Ready to help me, ready to cheer, **Just** when I need Him most.

Just when I need Him most, **Just** when I need Him most,
Jesus is near to comfort and cheer, **Just** when I need Him most.

At just the right moment, Jesus said to His friends: "I Am, be not afraid!"

It was **6:00 a.m.** on the beach in Capernaum. In a few hours Jesus would begin **another conversation** with the **hungry crowd** (read 22-26).

1. Jesus had **dismissed the crowd** late in the afternoon, after **feeding** them. But many had **not** returned to the **west side of the Sea**.
 - a. So the **next day** they **regrouped** on the shore, near that **large grassy plain** (still on the west shore).
 - b. They were **looking for Jesus**.
 - a. Jesus and the Twelve had **arrived in one boat**.
 - b. Later, they had watched as Jesus **directed** His friends **back** into that boat, **without Him**.
 - c. Then they watched as Jesus **hiked back up** into Golan Heights.
 - d. So the next day, they **expected to find Jesus**, still somewhere nearby.
 - e. But He **wasn't!** *So somehow He **must** be back in Capernaum.*
2. Now (23) we learn a **new geography fact**....
 - a. There was a large **Jewish city** on the west side of the Sea named **Tiberius**.
 - b. It seems that word reached the **fishing fleet in Tiberius** that there was a **large crowd** on the eastern shore than needed a **“taxi”** back to **Capernaum!**
 - c. So the entire **“floating taxi fleet”** sailed from **Tiberius** to the eastern shore. There they **picked up** the crowd and **sailed back west** to Capernaum.

3. Sure enough, they **found Jesus!** v.25 – “*Rabbi, when did you get here?*”
 - a. But Jesus **ignored** their question. His **itinerary** was **not** the big issue.
 - b. The **big issue** is always the *heart issue*...
 - c. And as John has **pointed out** time and again, Jesus **knows your heart**. He **cut straight to the chase** with the crowd.
 - d. “*Truly, truly (26), I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.*”
 - e. “*Truly, truly...*” when Jesus starts like that He is demanding your attention.
 - i. “Yes, you’ve been **pursuing** Me, but for all the **wrong reasons**.”
 - ii. “**My signs** are designed to **strengthen your faith**.”
 - iii. “But **all** you can think about is your **belly**.”
 - f. When **Jesus’ power** leads you to **worship** Him and to see Him as **God’s Son**, your faith is sincere.
 - g. But when **Jesus’ power** is the means to **feed** your appetites (*prosperity, power, health*), then you are feeding a **false faith**.
4. There are some things about the crowd that **sound commendable**, but **be careful!**
5. They **sought** Jesus (*persistently*), they **came** to Jesus, but their motives were exposed as **selfish...fleshly**.
 - a. “*....you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.*”
 - b. A few decades later the **Apostle Paul** warns us of Christ’s **enemies** (Phil 3): *whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.*

Jesus conversation w/ the crowd is just beginning. He has a lot more to say to the crowd, to the Jews, and to His disciples.

But for now...

Consider this eager crowd...

Eager for what...?

Is Jesus **Lord**, or just a **cosmic vending machine**? A **fire insurance policy**?

Think about the disciples...

Far from *perfect*, but *following Jesus*!

Not to find the **prosperous** life, but if necessary to **lay down their lives**.

And *in fact* they did!

The crowd, the disciples,

Which are you...?

...pray...