

Pastor Graham Pfeffer Sermon for Sunday 28th July 2024

Text John 6:1-21 ²⁰ *But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid."* ²¹ *Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.*

"Who is Jesus?" That is basically the question behind these signs today. Who is Jesus to the crowd with the feeding of the 5000. Who is Jesus to the disciples when he said, It is I, do not be afraid. Even for you today, who is Jesus to you.

The reading today began with, sometime after this. So, what is 'after this' referring to?

In John 5, Jesus healed on the sabbath a man who had been an invalid for 38yrs by the pool of Bethesda. The healed man told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well. This caused the Jewish leaders to confront Jesus, for they uphold the law of Moses that says, it is not lawful to carry your bed on the sabbath. What made the Jewish leaders really upset is Jesus was calling God his own father, making himself equal with God.

Then at the end of John 5, Jesus says, if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"

Which leads us into the reading for today. *Sometime after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near.*

The Jewish Passover festival was near. This may seem a trivial detail, yet is in fact, the heart of what this chapter in John 6 reveals about who is Jesus.

In the miraculous feeding of the 5000 and the saving of the disciples from the sea, lets take note of the connections from when God rescued his people under the leadership of Moses and here in John 6. There is a feeding of a crowd. In Exodus 16, by Manna in the wilderness when God fed all the Israelites, and in John 6, bread and fish fed the crowd.

Jesus tested the disciples, how are we going to feed all these people. God said to Moses, in Exodus 16:4, behold I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.

In John 6:6, Jesus commands that the pieces be gathered up so that nothing is wasted, just as Moses commanded to gather and no-one is to keep any of the manna till morning. In John 6 we read where Jesus went up to the mountain in verse 3, then after the feeding of the 5000 he withdrew to the mountain perhaps a connection to that other mountain in Israel's story, where Moses met God on the mountain.

Before the Israelites entered the promised land, Moses said to the people. *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.*

It's interesting how the crowd responded to this miraculous sign of Jesus in the feeding of the 5000. John 6:14-15 ¹⁴ *After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."* ¹⁵ *Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.*

Even in John 1: ⁴⁵ *Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."*

As Jesus reminded Nicodemus in John 3, Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

That's why Jesus retreated to the mountain. They did not recognise who Jesus was. Jesus is more than a prophet. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus is God in the flesh. Jesus cannot allow them to make him the king they want. They want a king with political and military power to overcome their enemies. After all, to the Israelites, the Passover is a festival to celebrate liberation from a foreign oppressor.

So, who is Jesus for you? What do you want from Jesus? Do you want Jesus to serve your desires and needs? Is it possible that we get so focused on how we want Jesus to serve our needs and desires, that we don't see how graciously God is working, for his glory and our good.

Maybe sometimes Jesus does need to retreat and leave us floundering about like battling winds and waves until we are willing to let the great, 'I am', step in and have full control and allow him to rescue us from our feeble attempts to save ourselves, which is impossible.

Note the difference in this story to other gospels where the disciples say, who is this that even the winds and waves obey him. John 6:¹⁸ A strong wind was blowing, and the waters grew rough. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. ²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." ²¹ Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

Notice that there is no calming of the storm, but when they are willing to let Jesus into the boat, immediately they reach the shore and are saved. Just like when Jesus steps into your life, salvation immediately comes to you. Because of Jesus words, it is I, don't be afraid, know you are saved by the great I am. The cross reveals the full depth of the great I am, stepping into the world, into your life through faith, to rescue and save you.

Who is Jesus? Jesus is the one who comes in grace and compassion to a hungry and hurting world, where crowds don't understand who he is and what he has come to do. You might feel like the disciples and wonder what can you do, but be amazed at how God can bless abundantly from you a meal, a caring word, a prayer, a lift, a phone call, a visit to someone in hospital, even mowing the lawn or tidying someone's yard.

After all you do know Jesus as the great 'I Am'. You know we live in a dark and turbulent world. At different times we are all lashed by the storms of life that bring anxiety and fear. I pray that as you continue to invite Jesus into your life, you will be comforted by how he has bought you immediately to a place of rescue and peace. The turbulence may still be there, but you have the great 'I am' with you.

When you know Jesus is your only help, rejoice that God's kingdom has come in Jesus. Jesus stepped into the world as the great 'I am' to heal the broken, to bring hope, and to rescue you. Jesus says to you and me, "It is I; do not be afraid." Amen.