



Reaching for the Impossible

John 6:1-15

We have been looking through the miracles of Jesus as recorded by John in his Gospel and to remind you, here's the list again:

1. Changing water into wine John 2:1-11
2. Healing the royal official's son John 4:46-54
3. Healing the paralytic at Bethesda John 5:1-18
4. Feeding the 5000 John 6:5-14
5. Jesus' walk on water John 6:16-24
6. Healing the blind at birth John 9:1-7
7. Raising of Lazarus John 11:1-45

John accepts that Jesus did many more miracles than these but he focuses on seven as they are all signs of just who Jesus is. *John 20:31: these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (NIV)*

Looking at them, they are all in the range of the impossible. There is no rational explanation for any of these. The type and scale of these stories cannot be explained by natural phenomena or reproduced by illusionists. Which is exactly the point. So did John make all of this up? His stories or similar written ones were circulating very shortly after Jesus' time. The people that wrote them were prepared to die for these stories and their trust in Jesus – John was the only one of Jesus disciples that made old age. With all the death and persecution, there is never any contemporary evidence that people were being persecuted for telling lies. No-one ever suggested Jesus didn't do miracles. The Jews were more interested in the other claim John makes, that Jesus referred to God as His Father, therefore making Him equal with God.

John's argument is that if Jesus did all these miracles, then it demonstrates clearly that He is God's Son, He is equal with God. They are quite unparalleled in history, before or since. You either have to dismiss Jesus outright, or believe and find life in His name. There is no halfway house or compromise position.

We also discover from John's recollection that Jesus made a massive impact on Galilee and Judea in the three years of His ministry. The miracles may have started off small scale, with just a few people involved, but by miracle 4, the Feeding of the 5000, Jesus was now a major celebrity. This story (recalled in all four Gospels) represents the magnitude of interest in Jesus. He couldn't go anywhere in his native Galilee or for that matter, in Judea, without being followed by a huge crowd in search of seeing a miracle.

We see at the opening of the passage, it was Passover time. It was a time when many families left home and made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Not this year. Jesus wasn't in Jerusalem but in Galilee and people were hunting Him out there. In this story a crowd of 5000 men (not including women and children) were seeking Him for His preaching, and most of all, His miracles. That's the size of a significant town in those days. It's about the current size of a small market town like Swaffham. It's the capacity of an indoor stadium like to O2 on a WRESTLING NIGHT.

People were hunting out Jesus rather than going to Passover. You can see why the religious establishment saw Jesus as a threat. He was bad for business.

So here are all these people come to see Jesus. Just what were they expecting of Jesus. I would suggest there were many different reasons.

CATALINA

Do you remember this from early August? It was the Wings on Waves mini-airshow on the prom. It brought out a large CROWD, one of the largest of the Summer in Felixstowe. What were they expecting.> Some were expecting a Lowestoft, Clacton or Southend type airshow. They were disappointed I think. There were those like myself and Michael who are veterans of serious air shows, so we had a good idea of what to expect from the flight list, which wasn't much. The majority of the crowd had never seen an air show. In fact, many got bored and ate ice creams, sunbathed, went in the sea or built sandcastles while they waited or even during the displays.

5000 CROWD

Each in the crowd following Jesus came with an agenda, mostly it would seem, the expectation of Jesus was that He would do a miracle. They weren't disappointed on this occasion, but as with the previous miracles, it probably took a while for word to get around about where the food came from, and what had actually happened, which made the crowds want even more from Him.

We know the story. Jesus is being followed so that even when He gets to a remote place, they are still there. And He teaches them. Can I say it's not impossible for someone to speak to 5000 hushed people if you have the right kind of locality and a good voice. The old METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE in Spurgeon's time could seat 10,000 and these were the days before amplification. In this place, both conditions were satisfied for Jesus.

5000 CROWD

And then came the end of the day and time for the people to have something to eat and go home. But at a remote location, where do you find food? Of course Jesus decides that they should feed the huge crowd. So to test out His disciples He asks Philip to go and buy food for thousands of people! Philip correctly calculated it would take about 200 pieces of silver – a year's wages – to feed the crowd. A polite way of saying, that's impossible. And where do you find that much food at no notice at that time of day?

BOY

Did they think that Jesus had gone mad? I don't know, but I can't help having the feeling that they were trying to humour Him when they produced the boy with 5 loaves and 2 fishes! Jesus asks for food for thousands of people? Yeah, right! In your dreams at that price and level of notice!

JESUS BLESSING BASKETS

We know the story. Jesus was testing them. He was priming them to start imagining that in Him, the impossible is possible. With 5 loaves and 2 fishes he fed a crowd of thousands! And how spectacular was that? I guess initially most people would not have realised just where all the bread and fish was coming from. Then they realised that they were witnesses of one of the most spectacular miracles Jesus did. After that they wanted to make Him king!

The challenge for you and I today is this. Just how much do we think Jesus can do in our lives and in our community and country today? Can He do things like this story? Seriously? I remind you frequently of stories of impossible miracles in other places in the world now – all done in the name of Jesus.

Do we believe those stories? We are here to remember the One who died and rose again this morning. He was the same One who said to His disciples: VERSE *John 14: 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. If not, believe because of the things I do. 12 I am telling you the truth: those who believe in me will do what I do—yes, they will do even greater things, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father's glory will be shown through the Son. 14 If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.*

This is another one of John's big statements. *I am telling you the truth: those who believe in me will do what I do—yes, they will do even greater things.* Do we seriously believe this because it applies to us?

REACHING FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE

That's the implication of what reaching for the impossible is all about. Jesus is the God of the impossible and He wants us to start embracing the impossible because He wants us to achieve for Him those things His disciples like John achieved for Him.

How did people respond to Jesus miracles? Doubtless there were those who just went home with a full stomach and a good story. CARTOON.

For many, there were those who wanted to make Him king. They had their own agenda for the Saviour and wanted to use Him for that.

REACHING FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE

When faced with a Saviour who gives His people such immense power through the Holy Spirit; who promises to do so much in His name - *If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.* - what's our response? Maybe the first thing we want to ask for is our desire, our aspiration for what we want God to do. I could give Him a good list. But God has higher purposes than our small ambitions.

BREAD & WINE

Back to the Gospel. We know that the purpose of Jesus was quite different – to die and to open that way that each may find sins forgiven and relationship with God. He wasn't destined to be their type of king. He was destined for even higher office as King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Here is the challenge for us as we come around His table this morning. How big are our expectations of what Jesus does and can do in our lives? I remember from my youth a famous book by Michael Griffiths called GIVE UP YOUR SMALL AMBITIONS. It was a book encouraging people to answer the call of God to the mission field and to have that expectation that God can do big things in our lives if only we would listen to Him and embrace the impossible things that God calls us to. Maybe we are not called to some strange land, but all of us are called somewhere even if it's to this strange land of Felixstowe. We are a small minority but even so God wants to do the impossible through us – yes us- to bring the people in this town to Him.

I have encouraged You over the past year or so to look hard and realised that God is working amongst us. To recognise it. To give thanks for it. Now it's time to realise that He wants to do some much more: beyond everything we could ask or imagine as Paul says in Ephesians 3:20.

REACHING FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE

All we need to do is to start to embrace it, to spend time in prayer asking for it, crying out for God's will to be done in the lives of men and women here in Felixstowe who so desperately need it. To be prepared to ask for big things, impossible things, because in the will of God even mountains can be moved in Jesus' name? Do we believe that – really?

Let's come in confession before Him this morning.

CONFESSION

Father, this morning we confess that so often we have had such small ambitions for our faith and prayer lives. We hear the great stories of scripture like the feeding of the 5000 and think it could never apply to us. We hear the stories for your Church in other places and we are sceptical or think that it could not happen in Felixstowe. Lord forgive our small thinking. Thank You that by Your grace and mercy you desire to pour out Your blessings on all your people, including here.

Lord forgive us of those times we have thought that you can't or won't act in the way that you did of old. Forgive us for the times when we have accepted our own solutions, or human wisdom instead of seeking Your will and Your way. Forgive us as well for believing that all we've experienced of you is about as far as it gets. Give us the strength by Your Spirit to understand just all that you are prepared to, and want to do amongst Your people.

Lord forgive us for only thinking about Your power in terms of what we want, or according to our thinking. Please give us that vision of what you want to do in our lives, Your church and in the lives of our family, friends, neighbours and community. Lord please give us that longing for seeing Your Spirit poured out on Your church and on this community in a new way, a powerful way.

Lord, we forgive us for our weakness and our small ambitions, and reveal more of the power of Your Spirit and the perfectness of Your will, and envision us to embrace the impossible.

In Jesus' name

Amen

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