

Satisfying or Safe?

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[0 : 00] We are going to turn together to John chapter six because we are continuing our study on John's gospel that we are working through in our morning services. And today we come to the passage that Alistair read, which records for us two of Jesus's most famous miracles.

This chapter is following a pattern that we see a few times in this section of John from chapter five to 10, where Jesus performs miracles, and these miracles testify to who Jesus is.

And these miracles also prompt long discussions that are recorded between Jesus and those who were with him. So in these sections you've got that kind of pattern of maybe a short description of a miracle and then a long record of dialogue between Jesus and others.

And as we saw last time, and as we'll be saying again over the coming weeks, although here Jesus's popularity is increasing, large crowds are coming to hear him, it's also the case that hostility towards him is increasing.

And many of the discussions that we see recorded are because the religious leaders are offended by what Jesus has done and they are questioning him.

[1 : 11] So we're gonna look at the section from verses one to 21 today. And as we start, I'm just gonna read two little sections that are on the screen, verse 11 and 12 and verse 19 and 20.

Jesus said, have the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place so the men sat down about 5,000 in number. Jesus then took the loaves and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated.

So also the fish as much as they wanted. And further down in the passage, when they had rode about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat and they were frightened.

But he said to them, it is I do not be afraid. Our title today is Satisfied or Safe. And the reason I've chosen that title is because I think it's the case that for many people in their approach to life and especially in their approach to the big questions of what really matters in life, I think for many people it can feel as though you have to make a choice between being satisfied or being safe or to put it another way, in life, it can seem as though the most satisfying things are risky and the most secure things are boring.

So to go back to the children's talk, when I spun the bucket over my head, that was quite satisfying when it worked but of course it was risky as well.

[2 : 47] We see examples of it in all sorts of parts of life. So to take work for example, you might leave school or college or university and you might get offered a job which you're thinking, well, it's not the most exciting job in the world but it's secure and it'll give me a steady income, it's a secure sector and in terms of career goes, that could be really quite stable and wise.

So you think, well, I could do that or I could go traveling for a year and I could see the world, I'd have to find jobs as I go, I don't know if I'd have enough money but I'd have to work my way through and hopefully I would make it.

Both of those options are totally fine, both are excellent things to choose but the job is not as exciting as the traveling and the traveling is not as safe as the job. Same can be true in relationships, particularly in terms of how our culture thinks in terms of relationships today.

I think that if we were to talk to people out in the street, especially young people and to ask them all about relationships and particularly talking about marriage, I think to many of them, the security of marrying one person, of staying faithful to them for your whole life, of them being the only person that you ever sleep with and on the assumption that that's a loving relationship, although that would give a lot of stability, I think to many people would be like, I think that's a bit boring, it's not as exciting as, spending a few years having fun, having lots of different partners, seeing what

happens.

People think that's more exciting, even though that is likely to carry a greater risk, either of you getting hurt or of you hurting other people. Even something more, much, much, much more less serious as opposed, going to the beach, we all love going to the beach, you go to the beach and you think of jumping off sand dunes.

[4 : 39] If it's a small sand dune or a big sand dune, which one's more exciting? Big one, which one's safer? Small one. If you're running away from the waves, if you ever do that game where you go up to the edge and you have to run back from the waves, if it's a small wave, not very exciting, but it's safe.

Big wave, exciting, not safe, and many of us have been caught out. So often, the more risky something is, the more satisfying it can be and the converse is through, if something's safer, it's like, okay, well, it's not as exciting as I maybe hoped.

These are just examples, and I know that for all of these examples, there's a lot of variation as to how much it can resonate with people, and I hope you can see just the general point that I'm trying to make.

And the reason I want to make that point is that because I think it is the case, I think it's definitely the case, that when it comes to our relationship with God, we can very often think that that whole area of our lives, the whole question of faith and where we stand before God, that can so often feel like we have to choose between either being satisfied or being safe.

So on the one hand, when it comes to God, some people choose what we could kind of label like a formal external religion.

[6 : 05] So people will recognize that the question of our relationship with God is the most important question of all, and so they're conscious of eternity, they're aware of their mortality, they're anxious about their destiny, and they are confronted by the fact that they have an urgent and serious spiritual need.

And so as a result of feeling like that, you think, well, I want to be safe. This is all really important, and I want to be safe. And in terms of the formal external religion, which is in inverted commas, that we see in many people today and that you saw in the religious leaders in Jesus' time, there was this desire to make sure that, well, I just need to make sure I'm safe, that for eternity, I'm not in danger.

Now, very often, what that results in is a religion that's based primarily on fear. And so you're thinking, well, I have to make sure that I stay right with God, I have to make sure I don't put a foot wrong, I have to make sure that I fulfill this, this, this, this, and this, so that I'll be safe.

And so there's this urgent awareness of the need to avoid hell, the need to stay safe.

And so you think, well, I better not take any risks. I mustn't do this, I mustn't do that, I mustn't do the next thing, and sometimes it can even reach the point where people would say, you know, you mustn't even risk enjoying yourself.

[7 : 38] And that's because the joys, the pleasures, the experiences that life offers are just not worth the risk. And I think that, you know, that's something that you definitely saw in the religious leaders around Jesus' time.

I think that we probably have to hold our hands up and say that, that as a church across the nation, our Presbyterian tradition has probably given that impression at various times in our history.

And the result of it is an exhausting and guilt inducing life. And one that in terms of day to day enjoyment, is not that satisfying.

And so it's safe, but you just have to kind of grind through it. But that's a sacrifice that's worth it, because safety is the thing that matters. So that's one way of approaching it.

Other people go for the other option. They're much more concerned about being satisfied. And so in order to achieve that, very often what people will do is that when they come to think of God and questions of life and eternity, they will very likely choose distraction from God.

[8 : 58] So it's like, I don't really want to think about that. And for some people, they might even choose an outright rejection of God. So you try not to think about eternity. You avoid questions that might induce guilt or fear or make you feel unsettled.

And instead of thinking about your destiny, your eternal destiny, you just focus on the here and now. And you think that's what matters. That's what I'm going to prioritize. And the reason people do that is because they want to be satisfied.

People want fun and pleasure and fulfillment and experience. And in the pursuit of that, it can so easily seem like religion just gets in the way.

It's just a pain. And so we need to put it to one side. Instead, we live life to the full. We put a lot of opportunity into the new and exciting experiences that a day or a week or a year can bring.

And alongside that, the emphasis tends to be towards building up treasure here on Earth. So you think, well, I need to just achieve certain things here and bring certain things into my life as I go through life just now.

[10:08] And that can show itself in various ways, whether that's building up a successful career, finding a happy relationship, getting financial security or becoming a well-respected member of your community or something like that.

And all of that's very satisfying. And none of it's particularly wrong. It's not necessarily bad. Some of these things are the most important parts of life. But all the time, there's a question that's getting pushed away, one that's getting left in the background and yet every so often will niggle you.

When I die, will I be safe? So, formal, external religion might make you feel safe, but it's probably going to give you a life that at the very least is restricted and worst one that is dull and depressing.

Rejection of God, on the other hand, is probably going to give you a life that will appear much more satisfying on a day-to-day basis. But it's one that's never going to give you an answer as to whether or not you are safe or whether or not the people you love so dearly are safe.

All around us and all through human history people have made a choice between being satisfied or being safe. And of course, the tragic thing is that neither of these actually work.

[11:34] Formal, external religion won't make you safe and living life with no thought of God won't actually give you satisfaction. And yet, I do think it's fair to say a lot of people approach faith in terms of this choice and maybe some of you have felt like you've had to make that choice as well.

The absolutely amazing thing about the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that he doesn't say, satisfied or safe.

He says, I will give you both. And that's what we learn from these two miracles. Each of these miracles arises out of different needs, different types of need.

In verses 1 to 7, you see a large crowd as follow Jesus. They walked quite a distance in order to listen to him and they need food. They haven't had anything to eat. But the crowd is so big that there's no way that they can go and buy bread.

In verse 7, Philip says that 200 denarii wouldn't be enough to pay for them. That's about eight months' wages. So it's a huge amount of money. A huge crowd is needing to be fed.

[12:51] And so their daily need of food, something that they need every day, particularly when they've walked so far from home to listen to Jesus, that prompts the first miracle.

Then in verses, the second half of the passage that we read, verses 16 to 19, we read about how the disciples had then rode out right onto the sea. The wind had picked up, the sea had become rough, and they're in danger.

So this is a moment of crisis. And the danger that they face gives rise to Jesus' second miracle. So you've got these two types of need before us here. There's like the day-to-day need of food.

And then there's a crisis moment as they're caught in a storm. And it's interesting to note that even though we live in very different circumstances today, these two types of need are ones that we experience all the time.

So we have our day-to-day needs. We need food and warmth and shelter and companionship, all of these things. And then at various points in our lives, we also face moments of crisis.

[13:56] And so that might be a healthcare, it might be a dangerous situation, it might be sitting in the pew while the minister throws a plane that doesn't actually work. There's all sorts of situations where we're reminded of the fragility of our lives.

And I think it's fair to say that in terms of day-to-day needs, we long to be satisfied. And in terms of moments of crisis, we long to be safe.

What I want us to see is that Jesus responds to both of these needs with mind-blowing effectiveness. And that's one of the first things I want us to really notice in these passages, just how effective Jesus's response is.

For this huge crowd who's come, which is recorded here as 5,000 men, I think pretty much every scholar like these, that you would have been at least double that when you added women and children.

Jesus takes five loaves to fish and he distributes it to everyone so that there is a miraculous multiplication of the fish and the bread.

[15:13] So much so, everyone is satisfied. They've eaten till it had as much as they wanted. You can see it there at the end of verse 11. And the disciples go and they gather up 12 baskets of fragments.

In the storm, Jesus comes walking on the water and the disciples are frightened, terrified of the situation they face, but he comforts them with and reassures them with the words, it is I do not be afraid.

Now we know from the other gospels that Jesus calmed the storm. John here gives us a different emphasis. He emphasizes the fact that they quickly reached the land to which they were going. Now that makes sense if you think the storm was calmed, they were not far from where they needed to go and they were able to arrive. And just to note that that word immediately doesn't necessarily mean like at that second, immediately can mean the next thing that happened.

So to give you an example, if I said to you, I came off the ferry and then I immediately went to Tesco's. That doesn't mean that like at that second, I went from the ferry to Tesco's.

[16:27] We're taking a good few minutes, but it's still immediately. So there's the great emphasis in both these miracles that Jesus responds to their need with mind blowing effectiveness.

In other words, Jesus just nails it in terms of what needs to be done. He provides for the crowd's needs in a way that just exceeds all their expectations and he reaches and rescues the disciples from their danger in an utterly astonishing way.

Now what's all that teaching us and why is all this so important? Well, one of the things that John highlights in his passage is that this is a sign that Jesus performs.

He's reminding us in verse 14 that the miracles of Jesus are all signs. In other words, they're pointing us to something else and in many ways the important thing is not so much the miracle, but the thing that is being pointed towards.

And what they're doing is pointing us to the identity of Jesus. They're showing us who Jesus is. And so in both of these miracles, we're seeing some of the key truths about Jesus's identity being revealed to us.

[17:41] I'm just gonna highlight three. There's probably more that we could say, but we can pick out three of the most important ones. We see Jesus's power. And so both miracles are miracles.

And that means that there's things that don't normally happen. And we are not in any way embarrassed about that. We're not saying that, oh yeah, it's perfectly normal for loaves to be multiplied or for wind and storms to be calmed.

We're saying that these things don't happen. They're miracles. And they can only happen if God intervenes because they are things that only God is capable of.

But that's exactly the point. Jesus is the Son of God. As John told us in 5:19, he says the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.

For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. Jesus has the power to do the works of God, to do what only God can do, because that's exactly who he is.

[18:49] They also emphasize Jesus's authority. And so in particular, we see in these miracles, Jesus exercising authority over the created order.

So bread and fish are multiplied. The sinkiness of the sea, not that that's a word, but you know what I mean, the sinkiness of the sea is overcome. And no one can do that to creation except the creator himself.

And again, that's exactly who Jesus is. John told us way back at the start of the Gospel, when referring to Jesus, that all things were made through him, without him was not anything made that was made.

And so you've got this great demonstration of the authority that belongs only to the creator of the universe. And then the third thing that we see powerfully here is fulfillment of the Old Testament. Fulfillment of the Old Testament. Now we'll say a little bit more about this week, because the discussion that follows from verse 22 onwards is talking all about that. I just want us to notice just now that the allusions to the Old Testament are very, very strong in this passage.

[20:00] So when you're reading through John 6, you are constantly getting pointed back to the Old Testament. In particular, you're getting pointed back to the Exodus. So when God took the Israelites out of Egypt, he had authority over the waters as the Red Sea parted, and as the Jordan

was stopped when they entered into the Promised Land.

And throughout their years of wandering in the wilderness, God provided them manna, bread from heaven, to provide for their daily needs. And the crowds recognize these connections.

They see that that's what's going on, because they say, they saw the sign that he'd done, and they say this indeed is the prophet who was coming into the world. And that's an allusion to something that Moses said, and which again ties us back to the Exodus.

Moses said in Deuteronomy 18:15, the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers. It is to him you shall listen.

And so the connections to the Old Testament are very, very strong, and as I said, we'll go over them a bit more next week. Here we see that the problem was that although they started to recognize that Jesus is the prophet that was to come, their expectations of that prophet were misguided.

[21 : 14] And as we've said many times, they thought that the Messiah, that the prophet who was to come, would lead a revolt against the Romans. And so you can imagine the situation. You've got Jesus standing there.

He's got 5,000 men in front of him. It's like, let's fight. Here's an army. Let's do it. And of course, Jesus is like, that's not why I'm here. So he withdraws by his own will.

He's got a way himself to a mountain. What I want us to see in all of that, is that in these miracles, Jesus is revealing to us who he is.

He is God the Son. And as God the Son, he is fulfilling all the promises of the Old Testament. He has authority over creation.

And he is the one who has unmatched power. But the absolutely amazing thing about Jesus, is that he is using all of that power, and all of that authority, so that you can be satisfied and safe.

[22 : 21] So we don't need to have that or. We can change it to an end. The feeding of the 5,000 is pointing us to the fact that Jesus will satisfy our deepest needs.

And that's not primarily physical needs. The physical feeding here is a sign pointing towards the spiritual feeding that Jesus gives to us.

Because spiritually, we are all hungry. Now when I say spiritual, I don't mean like mystical and weird like that. What I mean is the fact that we all hunger for stuff that is non-physical.

And so I think every single human being would agree that just physical stuff is not enough for us.

There's non-physical stuff that we value and that are fundamental to who we are.

So we hunger for truth. We hunger for answers. We hunger for purpose in life. We hunger for a community that we can be part of with friends.

[23 : 23] We hunger for joy. We hunger for justice. And above all, we hunger for love. These are all non-physical realities. These are all spiritual realities and we hunger for them.

Jesus will give it all to you. Jesus gives us truth about our origins, about our destiny.

Jesus gives us answers to the questions that we have about life and reality and meaning. Jesus gives us purpose so that we can go into this week of our lives with someone amazing with us and with something amazing to live for.

Jesus gives us a community where we can come into a family of brothers and sisters that doesn't just extend across our community, it extends across the world, it actually extends across history.

Where we are part of something amazing, all united in Jesus.

Jesus gives us justice. He is the one who will call every injustice to account when he returns as judge and he will give you love.

[24 : 28] Love that I cannot describe and love that nothing else can match. The feeding of the 5000 is pointing us to the fact that Jesus will satisfy our deepest needs.

The walking on the water is pointing us to the fact that Jesus will rescue us from the greatest danger that we face. He's come to save us from sin. He's come to rescue us from a path that leads to death.

He's come to give us eternal life. He's come to give us unshakable security. He gives us a peace that passes all understanding.

A peace that's greater than anything that I can describe. And is that not what we long for? We long to be safe.

We long for the people that we love to be safe. The elderly people who we know and love and cherish and who we know are in the final chapters of their lives.

[25 : 35] The young children that we are raising up and who are so precious to us and all our family and friends who are kind of in the middle of life as we blast on together, we want them to be safe.

We want to be safe ourselves. We want them to be safe. We long for hope in the face of death. Jesus has come to give it to you. Jesus has come to give you that safety.

And all of that means that you don't need to make a trade-off between being satisfied and being safe. In Jesus you'll find satisfaction that nothing else can match.

It's absolutely brilliant knowing and following Jesus. And in Jesus you will find safety that will never end and that nothing can threaten.

He's come to provide for your every need. He's come to protect you from every danger. Now, we get a foretaste of that now in our lives as followers of Jesus. Ultimately, we'll know the fullness of it in the new creation.

[26 : 45] But I want us to finish by noticing that the most incredible thing of all is this. That in order for that satisfaction and safety to be possible, Jesus had to be emptied and Jesus had to be exposed.

And that's what John's Gospel is moving us towards. All these signs and discussions and confrontations and everything that we're reading about in these chapters, they're all leading towards something.

They're all leading towards the cross. That's the great climax of John's Gospel. It's the great climax of Jesus' mission. And on that cross, Jesus was utterly emptied.

And so he faced horrific injustice. He had no answers. He experienced total isolation and abandonment.

He was deserted by his friends. He was mocked by the people he came to save. And above all, he was cut off, cut off from his father's love. He was emptied of all the things that give us satisfaction.

[28 : 01] And on the cross, Jesus was totally exposed. So he was the one placed in mortal danger. He experienced awful physical pain.

He experienced desperate emotional anguish. He fell under the wrath of God. He was exposed to death itself.

And it was all so that you can be satisfied in him. And so that you can be safe in him.

That choice, satisfied or safe, is one that so many people think that they have to make. And every time they choose one or the other, it's leading them away from Jesus.

Because Jesus didn't come to give you the choice. He came to give you both. And all he asks is to do is trust in him.

[29 : 01] Amen.