

Where's the Rum Gone? The King and the Crowd

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 February 2018

Preacher: Matthew Todd

[0 : 00] John chapter 6 verse 1. John chapter 6 verse 1.

Jesus said, Make the people sit down. There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down. About 5,000 men were there. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted.

He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, Gather the pieces that were left over. Let nothing be wasted.

So they gathered them and filled 12 baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world.

Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum.

[1 : 55] By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing, and the waters grew rough. When they had rolled about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water, and they were frightened.

But he said to them, It is I. Don't be afraid. Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading. Good evening. I'm Matthew Todd.

I'm a ministry trainee here at St. Silas. Let me pray for us. Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the privilege of being able to study it together.

And I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts will be acceptable to you tonight. In Jesus' name, amen. Well, I don't know if you've seen the Disney film The Pirates of the Caribbean.

There's a great scene in that where Captain Jack Sparrow and Miss Elizabeth Swan are marooned on a desert island, which has previously been used by rum runners. And Jack awakes with a dreadful hangover to discover that Elizabeth is burning all the rum.

[3 : 20] If you've seen the scene, this will make sense. But Jack Sparrow runs up to Elizabeth and starts saying, Why are you burning the rum and all that?

And he's kind of getting quite agitated about this. And Elizabeth answers, Yes, the rum is gone. And Jack Sparrow says, Why is the rum gone?

And she says, One, because it's a vile drink that turns even the most respectable men into complete scoundrels. Two, that signal is over a thousand feet high. The entire Royal Navy is out looking for me.

Do you really think there's even the slightest chance that they won't see it? And Jack Sparrow answers, But why is the rum gone? So the crowd in these stories we've just heard actually has quite a lot in common with Jack in his inebriated state in terms of their ability to miss the point.

There's three headings in your service sheet, which is simply a feast fit for a king, a crowd not fit for the king, and the king of creation. And that's kind of what we're going to be looking at today.

[4 : 22] So first we're going to be thinking about the feast, a feast fit for a king. The people following Jesus are hungry for more miracles and signs, but not necessarily for the eternal truth that he's revealing.

The similarities of this miracle, the feeding of 5,000 with the children of Israel after the Exodus, surely couldn't have been missed. Gathering around a mountain, the lack of food, the manna from heaven, and they gather 12 baskets of leftovers, one for each tribe.

Later in the passage, would back this up, would suggest that they are well aware of these kind of similarities, and yet they totally missed the point. If you just skip ahead, I know this is slightly illegal, but skip ahead to 630, which is not actually in my passage.

But they asked him, What sign then will you give us that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness. As it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat.

Are they stupid? This is the same crowd that he's just fed, 5,000 of them. And they're saying, Go on then, show us a sign. What exactly are they looking for? And they describe the very sign that they want, and it's the sign that he's just done.

[5 : 40] Furthermore, there's remarkable parallels with the miracle with Psalm 23. He makes me lie down in green pastures. You know that slightly random verse about there being much grass.

In other Gospels, it specifies green grass. Set a feast in the presence of my foes. My cup overflows. There was abundant leftovers.

Jesus is establishing himself as David's lord and shepherd, and as a consequence, the lord and shepherd of his people. But here's the thing. Jesus receives the food, which he then divides between 5,000, from a young boy.

And this is one of the first big clues that Jesus has a different ultimate outcome in mind from the crowd. Children had no status or position in Jewish society. There was a first-century rabbi that wrote a list of things that you were not to do if you were seeking to become wise.

And among that list was chattering with children. It wasn't considered a very normal nor wise thing to be associating with children, really.

[6 : 47] But there's an uncomfortable message there for the heroes. Jesus is demonstrating not only his great power, but also his ability and desire to work through people from the greatest to the least.

And this is particularly uncomfortable for the established authorities because Jesus continues to teach that the kingdom of heaven turns the world and its ways and its expectations upside down. Unfortunately, this is not the king the crowd are looking for. Back to Jack Sparrow. It transpires that upon rescue, Captain Jack Sparrow was destined to stand trial and most likely hang on account of him being a pirate.

His seemingly innocuous question, why is the rum gone, was perhaps not such a silly question after all. If his plan was to drink himself into an early grave whilst wooing his female companion, then that question made perfect sense because rescue was the last thing that he wanted.

I think we're always in danger of missing the relevance of Bible stories either because we're too harsh on the characters or too lenient. We are too harsh on the crowd if we believe that they were totally clueless as to what Jesus was doing, that they refused to accept that they had experienced a miracle, or even that they greatly respected and admired Jesus.

[8 : 11] But we are too lenient if we do not see that there was a fundamental heart problem evident in their response. It feels harsh and unfair to suggest that we or our fellow Christians can still be missing the point when we know our Bibles, we believe that God hears and answers prayer, and we sing our worship to Jesus every week.

But I think if we search our hearts, we find that there are places that are not yet surrendered where we require Jesus to fit our expectations, to tread softly on our pride and selfishness, to back off when it gets too painful, or to wait until we are ready.

And perhaps rather than asking how we can be rescued, we are more likely to be asking, why is the rum gone? This develops quite clearly that the crowd is not fit for the king.

The crowd collectively continue to miss the point, and they see Jesus' power as something to be exploited. They recognize him as the promised prophet, if you see there in verse 14, but they don't understand how he will save them.

5,000 is a huge crowd. John emphasizes 5,000 men, so that's not including the women, and clearly children. But the point is, if Jesus had said, the time's at hand, arm yourselves, march with me to Jerusalem, those 5,000 men would likely have grabbed their pitchforks, gathered the zealots, and to be honest, history might have taken a very different turn.

[9 : 52] You see, 5,000 is a number of military significance. Until the middle of the first century, a Roman legion was made up of 10 cohorts, and each cohort had 500 men. Jesus has been offered a legion.

And, needless to say, the mass hysteria, or the military, was not what Jesus was seeking. And he dedicates most of his time from now on to more private teaching.

Crowds can be tricky. I can't help but find myself, find the crowd mentality somewhat amusing. When I worked with large choirs, I would frequently have experiences where I'd ask people to move, usually when you're doing a concert and you need everybody to be lined up properly or ask them to follow a particular simple instruction, and people just stare at you blankly, or they point-blank ignore you in a way that they wouldn't dream of doing if you'd asked them individually. Being in a crowd dampens our sense of personal responsibility and simultaneously increases our collective confidence. In short, we behave like sheep, aimlessly following the leader in comfortable oblivion.

Anyone who's had to direct large groups of children knows how extreme this can get, with otherwise responsible youngsters going rogue, drifting across busy roads, ignoring instructions, and sometimes going a bit wild with the excitement.

[11:19] We need to be careful. Churches, Christian conferences, missions, usually all crowds, as well as being aware of the dangers of rejecting personal responsibility and acting out of character due to the boost in collective confidence, we need to take the lesson of the crowd to heart.

It's easy to hear Jesus' words, be fired up with zeal and enthusiasm, and then march off towards a righteous cause which Jesus himself wants no part in.

We have the immense privilege of God's living word to guide us. Whenever we act as a crowd, we must be sure that it's the Bible and not mass hysteria which is guiding our actions.

Let's think about Jesus being the king of creation for a moment. So let's be clear. Here, Jesus chose not to comply with the crowd, but not because their vision was too big for him, but because both their diagnosis of the problem and their imagined solution was far too small.

Jesus has come to deal with the root of all the world's problems. He's come to deal with the heart problem. Jesus appears to them walking on water.

[12:43] The sea in the Old Testament writings often symbolizes chaos and rebellion against God. In this creation story, the Spirit of God hovered above the deep. He divides chaos and order by separating the land and the sea.

In Noah, the flood symbolizes the chaos of sin covering the world. The crossing of the Jordan, they have to cross that chaotic water in order to reach the promised land.

Jonah, who heads for the sea as soon as he decides that he's going to disobey God. And indeed, Revelation 21, where there is no longer any sea. This is, by most scholars, agreed that it doesn't literally mean there's no longer any sea, but that chaos, that rebellion against God is gone.

Jesus walking on the water demonstrates his complete control over the physical world, which should be no surprise after his miracles. But it also symbolizes his complete control over the chaos of a creation in rebellion.

It is possible that the immediately, in verse 21, implies a miracle. Either way, the point is that Jesus' presence was all that was required to overcome the sea and reach their destination.

[14:03] The message should be clear. If our God is with us, who can stand against us? As we read in Romans 8, 31. And this is captured in Jesus' words to his disciples.

I am. Do not be afraid. The NIV translates this as... What's it?

Sorry. Doesn't translate it as I am, does it? It is I. It is I. Thank you. It is I. But if you take the actual literal Greek, it's ego, amy, which translates as I am or I exist, quite literally.

The same words that God uses to Moses in the burning bush. So you have the sense of two incredible truths being held in tension as God is walking towards them on the water.

The disciples respond with fear, and rightly so. Jesus says, I am. Ego, amy. Followed immediately by do not be afraid.

[15:20] He's the king, but he's a friend. He's God, but he's man. Maybe we need to be reminded that Jesus is one with God of the universe, and that we would do well to respond in fear and trembling.

Or perhaps we need to hear Jesus saying to us, don't be afraid, and be reminded of how far his love for us extends. Or maybe both.

It was a boy, based on a true story. We'll call him John. He had a medical condition, and his parents never told him what it was, but he became aware that he tired quicker than other children.

He couldn't compete effectively in sports, and he grew resentful and angry at life. John was 12 when he was in hospital for a minor operation to have a mole removed from his hand. He protested strongly.

Why did he need to go to hospital for a stupid operation that wouldn't solve anything? What was the point? What was the point in anything? There was a younger boy in the bed next to him. We'll call him Josh.

[16:29] Josh was full of life. Josh loved his parents and his friends. He made the nurses laugh and the doctors smile every day. Josh got talking to John.

What are you in for, John? Just my hand. No idea why I need a stupid operation for it. Do you like sports? No. I love football. I'm not much good, mind you, but I'm getting so much better now. I train every day, you know, and our team is on fire at the moment. You like computer games? No. Well, I guess. I bet. Don't you think it's amazing you can play with people all over the world now. I wonder what it'll be like in ten years.

As the days passed, John felt something changing. Something deep inside him which he'd buried his whole life was stirring. At first, he hastily forced it back down, but then he started to listen. It seemed to be saying that he'd been missing something, that maybe being angry with life didn't make so much sense after all.

All the while, there was something strange happening in the hospital. Why were they not doing the operation? The doctors hardly looked at his hand, but gave him all sorts of other tests. His parents started looking increasingly worried.

[17:33] One day they said it was time for the operation. They spent the day by his side, filled with deep concern. And it was time. John blinked several times and painfully opened his eyes.

His head was thumping and his body felt weak. He found the strength to turn his head and saw his parents at his side. He dragged his hand up to his eye. The mole was still there. It was never about your hand, John, said his mother quietly.

It was always about your heart. With a gasp, John heaved himself into a sitting position despite his parents' protest to take it easy. He looked down and saw a long, thin scar down his sternum. He looked to the bed beside him. It was empty. Where's Josh? His mother looked away. John's father took a breath.

He always knew John. He knew he didn't have long when he arrived and I'm afraid he's no longer with us. But that is why you're still alive.

[18:38] His mother handed him a card. It read simply, You have my heart, John. Please use it well. Love, Josh. Love, Josh. Jesus is the rightful king of our lives.

We are brought with a terrible price. He is Lord of creation and all seen and unseen powers. And we break the second commandment when we try to limit or contain Jesus to something with which we're familiar and comfortable with.

He's more powerful than we can comprehend, more wonderful than we can imagine, more knowledgeable than we can understand and so much more terrifying than we believe him to be. And yet, he's not come to condemn the world for rejecting him, but to save the world through the sacrifice of the cross.

He says to us, as to the disciples, it is I. Don't be afraid. How do we answer? Not yet, Lord.

My life is too chaotic for me to see clearly. I need some space to deal with the broken relationship with my parents or my spouse. I need to break my addiction to alcohol or pornography before I accept you or come back to you.

[19:55] I need to sort out my church first before I can be sure that you still care. Our best efforts can barely contain chaos, let alone defeat it.

Only Jesus can calm the storm. Are we willing to take him into our boat? Amen.