



Sermon Series by Season

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Vol. 1 Part A
Advent through Transfiguration

“The surprises of Christmas”
“Jesus’ miracles in John’s gospel”

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The purpose of this volume.

Churches are often vacant for long periods or are in locations where it is difficult to find pastors to fill the pulpit when they are vacant. This series of four books is my humble attempt to help vacant congregations. The sixty sermons, divided into four sections by the seasons, will give congregations an option on Sundays that it is hard to get a pastor. The sermons are arranged in series covering a specific section of scripture or topic. Some are meant to cover a season. Others will fill the long weeks between Pentecost and the beginning of Advent.

This is the first of four volumes of sermons that will cover the church year. The 60 sermons in the volumes can be used during the season indicated or as a sermon series at any time of the year. There is no cost to use these sermons and so I encourage you to freely use them with or without citation of authorship. God gave them as a gift to us at Bethany and we want to pass them on to you. Feel free to pass them on to others so that as many as possible may share in what the Lord has given all of us. You are also allowed to edit them to fit your specific location or your personal style of preaching. May the Lord bless you as you learn and grow from His word.

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Advent/ Christmas – The surprises of Christmas

We often think that we know every aspect of the Christmas story. However, each page contains details that would have surprised the ancient Jews and modern Christians. As we dig into the Christmas story, we see the great wisdom of our Lord in His plan for our salvation. We also transform Mary and Joseph into amazing people of faith instead of the cardboard cutouts in manger scenes. Even Simeon and the Wise Men are shown in a new light if we dig deep into the account. God specially chose the people of the Christmas story to accomplish what most men and women would never have been able to do. Each person has a lesson to teach us about our connection with the baby Jesus and how we receive the most from the Christmas story. The depth of this story shows the character and wisdom of God and the unique qualities of the people He chose to be part of the birth of His Son, Jesus. Dig deep into the stories and expect to be surprised by the actions of our God to bring us a Savior.

1. Born of a virgin

Isaiah 7:10-17

Big idea: Do you believe in the sign?

Isaiah 7:10-17 10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, 11 "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." 12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test." 13 Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. 15 He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. 16 But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. 17 The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah--he will bring the king of Assyria."

Christmas is a time of comfort.

More than any other time of the year, the Advent and Christmas seasons are times of comfort. The weather outside may be cold and snowy. Colds, flu, and pneumonia run rampant in our schools and workplaces. Yet, many look forward to being with family and sitting quietly by the fire. We think of Christmas as a time of happiness and good cheer. We gather our families together to share presents and for a special meal. We attend holiday concerts at school with the kids or in the church as the choir sings all our favorite Christmas carols. It gives us warm fuzzy feelings that we miss the rest of the year.

Plastered on street corners and in stores across the nation are words like peace, joy, and love, while secular Christmas songs, old and new, play to give us a festive feeling. Santa Claus is there for every child to reinforce that Christmas is a season of giving and good times. Yet, the real comfort and joy of Christmas come from somewhere else. The secular holiday has a warm fuzzy feeling that goes away with the January snows. Genuine comfort is based on a manger in Bethlehem and will last through the year. It is a sign of God's love and not man's wishes. Isaiah tells us that the virgin bears a son – Immanuel, which is “God with us”. Christmas reminds us that God is with us because He loves us and wants to build a special relationship with us.

A. Increasingly, people trust in man and not God v. 12 *But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test."*

The year is 735 BC, and the kingdom of Judah is reigned by the wicked king Ahaz. God has allowed his neighbors from all sides to attack him and destroy the cities of the realm. Rather than turning to the Lord, he turned to Assyria for protection and installed their gods in the Jerusalem temple. God sends Isaiah to tell the king that he doesn't need to fear his neighbors. God is willing to deliver Judah and will

even give a powerful sign to show that rescue will come to pass. Sadly, Ahaz wants no part of the Lord and refuses the sign. He will not be dependent on God. He can take care of his kingdom without God's help.

Increasingly, people trust in man-made things, not God. Governments offer programs, and businesses provide solutions even as they remove God from Christmas. Technology is their answer to all our problems, personally and as a nation. As a result, many don't feel they need God or the things that He offers. God still desires to come into people's lives, but there is no room. The church should be filled through the holidays, but churches will be half-empty. The "happy thoughts" of the season are supposed to overcome the gloom many have in this time of joy. But, like Ahaz, many still say to God, "thanks but no thanks. I got it covered."

B. A sign is given v. 14. *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

Ahaz has refused God's help, but God will not be pushed away. He promises a sign. A virgin in Ahaz's kingdom will conceive and bear a son. It will be a miracle, and everyone will know God can work the impossible, for God wants everyone to see He is still with His people even on days when the king is evil. The kings around them will not destroy Judah. God has made a promise to David and even to Adam and Eve that a Savior will come and will come from the line of David. This promise is fulfilled at Christmas. A descendant of this wicked Ahaz will save the world. The Virgin Mary will conceive and bear a son who will change everything.

And so the baby lying in the manger, born of the virgin, is God's sign that He has not forgotten us. The world may think it can save itself, but God knows man often brings only destruction as his solutions cause as much harm as good. No, the child is God's sign that when all those things are gone, this Savior will remain, and He will take care of His people. So God speaks loudly through the birth of the child, a simple message. "God loves you no matter how bad you get!" Here is God's sign that He will not forget us.

C. Deliverance is coming v. 16 *But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.*

God makes a promise of deliverance. The neighboring kings that had caused Ahaz so much trouble would be gone before the boy born of the virgin was 12 years old. In fact, within two years, the neighboring kings were conspiring against each other, and two were dead. The Northern Kingdom would be captured by Assyria when the boy was 12 and never be a problem for Judah again. God was letting His people know that He was in charge and that the troubles that they were facing would soon be gone. God cared about his people and would rescue them. The promise of deliverance was made, and the date was given. God would give them what they didn't think they needed.

The son in the manger is our true deliverance. Here is the Messiah who will die for his people to deliver them from sin. Those who come to his cross will find forgiveness and eternal life at the empty tomb. God is again in control and will bring the promised salvation. For the child is a gift of love. Just as God loved the Jews, God loved the whole world enough to give us His son. This gift is the comfort and joy we prepare for in Advent. Jesus came down to bring peace and deliverance. He came down to live with us and help us throughout our lives.

D. The child will be a dividing line v. 17 *The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah--he will bring the king of Assyria."*

Instead of trusting the Lord and turning to Him when Judah was delivered, Ahaz continued to trust Assyria for help. His solution would bring even greater trouble. The Assyrians would invade Judah and ravage the land so that food was scarce rather than offer help. The nation did not fall to Assyria but

suffered from them throughout the days of Ahaz. His son, Hezekiah, would finally turn to God and be saved once and for all from the Assyrians. He took the sign of God's love seriously and turned to the Lord when Assyria threatened to destroy Jerusalem. Faith would divide Father and son. It would bring victory to Hezekiah, not the misery of his father's unbelief.

The child in the manger is our dividing line. Those who reject the sign will find that they will have no help when times get rough. Instead, they will have to depend on their resources, friends, or the support the world can give. History has shown that it will not be enough. But, like Hezekiah, those who come to the child will find that the Lord will listen to their prayers. They will have a constant companion in Jesus, who will walk with them and care for them all their lives. He has everything we need to find joy and peace in life so that we have absolute comfort and joy in trying times.

The Christmas season is symbolic of the division.

Ironically, Christmas is still symbolic of the division in our world. Some people don't want to speak of Christmas. They want manger scenes and Christmas carols taken away from public places. They attempt to take Christ out of Christmas because they do not wish the sign in the manger. For them, Christmas is a time of comfort based on food, family, and football. It is to be a time of presents and parties. While all of those can be good, they do not bring genuine comfort. They cannot deal with the struggles of life. Those who depend on artificial comfort are just as doomed as Ahaz was when he trusted the Assyrians.

It is the child that brings genuine comfort. He is a sign of God's love and forgiveness. He guarantees our salvation and our days with God on earth and in heaven. We want to proclaim with our manger scene and Christmas carols that Jesus is the reason for the season. We want to put our hope in him. He is the one who will provide for us in these troubled times. He is the one we can lay all our burdens on, just as Hezekiah did, and find that God still does miracles. He is the one that must be at the center of our celebration. He alone brings joy and comfort.

I will trust in the sign and hold it close.

Many churches struggle with shrinking numbers and budgets. Many Christians face loneliness and problems through the holiday season. We can hope for programs, parties, and presents to lift our Spirits, or we can turn to God when He offers His help. God has given us a sign that He will help and rescue us from our troubles. As we move into the next year, we need to see the baby in the manger as a sign of God's care for us. There is nothing to come in the future that He can't handle and manage for us. We could use our logic, but that will fail. We could depend on governments and technology to bring a better future, but that only sometimes helps. The only sure way to find joy and comfort is in Jesus.

Comfort comes when we bow our knees to the Lord and spend time in Bible study and prayer as we look ahead to the future. It will be God's comfort and help that will move every congregation forward. Hold Isaiah's promise of the manger close to your heart, for it is a sign that God will be with us. ***Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel.*** The virgin has conceived, and we have a sign. Immanuel – God is with us. Hold Him close, and don't let Him go. He alone can bring hope, joy, and peace in troubled times. Amen.

2. Mary's faith is more important than her ability

Luke 1:26-38

Big idea: God does the unexpected with a woman of faith

Luke 1:26-38 26 In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." 29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. 31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." 34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. 37 For nothing is impossible with God." 38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Was there a better choice?

She was hardly the girl any human would have chosen. She was young, poor, and from Galilee. Located on a major trade route, Nazareth was filled with merchants and Roman soldiers. It was a cosmopolitan city and not the hub of piety and faith that Jerusalem was. Certainly, Jerusalem held a better choice than Mary. God could have chosen a more mature woman with a better family and heritage. Yet, God does the unexpected and chooses this teenager pledged to a poor carpenter to be the mother of the Messiah. God's ways are not always our ways.

Yet, as we shall see, this young girl has a faith that sets her apart. She doesn't laugh at God's calling like Sarah or doubt it like Zachariah. She is a model of faith, believing God can do the impossible because He says so. It is her faith that makes her the perfect mother for Jesus. As we listen to her story today, we need to consider the importance of faith if God will be able to do anything significant through us. A lack of faith limits God's choices more than any shortcoming in our ability or education. Those who trust God can do great things in His name.

God had a plan

A. She was a young virgin v. 27 *to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.*

For the birth of the savior, God needed a virgin. Mary was engaged to Joseph, but the text clarifies that they had not consummated the upcoming marriage. In Jewish custom, there was a waiting period of a year after engagement. It was to prove that the woman was not pregnant. Mary was in that waiting period. Engaged but still living in her father's house, she receives the announcement from the angel. Through her, the Messiah would be born as a man. The Messiah would be conceived by God and delivered after the usual 9-month period of human birth.

Jesus would be a man in every way but sin. It was part of God's plan. He would need to eat and sleep. He would make friends and feel the pain of rejection. He would experience everything that you and I experience except sin. He can relate to us in every way because He is one of us. Mary would be part of God's unexpected plan, for the Messiah would have her DNA and be her flesh and blood. God wanted the savior to be able to relate to us. He wanted to be able to understand firsthand our pains and troubles as we expressed them in prayer. He desired to walk among us and live in our shoes.

B. She was favored, but it would be hard v.28 *The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."*

It was the honor every Jewish girl wanted, but it would be hard. Many Jewish women wanted to be part of the plan of salvation. Mary was chosen by God and given that favor. She would know the joy of having a special relationship with Jesus as His mother. Mary would know what it was like to hold him as a child and comprehend this savior in a way that only a mother knows her child. She would have a hint of what He was to become from the words of the angel and people like Simeon. God gave her a place that no one else has ever had.

Yet, it would not be easy. Mary would flee to Egypt and travel back to Galilee while He was a child. She would face the disdain of many who thought she was a woman who couldn't wait for sex till after marriage. Worst, she would watch the crucifixion and see her son die. The honor of being the mother of Christ would give her joys that no one else will ever know and pains that none of us will ever have to bear. God was with her to bring her through it all. God makes tremendous promises about her child and the grace she will receive. God uniquely was with her.

C. The child was the Son of God v. 32 *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,*

Her son, Jesus, would be no ordinary child. No normal man could be our savior. Only God could take away our sins. In a few brief promises, Gabriel tells Mary that this child will fulfill the Old Testament and that her child will be God Himself. The savior had to be free from sin. No living man fits the bill. Only God was free from sin and could sacrifice himself for the world's sins. Jesus is the "Son of the Most High God." He is God and would be born with no trace of sin. He would be able to die for the sins of others because He had no sins of His own.

God had promised a savior to Adam and Eve centuries before Jesus' birth. Here would be the answer to that promise. Once Jesus died and rose on Easter, he would be able to rule over the church as not only the creator but also as the one who freed them from sin and Satan. As a good Jew who knew her Old Testament, Mary may have understood the significance of what the angel said more than we do. God was coming as the savior of man because only He was holy. God wanted His people to live with Him in heaven and was willing to make the sacrifice so that it could happen.

D. She would be part of a miracle. 35 *The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*

She understood what God was proposing but was unsure how God would do it. The question was humble, and she asked what she needed to do, not doubting that God could do His part. It was a question of faith. She knew that God was proposing a miracle and that she would be involved. A miracle did occur. The Holy Spirit came upon her, and she gave birth to the God-man Jesus. Like other miracles, we don't know how God did it. We know that it is true in the same way we know God created the world in six days or covered the world with a great flood.

God did the unexpected because no ordinary action would create the necessary solution. Humanity did not need another King David to bring peace as the Jews expected. They required a God-man who was perfect and free from sin but who could also die on the cross in our place. It was the ideal solution to a very perplexing problem. Yet, it was something that no one could have guessed. Only a God with all wisdom could figure it out. Only a God with all power could make it come true. Mary sensed both and put her faith in God's promises.

Faith triumphs

Faith allows God's wisdom v.38 *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.*

It is faith that allows God's wisdom to succeed. Marvel at the faith of Mary as she steps forward to be part of an impossible plan. She believed the angel's words even though she understood what would happen less than we do today. She believed in God's wisdom and power. For her, it was a step into the unknown. What would it mean to be the mother of the Messiah? How would Joseph, her fiancé feel about being part of the plan? What kind of life would they lead, and what kind of man would her son be? All of that was in the future, and she said yes without fully understanding just because she trusted God.

Sometimes we have to say yes to God when we are unsure what the future will bring. God calls us to serve in the church. God calls us to share His gospel with friends or family. A lot could go wrong, but we must trust the Lord. We need to believe that God will work even through hardship. God works through people most of the time. Yes, He can always do a miracle unannounced. Typically, our Lord works through Christians to improve their world or minister to the sick person. He works through us, and our faith or lack of trust will determine whether things are successful.

What if she had not had faith?

That begs the question, "What if Mary had not had the faith to accept the angel's words?" The simple answer is that the Lord would have chosen someone else. What if there wasn't anyone else? It could have been like the days of Jonah, who fled God, or Moses, who made excuses. The simple truth is that when people don't trust God, miracles don't happen. If church members don't trust the Lord enough to tell their friends and acquaintances about Jesus, the church won't grow. The world doesn't get better if God's people don't think to pray.

God works through His people. When they trust Him to do miracles, miracles happen because of their prayers and because they stepped forward as Mary did. God wanted to do the unexpected, and Mary's faith made her the perfect tool for God to work a miracle. Jesus had to be both man and God. He needed to be a man to die on the cross and God to be perfect so He could die for the sins of others. Mary's faith allowed the miracle of Christmas to happen. It also allowed her to raise the Messiah and let Him be our savior. May the Lord help us to have such faith and do His will. Amen.

3. The responsibility of the gift for Joseph

Matt 1:18-25

Big idea: Great gifts often have a responsibility that comes with them.

Matthew 1:18-25 18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. 20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us." 24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

The gift may bring troubling moments before the blessing.

A. Gifts from God don't always come easy.

We think of every gift as a joyful event that causes no problems and brings happiness. Unfortunately, it doesn't always work that way. Great gifts often have responsibilities or challenges, even as you unwrap the gift. Children are gifts from God that come with a lifetime of obligations. A boat or new car you get for Christmas will have a list of responsibilities before the newness of the gift wears off. Even a new job may seem like a gift from heaven at first, but it can quickly become the worst thing ever happening to you as you deal with new challenges. In many situations, the euphoria of this recent gift in your life soon becomes overwhelming. God gave Joseph great honor as he was chosen to be the father of Jesus. Unfortunately, it was also a responsibility few of us would be ready to handle.

Somehow, we think God's gifts just come to us without obligations. We say "thank you" and enjoy what we have received without a second thought. They often don't come that way. They will bring great blessings and challenges that require obedience and responsibility. Many Jews wished to be the father or mother of the Messiah and have the honor of that special relationship with God. Hardships often come with responsibility. Joseph's life reminds us that great blessings require obedience and may bring problems or pain as well as joy.

B. A fearful beginning to a great story v. 18 *His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.*

God gave Joseph a gift like no gift ever offered before. Yet, it probably didn't seem that way at the time. He probably felt like it was the worst thing that had ever happened to him. His fiancé goes off to visit her cousin and comes back pregnant. What was he going to do? He can divorce her or have her stoned. No good Jewish boy would marry such a wicked woman. I can see Mary trying to tell him about the angel and the promise of God. It was more than anyone could believe. He thought that she was such a good Jewish girl.

Sometimes a seat on the church council or being in charge of a large project at work can seem overwhelming. How will I ever manage as outreach chairman or organize the million-dollar project at work? The task seems daunting, and we start in fear. Instead, we must realize that God chose us and will be with us. Like Joseph, we must take things one step at a time, trusting the Lord to help. God gave Joseph a special relationship with the Messiah. Who knows what benefits there will be when you take on a challenge for the Lord? Yes, there will be trials, but there will also be blessings.

With a gift comes responsibility.

A. Son of David: God chose you for great things v.20a. *But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David*

An angel comes in a dream and tells Joseph that God has chosen him for a particular task. The angel calls him the "son of David". No one else in the New Testament is given that title besides Jesus. It shows his lineage and his character. God called Joseph to do something great and gave Joseph everything needed to complete the task. The greatest gift is that He is a man of faith. Here is a man who will receive four messages from the Lord, and Joseph will obey them all. Here is the man who trusts God as he raises Jesus as his son. He will protect the Messiah from harm and raise the child in his home.

When God gives a gift, he gives all that is necessary to do the task that goes with it. God has prepared and chosen you. The mission may seem great, but God never chooses people to fail. Our first reaction should be to pray for direction and strength. God knows what we can do by His power. Let God direct you to teach, lead the congregation, and organize small groups or outreach events. God will be at your side to help you with the tasks He has given you. You were given this task for a purpose. Trust the Lord, and you will overcome the challenges and enjoy the benefits of your ministry.

B. God will help with the uncertainties of the future v.20b. *Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*

Life is more than a little scary for Joseph. There were a lot of things that could and did go wrong. For example, who wants to have their first child in a stable far from home? Who wants to have to flee for your life to Egypt because a crazy king wants to kill your baby? The gift had uncertainties. The angel told Joseph not to be afraid because God would be with him every step of the way. He would help them find shelter. God would warn Joseph in dreams and provide for their living expense with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The one thing that was certain about the blessing was God would provide.

There are a lot of times in life when we don't fully know what we are doing. A friend loses a loved one, and we don't know how to help. We take on a program at church, and everything seems to go wrong. There are days you live in fear. Turn to the Lord, and each can be a gift. God's hands will help you, as He is there taking care of the details. He provides what you need to accept the tasks He gives you without fear. Turn to the Lord in prayer; He will help you do things grander than yourself. You don't need to be afraid to serve. Be bold and have courage because no problem is too big for God.

C. The blessings may come with a bit of pain v.24b *and took Mary home as his wife.*

Just because God calls you to take on a task doesn't mean it will be easy. At the angel's command, Joseph takes Mary home and, with her, carries the shame. Everyone would think that this righteous man had committed adultery. People would think that Jesus had been conceived out of wedlock for the rest of Joseph's life. Just because it is God's will, doesn't mean it will be easy. He will be blessed by the magi and must flee the wicked Herod. God blessed Joseph with a return to Israel only to flee Herod's son. Here is an ordinary man having to protect the Messiah from evil kings and Satan's attacks. Yet, God was with Joseph, and the blessings were all realized.

There will be times when following God's plan will mean hardship. It may be as simple as the inconvenience of serving when you have other dreams or other needs. It may mean you try to help people only to have it blow up in your face as the people you try to help get angry at you. It may mean that a project goes differently than planned or that you find others quitting the project, so you must do more than your fair share. No one said that following the plan of the Lord will always be easy. Yet, God will be with you and guide you in your prayers and Bible study. Know that God will bring victory and blessings in the end. Trust God to make His plan and your ministry work, and don't give up before the benefits come.

Joseph trusts God and the Lord keeps His promise.

A. He obeyed the Lord v.24a. *When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him.*

So what does this all have to do with me? Look at Joseph. He got up and did what the Lord had told him to do. He didn't ask for signs like Zechariah and never seemed to doubt what the angel said. He puts aside his fears and obeys his God. When the Lord makes it clear that you or I should go in a particular direction, we must go. Pray about it and ask for strength. Search the scriptures and get more guidance. Then, go when you are confident that it is God's will. God will be with you.

God will not rebuke you for honest prayers. On the contrary, he rejoices when we come to him and ask for help with our fears. Our Lord wants us not to doubt him. He wants us to go forward so that He can walk beside us and you can be an essential part of His ministry. You may not be sure where the path will ultimately lead. Joseph didn't know about Bethlehem or Egypt or the cross. It doesn't matter. God knew, and Joseph trusted God to do the future work. We have to trust the Lord and follow Him. If we do, we will be blessed.

B. God delivers and walks with us v.23 *they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us.*

Look at the blessings that the Lord brought to Joseph. We often think of Mary in the Christmas story, but we should not forget Joseph. He was tasked with protecting the Messiah from a crazy king and all the hazards of life. He was one of only two people Jesus would ever call Father. And the blessings that came with the hardship cannot be underestimated. He had the chance to hold, love, and mentor Jesus, the son of God, in a way no one else did. He knew the heart of Jesus and took joy in his growth as a young man in ways only a father could.

When God calls you to take on his plan for you, remember that it is a gift. There will be hardships, but there will also be joys. There will be experiences you could have no other way than working at the side of God and other Christians and seeing miracles happen that you didn't expect. The gift has responsibilities. Jesus is not just a baby we get in life and can take it easy. He is a Lord who wants your life. Take the gift and accept whatever the Lord has in mind for you. You may be a teacher, a witness, or a leader. God has prepared you. Trust Him, and you will not fail. Amen

Luke 2:8-20 8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." 15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

4. Pass on what you have received

Luke 2:8-20

Big idea: Take the joy and give to others

Give and take

Christmas is the time of giving and receiving. You give to those you love, and they give gifts to you. Of course, you hope your gift will enhance their lives. You also hope you do better for someone else than the ugly sweater you got last year for Christmas. But what if you got a gift that you could share? What if you got a box of chocolates, and everyone expected you to share your chocolates around the room? How would it feel when half the gift was gone because you shared? Wouldn't it be nice if the box never had fewer chocolates, no matter how many you gave away?

In the text, the angels announce a special gift for the shepherds. They would receive a present of great joy that God had prepared for them and the world. They go into town, receive the gift, and then share it with everyone else. It was like sharing a box of chocolates with the village of Bethlehem. This kind of sharing is the essence of the gift of Christmas. Give what you have received. But unlike the box of chocolates, the gift of Jesus will not diminish as you give it away. God wants us to share Christmas. God wants you to frequently share so others can have Christmas love and peace.

The essence of the gift

A. A gift for the fearful – This is good news v. 10 *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of the great joy that will be for all the people.*

Have you ever seen an angel? Few have, but I can imagine the shepherds' fear when they saw the first one and then a great company of angels. God's presence brought fear throughout scripture, for everyone knew they were not holy enough to be in God's presence. Yet, this was an announcement of great joy. In the difficult time of Roman occupation and poverty, a new king was born. He would help His people calm their fears with healing and a perfect relationship with God. The shepherds were special since they would be with Jesus that night.

America often lives in fear. It is preached by media on the right and left. It is felt in higher prices and lost jobs. Politicians try to tell us everything is good and we should not be afraid, but the panic is widespread across America. Only the church sees things differently. For us, the savior has come, and we trust that He will care for us. Our God will punish evil, and the faithful will have what they need. The savior has come to us. And we place the future into His hands, trusting that He will not let things get too bad. We will not panic. We will live by faith.

B. The savior is a gift for the outcast v. 11. *Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you;*

The gift comes to the outcasts. Being a shepherd in Jesus' day was not a job that people aspired to or went to college to get. A shepherd smelled of sheep and seldom had time to bathe. It was a 24/7 job that often went to the youngest son (like David in the OT) or people who just liked to be alone. The religious leaders hated shepherds because their jobs kept them from worshipping the Lord in the temple or their local synagogue. Townspeople were suspicious of them and avoided them because of the smell and sometimes stole from others. Nobody liked a smelly shepherd.

Christmas is the time many feel like an outcast. You are the only sane one in a family of oddballs who expect you to come to dinner and put up with the madness. You live miles away from your family because you took a job miles from home. You might also feel awkward talking about Jesus and values in a society that thinks God is bad and crime is good. The good news is that Jesus has come for all people. Here is the one who comes and helps us put our lives back together. He forgives my past and gives me courage and character in the present. He will also give me hope for the future. He never turns anyone away. He has come to save us all.

C. A gift for the ordinary – He lies in a manger v. 12 *This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.*

Sometimes we don't feel special. Yet, God is wrapped up in the ordinary so everyone can have him. Just think about it. If Jesus had been born in an inn as we might have wished, the shepherds could not have gone and seen him. No innkeeper would let smelly, dirty shepherds into his home. Yet, the stable was a place everyone could visit. Shepherds, townspeople, and even the city mayor could come and see the child and talk to his parents. People could talk about the message that the angel had given. Jesus was within reach for them. God wanted ordinary people to have the gift, too.

Many things about the Christmas season are out of reach for us. I look at the commercials for luxuries that I wish I could get my wife or exotic places I would love to visit just once. So many are out of reach. I am not poor. I am just ordinary and not in the same league as CEOs, baseball players, or movie stars. Yet, I can come to the manger. I can come to see this gift for myself. I can be near my Jesus as I read the Bible and talk to him in prayer. My God is accessible, for He has come not just for the rich or famous. He has come to bring me joy.

D. A gift when you feel hopeless – He brings real peace v. 14 *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.*

Yet when times are hopeless, I need this gift the most. Desperate describes the mood of the people in ancient Judah. Life was difficult as most people barely made enough to feed their families and pay taxes. Luxury was not even in their vocabulary. Nevertheless, the angels pronounced peace to men. To the Jew, that was not just the opposite of war. It was “Shalom” which meant that life was going to be good in all its parts. Shalom peace was when all the segments of your life worked together, and stress was gone. It was a time of hope and happiness. God was there.

Our society has lost its hope. Kids are not even working because they see no reason. The elderly fear the future and think they will die sooner or later from some illness. Jesus wants to be the hope that we are missing. He wants to be our reason to look forward to the future and be our release from stress. As we pray each day, we can give him all the things that stress us out and cause us to worry. As we live in Bible study and prayer time, he will provide us Shalom so that our present and future are peaceful. We live in confidence because Jesus is at our side.

Share the joy – others need the joy, too v.17 *When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.*

The shepherds didn't just sneak out of town like you might have thought they would. No, these smelly guys went into town and made sure that others knew the gift they had just found. They shared the gift because others who felt like outcasts or hopeless like them needed it too. Surrounding every active Christian are a handful of people who need this gift. As a congregation, we do that with choir concerts and community service that touch people's hearts. We give away food to the community and open our church for worship through advent.

My challenge for you is to tell just one person or family about the gift God gave you. Tell them how your life would be less joyful if you couldn't worship Jesus. Tell them one thing that Jesus does in your life to make it better. Let them know that Jesus came to be their gift as well. He is the gift that keeps on giving. He is the gift that never diminishes when you give Him to others. Receive the gift of the Christ child this morning but give Him away, too. Let others feel His hope and acceptance by sharing this present with them.

5. Embrace the gift

Luke 2:21-38

Big idea: Embrace the baby and do not fear what will come

Luke 2:21-38 21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. 22 When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), 24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." 33 The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." 36 There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

The future has come

He was waiting every day v. 25. *Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.*

Simon was old and had seen a lot of things in life. Yet, he was a man of faith who must have had a strong walk with the Lord. He is a man of hope who looked forward to the Lord's promises in a harsh and troubled world. God was his hope, and the child was the gift that changed everything. Somehow the Lord had revealed to Simeon that he would see the Messiah. Somehow the Spirit had directed him that this was the day he would embrace history and make it his own. So many children had come to be purified. God would lead Simeon to the Messiah in their midst.

Christmas is past, and now we can't wait to embrace Jesus in our lives. God has also shown us that the whole world's future depends on this child whom we know will teach the nation and then go to the cross. God has shown us that the child who has come is our hope and future. January is coming with the cold and snow, but nothing is as bleak as a time without hope. We may feel like life has taken a turn for the worst. We can wonder what tomorrow will bring. A better way is to look to the child, ask what God's plan is for our future, and embrace the child and all He brings.

Yet we sometimes fear his coming as well.

Sadly, many people fear the coming of this gift. Up till now, all the songs of Christmas sounded positive, as the Messiah will make all things right. Simeon hints at the challenges of the Messiah's ministry. He looks to the rejection, the crucifixion, and the death of Jesus. Some things will be hard to handle and will hurt those who love Jesus. Trials still drive people away from God. They want an easy religion without pain. They are disappointed when Christians suffer, and life is not easy. Sadly, things don't always turn out right.

Faith can cause division in families as people argue about the meaning of Jesus. The child can cause us problems as we see what is right and wrong and find that our life needs to change. The child will not be accepted by all and may alienate us from people we have known for a long time. The temptation for some is to back away from the child. We don't speak about him lest we offend others. We distance ourselves from Jesus because we want to keep our friends. Yet, Jesus is greater than all the things we fear. Today, we look at reasons to embrace the child all our lives.

What embracing the baby can bring to your life.

A. A life changer v.32 *"a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."*

As Simeon picks up the child, he realizes that this child is a life changer. That day, many other children in the temple will make a difference in people's lives. Some will be rabbis, and some will someday be great fathers or mothers. This child will change the future of the whole world, not just a few. He will bring the opportunity of salvation to all men. The gentiles that have felt excluded from grace will come into the kingdom through the sacrifice of this child. The Jews who have waited for the Messiah will find salvation and be a blessing to the world's people.

The child is still a life changer. He brings forgiveness and healing when we are locked in guilt or wrestling with problems in life. He gives gifts and ministry so that we can have purpose and character. Those who have the child have a different life than those who do not notice him. Jesus is a child that brings genuine joy and gives us value others do not have. Those who have him deep in their life will find that they will be different in ten years because of him. Jesus will change their present and their future.

B. The watershed of success v.34 *This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be spoken against,*

The child will have a watershed effect on people. In his lifetime, tax collectors like Matthew and men like the thief on the cross would rise from the ash heap. People like many Pharisees or political leaders like Pilate and Herod would fall into oblivion. There is no neutral ground with Jesus. People will either joyfully accept him or reject him. It will determine their fate in life. They will rise with His hope and peace or reject Him and find that their life will spiral downward and ultimately face the trials of hell.

While people don't want to hear the truth in our society, and the church is often labeled judgmental because of this watershed, it doesn't make it any less accurate. Jesus divides humanity into the saved and blessed or the lost and cursed. He is the reason for success or failure in life and eternity. The greatest factor in whether people have great marriages and children is how close they are to Jesus. Active Christians find help with stress in bible study and prayer. They form deep friendships with other Christians, and life has a purpose for those involved in their church. Jesus will genuinely determine the course of your life.

C. A reason people will reject you v.35. *so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."*

Jesus will also determine how people see you. Jesus was considered an enemy of the organized church during his life. The Pharisees and Sadducees spoke against him and ultimately conspired to have him crucified on the cross. Why did they hate him so much? Was it because he healed people or talked to the lowliest classes of the people? No, it was that he dared to speak the truth about God. He told people things that they didn't want to hear. He told them that piety meant little and that God would not be ignored.

Realize that your faith will have a downside. If you tell people God's truth or live like you believe what Jesus said, there will be people who will not like it. Anyone who speaks the truth about alternate lifestyles or speaks out about selfish lifestyles can expect criticism. Friends and family will also not be happy if you put Jesus first. Tell the soccer team that your kid will not play on Sunday morning, or tell your boss that you will not be at work on a particular project till after church on Sunday, and you will be off the team and out of a job. Jesus can be inconvenient.

The lesson of Simeon

Take time to hold him in your arms v.28 *Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying*

The baby was important to Simeon. Simeon had been waiting for the baby Jesus and rushed across the temple to hold up the child. He knew the child was a game changer who brought blessings to those who held him and believed. He could not wait to see the child and have Him as his own. So why is that important for you? The answer is that holding back from the baby deprives you of blessings. Is there anything else you can do on Sunday morning that will affect your life as much ten years from now or provide as many blessings as possible or help in life?

I know you are busy, and Sunday Bible classes or personal devotions take time. Some of us walk by the baby Jesus because we are afraid of the reactions that we get from others if we are "too Christian." Sadly, the baby gets lost in the noise of work, raising kids, and even just having a life. Yet, who are you hurting? You hurt yourself and those whom you love. Faith impacts your family and friends more than you think. So, if you are to resolve for the new year, getting closer to Jesus is an excellent commitment to make.

Make sure others notice him, too v.38. *She gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*

When Simeon started singing about the child, the whole place stopped and took notice. The temple was noisy and crowded, but Simeon was over the top. People noticed. One of them was Anna, an 84-year-old prophetess who also gave thanks to the child. Then Anna did something remarkable. She went out and told others that this child was different. He was the one that all the Jews had been waiting for centuries. She told her friends about what the Messiah would do for the world. Others wouldn't have noticed the baby without her.

Christmas is over, and people will soon forget about the baby unless you tell them about what he is doing in your life. They will talk about the latest reality show loser, or the hurricane hitting the gulf coast. None of those things change your life or theirs like Jesus. Tell them about the child, so they see the change he can bring to their life. He is not an ordinary child. He is the watershed of success. Those who have him will find blessings that others will miss. Those who reject him will miss the greatest thing that could ever happen to them.

6. The wise men teach us how to worship

Matt 2:1-12

Big idea: Worship is personal contact with God that brings hope to life.

Matthew 2:1-12 1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel." 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Queen Protocols

It has been fascinating watching the articles about English royalty. Here are a few protocols when you are in the king or queen's presence. First, you must curtsey or bow your head when you greet them. Second, you must call them your majesty and be early, for the royal does not want to wait for you. Third, never touch the queen like Michelle Obama and the Canadian prime minister did. Finally, speak only when spoken to and do not leave a function before the queen.

Breaking one of these rules will bring consequences. Royals are as far above you as the sky is from the earth. He or she represents Britain personally and deserves your respect. Looking carefully at recent news stories, you will see how people like Prince Harry and Meghan Markle have paid for breaking the rules. If the queen deserves respect, shouldn't Jesus get respect as well? Sadly, Christians want to always be friendly with Jesus and expect Jesus to conform to them. The wise men show us some basic protocols about worship and teach us how to get the most out of our relationship with Jesus.

Worship Protocols

A Seek to know Him v.2 *"Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."*

The wise men sought out Jesus. They may have come to Herod, but I picture them asking around town first. They didn't expect the king to go to them in Babylon. They came to Him so that they could meet him and know him. What a change we find among some Christians today. They expect God to come and seek them out in their busy lives and explain himself to them. They often expect Jesus to adapt to them and give them gifts in life if they are to believe in Him. If He doesn't meet their terms, they dismiss him and speak poorly about our Lord.

Wise people seek Jesus in three ways. They look around in nature and see his majesty and power expressed in all that they see. They also open the scriptures to learn what God says about himself. Finally, they seek him out daily in word and prayer so that they can have a personal relationship with Him. None of this should be a burden. You want to bring His royalty into your life and will experience all the blessings of being close to the king. Like the magi, being in his presence is a time of joy. Yet, know that

you must seek him, not expect him to come to you on your terms. Making Jesus come to you is not worship.

B. Realize that not everyone will understand v.3 *When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.*

The wise men were probably surprised at the response that they got in Jerusalem. Herod was disturbed because the new king would take away his throne. The people feared the chaos in their settled world and the divisions that a new king might bring. How did these wise men know about Jesus? It is possible that the magi were of Jewish descent from the area of Babylon. The scripture had passed down God's message from the times of Daniel and Ezekiel. For these foreign dignitaries to recognize a new king would have seemed disastrous for Herod and his court.

Odd how the presence of Jesus still does not always soothe or comfort people. When we mention Jesus, we find people dismiss Him because He does not fit their mold of a leader or because His moral standards are too strict. Many don't want to be told how to live their lives by anyone. Others don't think that they need a king. Like some in Britain today, they don't see the advantage of royalty. They are not willing to bow to Jesus or think of him as being better than they are. So we should be surprised that only some have enthusiasm for our king like we do.

C. Bow down and honor your superior v. 11a. *On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.*

When they saw the child, they did something no one had done before. These dignitaries of the east bowed before Jesus and honored him as superior to themselves. The shepherds, Simeon, and Anna had rejoiced to God that Jesus was born but did not treat Him as their king. It was only gentiles that first declared his royalty. We look around the manger scene and ask "where was Herod or any of the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jerusalem"? No one could be bothered to come the five or six miles to Bethlehem. God had snubbed them and revealed the king to the gentiles, not them, so they would not bow before this false Messiah.

Knowledge of the scripture still does not guarantee that your heart is right with God. So many people in our nation know about Jesus. They often know the basic facts about Christmas or Easter but will not bow before Him and let Jesus be their lord. They want Jesus to serve them as equals. The worship in some churches seeks to entertain people and not to bow before Jesus. If you are going to worship Him, you need to admit that He is superior to you, and realize that it is an honor to be in his presence and to receive his blessing.

D Make offerings and sacrifices for Him v. 11b. *Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.*

The magi did not come empty-handed. They brought gifts. The sacrifice these men made to be with Jesus was enormous. The expense of traveling thousands of miles with a large entourage must have been tremendous. Bringing three gifts fit for a king cost a pretty penny as well. That is what you do when you are meeting a king. You bring gifts to honor and show him that He has great value to you. Jesus is so important that you are willing to make sacrifices for Him to honor him and show others his worth.

Worship involves sacrifice because you are showing that Jesus is worth it. He is worth your time to be in worship and to seek him out in Bible study and prayer. He is worth your offerings so His ministry can continue in this place and in other areas where we help others in Jesus' name. Worship is not just about us. It is about Him and showing the world that Jesus has value and that there are blessings that we receive just because we are in his presence regularly. We know what we are worth to him and want to show the world what He is worth to us.

The wise honor Jesus for who He is

The wise men traveled thousands of miles to come and see Jesus. They responded with joy, worship, and gifts when they found Him. They realized they had met someone special and felt honored to be in his presence. The sacrifice was nothing compared to the blessing. If you talk to many today, worship is evaluated by what we receive from Him, not the honor we give him. Worship is often about entertainment, messages aimed at solving our problems, and an experience that makes us feel good. Where is the Jesus in that?

Worship is the opportunity to meet royalty and should be no less respectful than if we were meeting the king or a great US President. We bow to one who is superior in every way over us. We offer ourselves because this is our Redeemer who has brought so much to our lives. We seek to know Him better in a way that no one gets to know the British monarch. Jesus humbles himself so that we can know him. We have so much peace and help if we are near him daily. We have character and different life as well. Odd, but those who bow before Jesus receive more than they could ever give him.

Worship gives meaning to life.

Here is a definition I found and like about worship. “Worship is personal contact with one who brings meaning and purpose to our lives.” As we bow before Him, we receive strength and wisdom to lead lives that matter and are filled with joy. So why would anyone want Jesus to come down and cater to their life? Why not come to Him in worship and let Him lift you to the possibilities that only he can give? Why not offer yourself to him so that He can make something special for your and my lives?

So many people in our world wander through life expecting Jesus to make broken lives work according to their plan. Yet, wise men still seek Jesus. They offer themselves as servants of the king and know that the king has a real plan for their lives and world. Coming to Jesus is not a sacrifice. It is an opportunity to be part of something bigger than yourself, wiser than you could conceive, and filled with His resources and love every day of your life. Worship is about Him, but it brings benefits to us.

Epiphany – Jesus’s miracles in the gospel of John

The season of Epiphany begins with the manifestation of Jesus’ nature to the Wise Men and continues for up to eight Sundays as we see the true nature of Jesus. The gospel writer John chose to show the character and unique qualities of Jesus through the “sign” miracles. Some of these miracles are found in other gospels, but many are unique to John’s gospel. As we look beneath the surface, we will see that each has a lesson to teach us about Christian living and would manifest a trait of our savior. Each demonstrates the power of Jesus over nature, illness, or death but also is meant to teach us so that our faith can grow. In examining each miracle, we will focus on the deeper meaning in each account and the qualities of Jesus that it demonstrates to us.

1. Water to wine – turn to Jesus for quality

John 2:1-11

Big Idea: Come to Jesus if you want quality in your life

John 2:1-11 1 On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, 2 and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." 4 "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. 8 Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, 9 and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside 10 and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink, but you have saved the best till now." 11 This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

Quality control

Sometimes it takes work to find things made with quality. We buy something only to find that it faces a recall or breaks the first time we use it. The things we buy don't last like they used to. I remember when a refrigerator lasted 25 years, but not any longer. In this miracle, we see God's quality. It was early in Jesus' ministry, and this may have been his first miracle. You would expect it to be something other than His best work. Most of us have to grow before show quality in our work. I remember that my first sermon could have been better, and the first fix-it project I did around the house needed to be fixed before we could use it. Yet, Jesus had quality from the very beginning.

We find Jesus in the town of Cana, which is about 9 miles north of Nazareth. Since Mary is so involved in the wedding, it may be the wedding of a cousin of Jesus or another family member. The family invited Jesus and his disciples to the weeklong feast since often the whole town was invited to a wedding. The wine runs out at this wedding due to poor planning or too many guests. Jesus does a miracle quietly that only a handful of people know. He turns the water into good wine and shows us something about himself that we must take to heart each day.

How to gain quality in your life

A. If you want quality, you have to ask v.3. *When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."*

It sounds too simple, but if you want Jesus to work miracles for you, you must ask. Often an aunt of the bride or groom was the party's hostess. Perhaps, that is why Mary knows that there is a problem. She could have ranted or raged, but instead, she came to Jesus. How did she know that He could help? A

mother knows. She has watched Jesus for thirty years and seen that if anyone can come up with a solution, it would be Jesus. Maybe she expects a miracle, maybe not. But she knows whom to turn to when the chips are down.

How bad does it have to get before you ask? Do you pray before each doctor's checkup, or do you wait till you are hooked up to chemotherapy and feel lousy? Do you pray at the beginning of a vacation or wait until something happens? Mary asked for help before others knew that they needed it. Do you? We must recognize our need and come to Him before healing begins. We will run dry if we try to make things work with our resources. Life is tough, and we must recognize that we can't handle it. We come to Jesus for help if we want real, quality solutions. The sooner, the better.

B. If you want quality, you need to wait for His time v.4 *"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."*

Yet the solutions must come in His time. He is not a vending machine where we pull the lever and the solution comes out. Jesus picks his times – quality times- so that the best result can happen. Sometimes that means we have to wait. That is hard for us. We are like the child who planted corn seeds in the garden and dug them up two days later to see why he didn't have a plant. Sadly, the kernels had few stems on each one that hadn't broken the soil's surface. By digging them up, he destroyed the plants that would soon have popped to the surface.

Having asked, we need to wait for Jesus just as Mary did. Sometimes quality comes with a certain amount of time, like a fine bourbon or even a coat of paint that needs time to dry. Jesus knows when our solution is ready and will give us a quality product at the right time. It is ok to continue to pray as you wait. Often, what God needs to prepare is you. You may need more time to be ready for his solution. Prayer can be when the Lord readies you by helping you see the truth and preparing you for a solution that may not exactly be what you want.

C. If you want quality, you need to follow His orders v. 7 *Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.*

Also, you can't tell Jesus what to do. Mary's words show that she was willing to let her son do what He knew was best. I doubt she had any idea that he would take the water jars used for cleaning and make wine out of them. She was ready to let Jesus solve the problem. She also ensured that the servants followed Jesus' orders to the tee. The servants would precisely do what Jesus said. The servants would fill the water jars (though they had no clue why they were supposed to), and then they would take a cup of this water to the master, not knowing it would become wine along the way.

Sometimes we balk at simple things Jesus asks us to do because we don't see any sense in them. That is one of the easiest ways to ensure miracles don't happen to us. Jesus doesn't have to prove that a blessing is coming, although sometimes he will do that to help foolish people. Yet, think of what would have happened if the servants had not obeyed. Nothing would have. No miracle. The same is true when you don't trust God enough to tell the truth instead of lying when in trouble or when people turn down an opportunity because they are afraid something might go wrong. Such actions kill miracles.

D. If you want quality, Jesus will deliver v. 10 *and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink, but you have saved the best till now."*

Together, the stone water pots contained 120-180 gallons of wine. Jesus' miracle saved the wedding but only a few people know the origin of the large amount of wine. Not only was their quantity but the wine was of a quality that exceeded the wine already served. It is the beginning of His ministry, and He is already a master. Would we have expected anything less from Jesus? If we think about it, probably not.

We know this is the one who could heal any disease and feed thousands of people. Yet, we often don't act like we expect Jesus to deliver.

We are often so slow to ask Him for help and hesitant to wait for His answer. We are too likely to figure that He just isn't going to help or that the help he can give is not what we want from Him. Yet, when did Jesus not deliver in scripture when people asked and believed in His assistance? The answer is never. If a miracle didn't come in scripture, it was because of the people and not because of Jesus. We can be sure of one thing. Jesus will deliver and provide a quality solution if we don't get in the way.

Giving Jesus glory

See Him through new eyes v. 11 *He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.*

If you follow through John chapter 1, James and John, Philip and Nathanael seemed to have followed Jesus because of his teaching. Here, Jesus opened the disciple's eyes to a whole new facet of His person. They saw His concern for others and His ability to offer miraculous help. It was a partial revelation of what it meant that Jesus was the long-expected Messiah. His miracles validated His teaching and prepared them for even greater things they were about to see. The rabbi that they followed, indeed, was from God.

So often, we have what I will call "limited" faith. We believe in Jesus, but there are limits to what we think He can do or is willing to do for us. We accept that He is a savior on a cross, but it never dawns on us that He would help us with our life on earth. We think of Him as being too busy to bother with all the insignificant problems that we face daily, so we never ask. But, look again at this miracle and see Him as the disciples did with new eyes. He does care about your life. He will help and give you more than you ever asked for.

Come to Jesus again and again so life keeps getting better.

Why do Christians often do without blessings in their lives? They don't ask, trust, or wait for Jesus to help. We stumble through life trying to get by as well as we can on our abilities, our limited and flawed abilities. We have another option. Why not start each day with prayer? Make a list of your joys, problems you face, and the help you need. Give it all to Jesus each day and ask for His help. Let him help you solve the problem at work or the problem with your knee.

What would the cumulative effect of having Jesus' solutions day after day in your life be? I'll tell you what it means. It means that your life would get better instead of you just coping with what you can do about things. Jesus will always give you quality answers and help. Those who pray to Jesus and seek Him out in the scriptures will find a better life because Jesus still works miracles. So take a sheet of paper today and write down all the things you want help with from Jesus. Why whine about life when you can have the water of life?

2. Nobleman's son – Jesus' power changes lives

John 4:46-54

Big idea: Contagious faith can leave a legacy in a lost generation

John 4:46-54 46 Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. 47 When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. 48 "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." 49 The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." 50 Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed. 51 While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. 52 When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour." 53 Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed. 54 This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.

Feeble faith- Tough crowd v. 48 *"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."*

It was a tough crowd. Jesus had been gone from Galilee for about six months. He had been in Judea and Samaria, and many had heard that He had performed miracles in Jerusalem at the festival. Now, they wanted Jesus to perform miracles here in Galilee for them as He had done down south. They had sick He needed to heal. They wanted to see the spectacle. They had a claim on him since he had grown up in nearby Nazareth. The hometown boy owed them. Sadly, it was the same struggle Jesus had faced down in Jerusalem. They, too, would not believe without miracles. Jesus, you need to prove to us that you are from God.

Their feeble faith was infectious. Unbelief passed around Jewish towns and even from generation to generation like wildfire. It kept others from believing in Jesus. Children found it hard to believe in Jesus. It meant that the Jewish people would miss their messiah. There is only one thing that overcame this epidemic. It was people who boldly told how Jesus had helped them. They were apostles, disciples, and a host of people who had contact with Jesus. They told others so that they could see the authentic Jesus. This account is the story of such a man.

Lost generation

I wish we had more like him. Unfortunately, I see the epidemic in my denomination, which is happening in many churches around us. We have lost a generation of believers, including our kids. They are too busy with activities. People tell them that church is boring, and they believe it. They are disappearing from churches in widespread numbers because we live in a culture where parents don't tell their children about Jesus, and their lives don't model faith like the man in our text. As a result, our churches are getting older and grayer.

How do we overcome this problem? First, we need people who will not keep silent or are not afraid to tell of the miracles that Jesus does. We need parents who exhibit faith so that the little eyes of children will catch faith from their parents and see the value it can bring to their lives. The reason for this lost generation is not a culture that is against Jesus. It is a church that is silent about Jesus, and parents think that teaching their children about Jesus is the church's job, just like the soccer coach or dance teacher is supposed to do the teaching. Contagious faith will overcome the problem.

A Father's Faith grows and produces fruit.

A. Crisis Faith v. 47 *When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.*

It all begins with a crisis. A nobleman, perhaps a member of Herod's court, has a deadly sick child. He hears about the miracle worker who has returned to Cana, so he travels twenty miles to come and intercede for his son, who is dying. He is at his wit's end. He had probably tried all the cures that were common for his day. Nothing worked, but he hoped this traveling rabbi could heal his son. He will badger this Jesus till he comes and heals his son. Beg Jesus, before it is too late, and nothing can help.

We have been there at the hospital with an illness that just doesn't seem to go away or a job that is just more than we can take. It is called desperation. We have tried everything, and then we finally think of Jesus. We know of others that we prayed for in the church, and God healed them. We know He can do miracles. At this point, we have two parts faith and three parts just pure hope. Somehow we find the words to pray and ask – no beg – Jesus to help. We are not looking for a sign so we can believe in him. We are looking for a miracle at the hospital or with our job. Jesus, if you ever loved me, help me now.

B. Confident Faith v. 50 *Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed*

The words must have shaken the man to his soul. It was not a dismissal but a granting of a request. Jesus told him that he could go because God healed the son. I have healed your son. I don't need to travel. I have already taken care of it. Then this man does something extraordinary. He goes believing that the son will get better. The text tells us that this is the seventh hour, which is 7 PM our time. He cannot run 20 miles in the dark to see his son. He must find a place to sleep and set out in the morning. How hard that night must have been. Is my son getting better or not? Somehow the man holds it together, believing in Jesus and a miracle he cannot yet see.

It is at this moment when we pass or fail. Having a sense that Jesus has answered our prayer, do we move forward confidently, or do we hold back, wanting Jesus to prove himself? There will be plenty of time to get cold feet and to wonder if we need to do something else. Yet, confident faith trusts Jesus and believes in Jesus. It goes forward with the surgery, placing ourselves in Jesus' hands. It takes the opportunity because we see the benefit and have prayed about it for days. It is willing to take the chance on ministry because we see how much it will help one another.

C. Contagious Faith v. 53 *Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed.*

And so the father goes home believing that his son will gradually improve. The servants meet him and tell him that the dying son had completely recovered, just when Jesus proclaimed that he was well. The man can hardly contain himself and must tell the story of Jesus' kindness and words. He embraces the son and tells the story over again and again. He tells his son and family what it was like to talk to Jesus and have the reassurance that he felt. His faith is infectious. The whole family begins to believe in Jesus and believes that Jesus has the power of God.

Such faith is contagious. It is the person who will tell you over and over about how Jesus healed their cancer or saved them from a car wreck. They repeatedly go over the details with joy, even when others want them to stop telling the story. Jesus has helped them, and they want the world to know. Little eyes see the joy and the changes that such faith brings. They see that their father, mother, grandfather, or friend is different, and that lets them know the story is true. Soon they believe it for themselves. They have felt the love of Jesus and will pray to Jesus as needed.

Change your legacy with one step

It came down to a choice – action, not words

Only Jesus probably knew how much the man's life changed in that one moment when the man took the step and believed that Jesus had done the miracle. It didn't change whether Jesus would heal his son. Jesus said He would heal the boy, and a father's doubts would not have undone the miracle. No, it changed the father, and it changed his legacy. He set out at first light, demonstrating that he believed. He

didn't go back to Jesus and make sure that he understood the master or come back to beg for some sign it was true. Instead, he stepped out in faith.

It is not enough for us to say we believe Jesus can take care of our problems; we need to act, acknowledging that he has taken care of us. So we step out to do an impossible ministry. We let them wheel us into the operating room, confident that Jesus has things in hand. And when we do that, we change our family, friends, and future. Our children watch our faith and begin to believe Jesus can do amazing things. Our friends and fellow church members are willing to be part of the ministry because they see how strongly we believe in Jesus. We change others as we are changed.

What if we all led our households to believe?

So how do we reach that lost generation? The answer is more uncomplicated than you think. You reach them by showing your faith. I picture the father in this story going home and telling everyone in detail about Jesus. I imagine him taking the family to meet Jesus as Jesus ministered in Galilee. His son gained more than healing. His son acquired a strong faith that would trust in Jesus for life. He gained it because He saw his father's actions and caught the joy and power of his father's story. Not only the son but the whole household believed. They saw the father's faith and felt Jesus' love and power.

When was the last time you told your family about a miracle that happened to you? When was the last time they saw you step forward to do something just because you believed in Jesus? When was the last time you took someone to meet Jesus in worship or a small group? The generation does not have to be lost in space. We have a savior who continues to do miracles for us, and we can change our lives, our legacy, and our community if we tell our families and friends about Jesus so that they can catch the faith through us.

3. Healing at the pool – Jesus' power over time

John 5:1-18

Big idea: Love others for Jesus, leave results to God

John 5:1-18 1 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie--the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. 4 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" 7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." 8 Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." 9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, 10 and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." 11 But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" 12 So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" 13 The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. 14 Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." 15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. 16 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. 17 Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." 18 For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Sometimes love brings no results.

Sometimes you say to yourself, "Why did I bother?" You helped a next-door neighbor and didn't even get a word of thanks. You brought someone to church with you for a fellowship event or even a worship service or Bible class; all they did was criticize the church and God. You put yourself out in a big way to someone who is struggling and it doesn't seem to bring anyone or bring them one step closer to the Lord. Many times other Christians will even criticize you for trying to help. You walk away bummed. Just know that you are in good company.

Jesus had the same experience on more than one occasion. In the text, he sticks out his neck to help a man and gets burned. He is in Jerusalem, walking near the pools of Bethesda that were just north of the temple. It was where all the sick congregated because they believe that an angel stirred the waters, and healing came. You would expect that every miracle of Jesus resulted in a small army of believers. Not so. Here we find a man hesitant to be healed while turning the kindness of Jesus into a charge against Him and the beginning of significant persecution by the religious leaders. Sometimes love brings no results.

A. Love made Jesus stop v.6 *When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"*

There was no reason for Jesus to have to visit this place. It was where the sick and the lame gathered, hoping for a miracle. Imagine the smell and the constant groaning of the people. It was a place that most of us would avoid, but Jesus was there. There was also no reason to reach out to this person other than pure grace. Jesus heard of the man's terrible condition, and his heart was moved to help. He could have stopped to help one of a hundred others, but Jesus stopped here and offered help to a helpless man.

Opportunities are around us all the time. It is a chance to give to Missionary Pilots flying into the hurricane-torn Caribbean. It is the man begging on the street on the way to a Bengals game. It is the next-door neighbor who struggles to rake their leaves. You can ignore them, or grace can tug at you. You can't heal them all. Jesus didn't even try. Yet, you can help one. You help them because God's love makes you

stop. Their plight touches your heart, and you want to help them in the way that Jesus helps you. God's love has changed you and made you care.

B. Love was stronger than excuses v 7 *"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."*

Even when asked, this man offers excuses. After 38 years, the man's problems had become a way of life. No one ever helped him, and he had probably given up. His situation was hopeless, and everyone thought he would die an invalid. To this man who only offered excuses, Jesus gave healing. There is no indication that he believed in Jesus or that Jesus could help him get well. Yet, the love of Jesus was more potent than the excuses. His compassion wanted to make a radical change in this man's life.

People will sometimes offer excuses if you provide help. They will not call you back when you tell them to call you if they need something. They have lived with their hopelessness for so long or think their problems are so large that any attempt to improve things is foolish and will not succeed. Yet, you still can ask for permission to help. You can do something little to improve their life or take them on as your pet project. The love you feel from Jesus makes you want to help even the desperate people who have nothing to give in return.

C. Love is sometimes anonymous v.12 *So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"*

In the exchange between the man who was healed and the Jewish leaders who were upset that he was walking with his bedroll, the man said he didn't know who healed him. His ignorance was probably genuine. Jesus had healed him and slipped away into the crowd. Only later, when Jesus sought the man out, would he learn who healed him. Jesus wanted to encourage this man who was now visiting the temple to turn from his sins and believe that he might have both eternal life and the ability to walk. Jesus wanted to let the miracle lead the man to faith.

Sometimes we show our love anonymously. We shovel a walk when no one is looking. We give to the PTA or the Gideons, and because we wad up the bill, no one will ever know what we gave or give us a tax credit. We don't always have to have credit. We do our act of grace for Jesus. Other times, we can follow up with people so that the gift can grow. We get caught shoveling the sidewalk, and so we talk about how we are just moving forward with Jesus's love. Other times we get a chance to comfort someone at PTA struggling in their marriage. Love can be anonymous, but even nameless love can give us opportunities for more love.

D. Love sometimes has unwanted consequences v. 15 *The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.*

Sadly, the man immediately went and told the religious leaders that Jesus had made him well. Perhaps, he informed them about Jesus because of fear. He wanted them to turn their accusations on Jesus so they would leave him alone. Because unfortunately, the Jews had rebuked the man for breaking one of their customs not in the Bible. The result was that persecution began in earnest for Jesus from this point. His act of kindness had not only been unable to change this man's heart or cause him to believe but had backfired and made it more challenging now for Jesus to do ministry in Jerusalem.

You may have had something like that. You shovel one neighbor's walk, and someone else is mad that you didn't shovel theirs. You reach out to help the low-income family at the PTA, and others shun you because you are friends with the Wilsons. Just realize that assisting people can have unwanted consequences. In a society where many want to judge, you can find yourself rejected for helping people others hate. You can discover that people will desert you for doing things differently. Worst of all, you can find that the people you try to help will not always appreciate your actions.

We can't base love on success

Love others for Jesus, leave results to God

Not every kind act will bring forth faith or even a word of thanks. Some even bring forth trouble. Yet that is not a reason to stop doing acts of love to others. It will hurt. At least it has hurt me in the past. It may even cause you trouble or give you grief. Yet, you cannot judge acts of kindness by the results you can see. There may be reactions that you cannot see or that will come later. But changes and even faith may come from someone connected to that person who saw what you did. Love can change lives like that.

The most significant reason is that you didn't do it for them. You did it because you have felt God's love, which caused you to want to do something you knew would please God. Every person is someone God loves, and as you do things for those He loves, it touches God's heart. Leave the results up to God. You may be just one of a dozen acts of kindness that He orchestrates to change a person's heart. Act in love for God, and let God take your actions to chip away at a frozen heart. Who knows, you might be the 10th person in the string who finally sees a heart melt before our Lord.

There is no guarantee of success.

What if we stopped doing anything that we didn't have a guarantee of success? We stopped watching the Bengals because they lost the last game. We stopped shopping because we needed help finding the clothing or flavor of yogurt we wanted. We stopped going to the gym because we hadn't lost ten pounds. Face it; there is no guarantee of success in life. No one says that you will get what you want all the time. The same is true in sharing sacrificial love on behalf of the Lord. What is also true is that sometimes you will be successful. There will be lives that are changed because you care.

Now imagine what the world would look like if everyone stopped loving others or showing grace just because it didn't always work. What a cruel world that would be. It would be every man or woman for themselves. It would never be showing a smile to a clerk or cashier or acknowledging their hard day. There is a reason that Jesus was a person of grace. Even when it broke someone's rules about the Sabbath, his continual grace was why the world is as good as it is. Now it is our turn to love because He loved us. Give grace like Jesus and make your world better with His love. Amen

4. Feeding 5000 – Jesus' power over scarcity

John 6:1-14

Big idea: Give what you have to Jesus, and He will provide.

John 6:1-14 1 Some time 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 miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. 4 The Jewish Passover Feast was near. 5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" 8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 9 "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" 10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. 11 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. 12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." 13 So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. 14 After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."

We live in a world of scarcity.

We live in a world of scarcity. People with money in the bank wonder if it will be enough because social security may fail us or health care will cost too much. Children complain that they don't have enough toys, or parents worry that they can't afford activities that their children need. We think if we save a little more or work a little harder, we will have enough, but even if we have more money, someone will tell us that it isn't enough. Yet, no one asks, "What is enough?" because no amount of money gives us that secure feeling.

Churches live in a world of scarcity as well. The offerings never seem enough to keep up with the bills that pop out of nowhere. The people's resources never seem enough to do the ministry you want or keep up the property. The church is going to die, so why fight it? We are doomed to failure is the message on so many fronts. The truth is simple. We don't have what we need because we don't turn to Jesus. Instead, we trust in ourselves or an extension of ourselves called government. Neither is working well. It is time we put our life and finances in Jesus' hands.

Jesus can overcome scarcity.

A. scarcity brings crisis v. 5 *When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"*

It has been six to twelve months of miracles and teachings since the miracle of John 5, and now the crowds are following Jesus wherever he goes. They keep demanding healing and help. They cry at Him because they are desperate. Jesus and his disciples go into the hills to get away for some rest. Yet the crowds follow him to this desolate place. Five thousand men and their families are coming. How will we feed them? How will Jesus keep this mob of people demanding their needs must be met from becoming a riot? Their scarcity and overwhelming needs have brought a crisis.

We notice scarcity as we look at most churches' budgets for next year. Income has not kept up with needs. We would love to do more to witness to the people at the apartment complex next door or help the homeless in our town. We would love to do something for the people rebuilding from a hurricane. How can we do that when we can't keep up with our bills? The needs are plentiful all around us. As we sit here in church with Jesus in our midst, he is going to ask the question of us that we, like the disciples, want to

avoid. He will ask, how will you minister to these people I am sending you? They are desperate and have less than you do.

B. Scarcity breeds hopelessness v. 7 *Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"*

Phillip didn't answer the question. He was overwhelmed with hopelessness. Eight months of salary could not feed these people. He started looking at the people and figuring out the probable cost. The gospel of Mark tells us that the disciples wanted to send the people away. It was hopeless. In reality, it was a test. Jesus knew what He would do, but hardship was a way for the disciples to learn that they were powerless. Desperation should have driven the disciples to Jesus. They had seen the miracles of the last year. Sadly, they do not believe in Jesus or His ability.

Churches will meet in councils or with voters raking their brains and trying to figure out what they will cut in the budget to make things work. They will also figure out the cost of an outreach ministry and call it impossible. Tearing out their hair, they will see things as impossible. It is a test that many churches fail. God will not make it easy because we don't appreciate His power when things are so easy that we can manage them. Desperation gets us down on our knees and makes us pray. Hopelessness makes us realize that Jesus has to be the answer. How bad does it have to get?

C. Jesus will provide v. 9 *"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"*

A young boy made an offer. It was an offer hardly worth considering—a sack lunch with 15,000 to 20,000 hungry people standing around. Yet, Jesus doesn't turn the offering away. He blesses it, and suddenly it is enough. No, it is more than enough. Imagine the surprise as plate after plate of food is passed to the thousands. Each of the disciples will set food before the sitting people. Did they wonder if there would be more each time they came up with thousands waiting to get food? They took load after load of food, and Jesus provided what they could not do. Jesus was greater than scarcity.

It starts with an offer in the church. A few people offer to give a little more or tithe a bonus or some extra money they have received. That is a bold move because we often think, "What would an extra \$25 or \$50 from me do?" We dismiss it because we "know" that it is not enough. Yet, as the church's people participate, the Lord will provide. We may wonder if there will be enough as bills come up or if the community needs ministries around us. Yet, there is nothing that our Lord can't do. We have to trust him, and he will provide what is required. Our little in his hands is a lot.

D. Jesus will provide in abundance v. 13 *So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.*

He made the disciples gather up the leftovers because leftovers can tell you a lot. Jesus wanted everyone to see that this was not a trick. The disciples filled twelve large baskets from the bread taken from one sack lunch. God had worked a miracle, and it was beyond their wildest expectations. They hadn't looked to Him for help, making them feel hopeless. Jesus had overcome scarcity by using the little they had for a miracle. He wanted the disciples to offer what they had to heaven so God could make it more than enough. Scarcity does not exist in heaven or in times of faith.

God makes us gather the leftovers and see when the Lord gets us through a tough year or a long summer, and there is still money left. He wants us to know that a grant or some other unexpected gift came, and there was just enough. He wants us to replace our hopelessness with trust in Him. When we don't look to Jesus, we will also find ourselves hopeless. But, when we follow Jesus' example and look to heaven, God always makes a way.

**Two ways to ensure scarcity
Don't turn to Jesus**

Our first instinct is to ask what we can do. Voter's meetings start with a quick prayer or none at all. Members discuss the options of cutting budgets or increasing giving. Sadly, the church hardly mentions God at all. That is a formula for scarcity. It is a formula for scarcity in the church and our lives. We don't take the time to pray through problems but only turn to the Lord when we are desperate. We haven't learned to trust the Lord with our lives and with our future.

It happens in life as well. We find ourselves in crisis and pray as only a last resort. We will plot and come up with a plan for dealing with the situation, but do we turn to God? God has the answers waiting for us, but we will go through a lot of pain and suffering before we ask Him how to improve things. If you want to overcome scarcity, be in prayer and be in the word. God will give you the answers you need and provide for the things you need. Depending on ourselves causes scarcity. Relying on God brings abundance in life.

Don't give Jesus what you have.

Andrew answers Jesus' question. Where will we get bread? It is here in the sack lunch of a kid. The child offers the little he has, and Jesus can do a miracle through it. It could have happened with some food one of the 5000 brought or something the disciples had. Jesus overcame scarcity by using what the boy had. The simple sacrifice showed trust. The simple gift showed concern for others. It was small, but the boy gave what he had, and Jesus could bless his gift and provide for others. Scarcity will come when everyone refuses to share.

Generosity comes when you share what you have. Most churches would have more than they need if everyone shared even 5% of their income. They would get a considerable boost if people gave offerings for the Sundays that they missed and not just when they were there. Scarcity will come when people forget God. You will never have enough to handle the future without God. Trust Him for the future and be generous with His blessings right now. Faith knows that we can trust God to continue to provide for us so that we can provide for His kingdom.

5. Walking on water – Jesus' power over nature

John 6:16-21

Big idea: Faith expects Jesus to work miracles for us

John 6:16-21 16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, 17 where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. 18 A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. 19 When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. 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.

Do you really believe in miracles?

A statue at the Catholic Church cries, and people flock to see the miracle. A friend has their cancer disappear, and the doctors can't explain it. A car swerves before you on the ice and misses you by inches. Would you call them miracles or not? Most of us still believe that Jesus did miracles in the Bible. We accept that Jesus healed the lame and raised the dead. We acknowledge that He fed the thousands and walked on water. But, most of all, we believe that He rose from the dead on Easter. Those are things we accept as accurate.

But does Jesus still do miracles today? Do we believe in miracles so much that we pray, expecting Jesus to help us? Do we pray in the hospital knowing that Jesus will heal? Do we expect that Jesus can revitalize a church or change a life? I think that would be less accepted. The miracle today follows directly after the feeding of the 5000. The disciples had seen Jesus do something only God had done in the Old Testament. Now, in trouble, they never consider that He might work a miracle for them. Their faith failed them because they didn't expect Him to help.

A. Happy to have seen a miracle v. 16 *When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake,*

It was evening, and Jesus encouraged the disciples to get into the boat and escape the crowd. I picture them on a high because of what they have seen and heard. They had seen Jesus do a miracle, like God feeding the Exodus people in the wilderness for 40 years. They were excited and amazed at what Jesus had done. I picture them reciting the details and discussing their part in the miracle. Now they were setting off for Capernaum, where Jesus had done many other wonderful things. Maybe they would see a miracle there as well.

We look at the scriptures and talk about the miracles that Jesus did and get excited. I wonder what it was like to be there when he fed so many. I wonder what it would have been to be there when He raised Lazarus from the dead. We are happy that we have a God who has such power. Maybe we take that a step further and say a prayer of thanks when God made that car skidding on the ice miss us by inches. Maybe we thank the Lord that He cured Joe of cancer or that Mary got a new job that pays better. We are happy about the miracles and half-believe they happened because God could do such a thing.

B. Darkness creates fear and doubts v.18 *A strong wind was blowing, and the waters grew rough.*

Within hours of seeing the feeding of the five thousand, the disciples were in trouble out in the middle of the lake. A storm had come up and was tossing the boat around. The other gospels make it sound like they feared for their life. It was time for them to trust Jesus and believe He would save them. Yet, none of the gospels tell us that they prayed for help or called out Jesus' name. None of them look for Jesus or even expect that He will come. Instead, they row with fear and doubt in their hearts, trying to weather the storm and stay alive.

Many people will hear of this and other miracles and jump back into troubled lives without even a prayer to the Lord. They will face a crisis at their job that is eating them alive or have health problems and doctor's appointments that worry them. They may even struggle daily in their marriage or with their

children. Yet, few will pray about those things, and even fewer will expect God to do something miraculous. We believe that Jesus can do miracles in the Bible, but we live as if we don't think Jesus will do those miracles for us. So, we have to go it alone because those things don't happen.

C. The well-known voice calms us v.20 *But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid."*

Then Jesus came walking on water to them. He had seen their distress from the hills and cared enough to help unasked. They thought he was a ghost because they didn't expect Him. His appearance at first made them think things were now worse. They felt that they would die for sure. Then He spoke, and they recognized his voice. Only then did they invite Jesus into the boat. Only then did the fears go away, and they wondered how he had come to them. Jesus had done the unexpected. He had come to them, and they felt safer now that he was there.

A visitor comes to your hospital room and reads a devotion. Suddenly, you have a sense that Jesus is there. A stranger stops to help you when your car is stranded on the road, and you sense that Jesus sent him. The voice is calm, and you know that Jesus is near. He came even though you didn't call. You went through so much fear and worried when you didn't have to. In honesty, you hoped that Jesus might help but never expected He would come. We think that miracles don't happen today or don't happen to me. Instead, the words of Jesus ring through your ears as He asks why you doubted Him.

D. A second miracle to strengthen our faith v. 21 *Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.*

Suddenly, the boat reached the shore without additional rowing. It was as if Jesus did one final miracle to prove to the disciples that he cared and that He would help them when they were struggling. He had shown his power over wind and waves before. Here again, our Lord showed them that He was the master of nature. It was the exclamation point to show that Jesus would do miracles for them. He had healed the sick and fed the masses, but this was His way of showing that they could call on Him in their crisis. The question was would they remember? Would they call on Him expecting an answer the next time?

The surgery goes well, and you get told that the heart is well. You get a job, and it turns out to be better than expected. God still does extra miracles to prove that He cares. We pray for something, and it turns out better than we expected. God is showing that He listens and that He cares. It is to remind us that He does miracles for us. We know God can heal the sick or help someone else at church. These miracles encourage us to believe that He will do miracles for us. God is saying we shouldn't wait so long to call Him for help in prayer the next time.

The essence of believing in miracles

It would be best if you remembered what Jesus could do.

Sadly, most of us forget in the darkness what seemed so evident in the light. It was easy to believe in miracles when Jesus was doing a miracle right before them. It was a little more difficult in the dark when Jesus was so far away to believe His power could help them. Too often, our peaks of faith are followed by valleys of despair. We believe when Jesus has done a miracle before our eyes and then forget that He does miracles when we find ourselves in a dark situation. We must believe despite our darkness and the dire conditions of life.

We have to believe that His power to cure the sick, feed the hungry, and change the course of nature happens as often today as in biblical times. God is still active in this world and performing miracles for the benefit of His people. They have to believe that those miracles can come and ask for them. Sometimes, Jesus does miracles without anyone turning to Him, but most of the time, miracles come because people ask. In the darkness, they believe He can do miracles, so they ask for help.

You need to expect that He will do a miracle for you.

Yet faith is more than believing Jesus can help. It knows that He will help. It is praying with an expectation that Jesus will answer our crisis. The disciples saw a great miracle and never transferred the truth that Jesus could do miracles in their lives and their needs. Imagine the difference that it would make if you were to have surgery and you expected Jesus would heal you. Instead of worrying the night before, you read your Bible and focus on Jesus' miracles. You prayed before you went to the hospital and prayed with your family and pastor as they prepared you for surgery.

Now they wheel you in for surgery, and you feel calm. You feel like you have invited Jesus into your boat and have placed things into His hands. The outcome does not depend on the doctors or nurses alone. You know Jesus will guide every incision and every suture. You expect a miracle. You have learned an important lesson the disciples had not yet discovered in the text. Jesus does miracles for us. He does them because he cares. We can pray with confidence expecting that Our Lord will do the impossible. We can boldly go forward in every crisis, believing that He walks next to us and will help us every step of the way. Amen.

6. Healing the blind man - Jesus' power over illness

John 9:1-41

Big idea: O Lord, open our lips that others might see

John 9:1-41 1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. 4 As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 7 "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. 8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." 10 "How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded. 11 He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." 12 "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said. 13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. 14 Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. 15 Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. 17 Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." 18 The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. 19 "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" 20 "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. 21 But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. 23 That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." 25 He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" 26 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" 28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out. 35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." 40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" 41 Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains."

A lot of people are in for a surprise! Matthew 25:44 *"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'"*

Fred opened his eyes and shielded them until they adjusted to the bright light. He found himself standing in a large crowd with dirty gray robes. Across the aisle, he saw a smaller group in white robes and heard a booming voice welcoming them into heaven. It dawned on him that this must be the last day the preacher talked about at his uncle's funeral. Then the voice told those in gray robes that they were banished to hell. Fred sensed anger among the people around him. How could God judge them like this?

At first, Fred was angry too. He had gone to church as a child. Fred knew the Easter story, kind of. He had tried to follow the golden rule. But then he looked at the man with the booming voice. The people in white robes were calling Him Jesus. Fred began to realize He didn't know Jesus. He had pulled away from the Lord. He had been on the other side as a child. A busy life and anger over his divorce had made him walk away from the church and Jesus. He cursed under his breath and began to cry. If only someone would have reached out. Things could have been different.

The greatest miracle of all

A. Jesus – simply a name v. 11 *He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."*

A stranger approached the blind man and put gritty soil in his eyes, telling him to wash them off at the nearby pool. It seemed a dirty trick, and the man had no course but to go and wash because it hurt his eyes. Yet, when he did, he could see for the first time. He saw people, trees, and even the pool. When he went home, people asked if it was him. They wondered how this could happen, and he could only tell them who had done this. The people around him said the man's name was Jesus. Somehow, this one called Jesus had given him the sight he had never had, yet he had no clue who this man was or how he did it.

A priest prayed with the Johnson family at the hospital before their son's surgery. He spoke of Jesus and how He loved the little children. He asked God for a miracle. It was all nice, and the family thanked the friendly priest for his kind words, but they didn't understand. Then their child came through the surgery, and the doctors said he was healed. They couldn't explain the cure but wondered if it had anything to do with the priest's prayer. They also wondered how, but the honest answer was who – a "who" named Jesus, who was unknown to them.

B. Prophet – His miracles and teaching are from God v.17 *Finally, they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet."*

They dragged the blind man before the Pharisees, so they would know what had happened. The man told his story, and the Pharisees doubted the truth. Jesus was a sinner since He had healed on the Sabbath. Yet they wondered how a sinner could produce such miracles. The man who had been blind was searching frantically for a category to put Jesus in. Having thought about it, the man proposed that Jesus must be a prophet. Many of the Old Testament prophets performed miracles. He still didn't know Jesus, but he was beginning to see.

Tom Johnson pulled his grandmother's bible out of a box in the attic. He vaguely remembered her talking about Jesus. As Tom read the gospel of Mark, he saw Jesus heal one person after another. He seemed to have been a miracle worker, all right. So maybe there was a connection between Jesus and his son's healing. Many Americans have some vague knowledge about Jesus. They went to church as a kid or had a grandmother who went every Sunday. They may call on Jesus in prayer when the crisis comes, but you won't find them coming to church just because Jesus helped them. Jesus is a good guy, but they will do fine without him.

C. Man of God – represents God v. 33 *If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."*

The blind man began to stand up for Jesus even though the people wanted him to condemn the man who gave him sight. He cannot deny the eyesight that Jesus gave him. The world around him is crashing down, but he will not give up Jesus. The blind man, sensing their interest, asks if the Pharisees want to become His disciples, which he believes is why they are interested in the story. He does not understand why they can't see the simple truth, yet the blind man will not give up. Jesus must come from God. No one in the Old Testament had done such a great miracle.

As Tom looked at his son, He knew that Jesus did a miracle. Others in the family laughed at him and made fun of what he believed, but Tom can't deny what seems true to Him. The doctors had all but given up. His son was supposed to die. Then Jesus came and healed his son. Those whom Jesus has touched will often have a rough time. They believe in Jesus, but they don't know Him well enough to be able to defend what they believe. Friends will ridicule them, and they will begin to doubt it themselves. Yet, they stand up for Jesus because He is the only one who has cared.

D. Son of Man – He is Savior and Lord v. 35 *Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"*

Jesus returns to the formerly blind man to give him the greatest gift. It begins with a question from Jesus and ends up with the man having faith. Jesus knew it was not enough for the blind man to believe that he was a prophet or that he somehow came from God. He must believe in a savior and Lord. Jesus tells him bluntly that He is the Lord. The man could physically see Jesus with his eyes and now could spiritually see Jesus as Messiah with his faith. He bows down and worships Jesus. Here is God, and this man knows it. He believes it with all his heart, which will change his life.

Tom decided to go to Grandma's church on Easter Sunday. He wanted to see this Jesus for himself. It was awkward, and Tom knew the rest of the family would make fun of him. Yet, he had to know. He sat down shaking, but the Easter readings and message told him that Jesus was God. Now it was time for him to share that with the family. For those we know wrestling with the truth, it is time for us to go and share that Jesus is Savior and Lord with them. Like the blind man, they will not understand unless someone tells them. The greatest miracle is knowing that Jesus is Lord, even when it will not be easy for them.

The blind will see, and those who think that they see are blind (v.39)

Faith is about sacrifice and worship v.38 *Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him*

It is the moment of faith in the passage. The blind man believes and worships Jesus. The ancient Jews didn't worship prophets or angels. It was God whom you adored. The Holy Spirit had opened the man's heart, and He saw what the Pharisees refused to see. He saw that Jesus was Lord. The man had lost a lot. He was thrown out of the temple and would not be allowed to worship there again. Yet, he had gained so much. He had his sight, and he had his savior. The sacrifice seemed small in comparison. He would follow this Jesus and learn more so that Jesus might change his future.

Tom knew that life had to change. His grandmother's faith was what he wanted. She had been so calm when she died. She had always talked about the peace that she felt with Jesus. Tom desired Grandma's peace more than anything else. He was willing to make sacrifices so he might never live a day without Jesus. There is no halfway in the Christian faith. If you have seen Jesus with your heart, you will put Him above everything else. What you lose is nothing compared to what you gain. The more you see Jesus, the more your life will come into focus. Christ will change your life, and the future will be different.

Faith speaks even if others don't see v.27. *He answered, "I have told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"*

You have to give the man credit. His faith spoke even though many around him didn't want to believe. He knew that they were upset. He knew they could punish him, but he would not let others silence him. He told what he had learned and accepted the consequences. His faith spoke, and he would not let others silence him. As the sermon was finishing, Tom began to cry. This moment was something that He wanted for his wife and his boy. As Tom returned home, he would tell them all about the service. Tom would bring them next Sunday and would not take no for an answer. He had a joy in his heart that he wanted them to have so much.

The Christian church today is failing. Christians are afraid to speak like the parents in the story. God calls us to be open like the blind man who could not help but tell others about Jesus. Whom do we know who doesn't know the truth about Jesus? Who will not be among our friends, family, and neighbors in heaven? The world is blind because no one has taken the time to tell them about Jesus. Yes, they will not all want to hear, but genuine faith can't keep silent. We want to do everything we can to give people this joy in this life and the next. O Lord, open our lips so that others can see.

7. Raising Lazarus – Jesus' power over death. It is not all about us.

John 11:17-44

Big idea: Miracles are about God's glory, not just our pain.

John 11:17-44 17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. 21 "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." 28 And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. 32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. 35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." 40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

I guess it was not God's will.

You have been praying for weeks, but Grandma's cancer came back. You have prayed about getting a promotion and discovered they passed you over for the job. You shrug your shoulders and make do. You figured out that it just wasn't God's will. You figured that it was wrong to get your hopes up. Yet, what is God's will? We often assume that our will is what God's will should be. We want this promotion, so God should answer what we have prayed. We are uncomfortable with this disease, and so God should heal. Yet is that what God's will is?

Yes, I do believe that our pain touches God's heart. The Bible has several places where God notices the pain of his children or when they die. Yet, what if God wants more from a miracle than pain relief? What if God wants the miracle to move people closer to faith or to help more people than just you? Miracles are not all about us. In the text, the raising of Lazarus proved that Jesus was from God and brought people to faith. While it helped a family that had lost a loved one, it brought glory to God and led people to a savior.

A. Did God let me down? v.21 *"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*

Both sisters wished that Jesus could have been present to heal their brother. Yet, the timetable in the story means that Lazarus dies soon after the messenger leaves to find Jesus. The messenger was asking Jesus to heal a man who was already dead. Both sisters never waiver in their faith in Jesus' powers to their credit. They express their grief and a feeling that it was not God's will or that Jesus would have been there to heal their brother. Yet, the problem for both is that they still see the miracle as just about them and their pain. They still don't see the big picture.

Like the sisters, we feel disappointment or loss when a miracle has not happened. We are still in pain. We missed an opportunity. It is easy to think that God let us down. It is easy to wonder if there is any reason to pray when we need help in the future. We judge God too harshly when He is not on our timetable. Our Lord waited two days before coming to Mary and Martha. He is not our servant whom we can order to care for our needs. He is our Lord, and we need to trust Him to help us in a way that is better than we ever expected.

B. What did God promise? v.25 *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;*

Jesus sent the sisters a message back in verse 4 that the sickness would not end in death. Just before this verse, he is even more emphatic and says, "your brother will rise again." Yet, it never entered their minds that Lazarus would walk out of the tomb that day, even though Jesus had raised at least two other people by this time. Here Jesus tells them how it can happen. He is the master of life and death. He can raise the dead here on earth and will raise all people on the last day. Those who believe in Him will live in eternity. They are to trust that nothing is too hard for Jesus. Just believe.

There is a time for us to look at what God promises. He does not promise to do as we want, but what is best for us. Would God want to give you a job where you would be miserable? Could God allow someone to die because He knows they will be in unending pain if they live? God often gives us better than we ask. He often gives us solutions that will benefit others and not just us. God has a worldview; we have a narrow and immediate view. The wise will trust God and ask for His will, not their own.

C. What does God call me to do? v.39 *"Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time, there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."*

Eventually, it all comes down to trust. Martha had declared her faith in Jesus, even confessing that Jesus was the Messiah. Now Jesus asks to do something simple, and she questions his request. Yet, how would Lazarus come out of the tomb if she did not order the stone to be taken away? It was truth time and trust time. Martha had to put the situation in Jesus' hands even if Jesus was asking for something that didn't make sense. Would she obey and allow the miracle to happen, or would she get in the way and make it harder? She followed the Lord's will, and Jesus commanded her brother to rise.

We often think in little boxes. If God is going to answer our prayer, He will have to do this or that. Yet, we can't limit God. We have to obey and have to trust. God may ask you to interview for a job you are not sure you want. God may ask you to take on a ministry that scares you. Those who trust God will see miracles come at times that those with feeble faith will not. They will see God use our discomfort and trouble to work a miracle that is bigger than us. They will see God impact a group instead of just one person. Our obedience opens up doors for God to touch lives.

D. It is all about God's glory v. 40 *Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"*

Ultimately, the miracle was all about God's glory. Jesus has been praying about his friend's death for some time. He waited two days so that Lazarus in the tomb could not be in a coma or a trance, but he had to be dead. Jesus upped the ante so people could understand God's power. It had an effect. The text tells us that people who had come to visit put their faith in Jesus. Less than two miles from Mt. Calvary,

people saw a miracle of life and death. Here they heard Jesus call God father, and God answered in a mighty way so that people might believe in Him.

What if we prayed that every miracle God did for us resulted in His glory? God gives healing so that people we know might turn to God when they are ill. God gives us help with our broken car or furnace because he knows that we will tell everyone we know about how wonderful our God is. Miracles are not about us. Miracles happen so that people put their faith in God and have salvation. Miracles happen so that this world that thinks man doesn't need God has a sense of what life could be if they trusted Him. Miracles are to give God glory so that more people see Him as Lord.

Looking beyond my pain for a miracle

Be open to His response as you keep praying

So what does that mean for us? First, never give up on God. We often stop praying because we figure that it is over. The sisters stopped looking for a miracle when Lazarus died, yet Jesus did not give up. Just because we didn't get the promotion or Grandma is still ill doesn't mean we stop praying. Trust! Second, we have to obey. Open up your scripture, find out what God wants you to do, and then do it. God will send opportunities that we need to take. God will call us to live a Godly character when the world wants us to take shortcuts. Obey God and live as His child. Don't get in the way of the miracle.

Finally, ask if helping you can help others. Think beyond yourself when you need help. How can a miracle for you lead someone in your family closer to the Lord? How can a miracle in your life open up possibilities for ministry to others? God's answers to your troubles are not just about your pain but about God's glory. God can do so much more than we ever imagine. The raising of Lazarus four days after he was dead accomplished so much more than if Jesus had come in time and healed a sick friend. As we let God do God-sized miracles, we can watch God change the world around us.

Look beyond yourself!

Grandma Schmitt had cancer. The doctors had operated on her cancer, and now she was receiving radiation after surgery. At first, she prayed for herself, but then she thought about her daughter Elly. Elly took her mother to the hospital each time for surgery but hadn't been in church in years. So Grandma Schmitt began to pray with Elly. Every time they would go to the hospital, Grandma Schmitt would not get out of the car until they had read a devotion and had a prayer. Elly balked at first, but soon she listened to each devotion and asked questions.

After a few sessions, Grandma Schmitt asked if they could pray for anything for Elly and was surprised when Elly welled up with tears and talked about her problems at work. Together they prayed, and the prayers led to more requests in the coming days. God had used cancer to bring Elly back to Him. Sometimes, the greatest question we can ask is if our miracle could bring someone closer to the Lord. So don't just pray for yourself. Pray for them as well. Let God be glorified in you so that the world might be led to believe in God and have salvation.

8. Miraculous catch – Jesus’ power to reclaim

John 21:1-14

Big idea: Jesus wants to encourage us every day.

John 21:1-14 1 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 3 "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. 4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. 5 He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. 6 He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. 7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. 9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." 11 Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

There are times everyone needs encouragement.

Ministry can be challenging and thankless. You fight Satan and get beat up. You deal with God's people, who are often not model saints. You also deal with all the doubts and fears that well up from inside you. So it is no wonder that there are times when everyone needs encouragement to minister to the Lord. God gave Moses a staff that turned into a snake when he doubted at the burning bush. When he asked for a sign, Gideon had a fleece that was alternately wet and dry. The Lord showed Hezekiah a shadow that got longer as it approached noon. Every one of those miracles had no purpose but to encourage a servant of the Lord.

God still does miracles like that. Churches get grants as an encouragement to go forward and do evangelism. New members joining a congregation ready to use their gifts are a miracle that lifts tired servants and makes them want to move forward. In the text, we see the final miracle in John's gospel has only one purpose. It does not heal anyone or cast out a demon. It is a miracle of encouragement to help weary and confused disciples transition into the ministry of sharing the gospel and becoming the church.

A. In those times when you aren't sure to do v. 3 *I'm going out to fish, Simon Peter told them, and they said, we'll go with you.*

Everything had changed for the disciples since the resurrection. The daily 24/7 fellowship that they had experienced with Jesus until the last supper had been replaced with periodic appearances that they could not predict and could not count on. The disciples were used to daily miracles and now life was dull. Peter decides to do what he knows best. He invites the others to go fishing while they wait for Jesus. This impetuous man needed to do something and was just tired of sitting. He was lost and confused. He probably felt guilty for denying Jesus and was not confident of his status.

All of us have times when we feel distant from God as we are doing ministry. We serve the church as Sunday school teachers, treasurers, or elders and feel lost. We know we are supposed to be doing something, but where are the miracles? Where is the power of God in our lives? We are supposed to do what Peter does. Keep living our lives doing what we have always been doing. Teach Sunday school even

if there are no miracles. Balance the church budget or visit the sick. Sometimes, God wants us to do what we have always done for him and do it well for, in the midst of the ordinary, God will appear.

B. In those times when you feel like a failure v. 5 *He called out to them, friends, haven't you any fish? No, they answered.*

But what if we do the ordinary, and it feels like a failure? The disciples had been fishing all night and caught nothing. These were experienced fishermen who had fished this lake all their lives. They knew how to bring in the big catch, but nothing worked out that night. When daybreak came, they were tired, hungry, and frustrated. They had felt like they were failures at being a disciple, now they were failures at their life's work of fishing. What should have been a familiar, comforting task had only worsened their feelings of disappointment.

You continue teaching Sunday school, and no kids show up but your own. You plan a potluck for the community and the congregation, and three people show up. You want to throw up your hands and quit on the spot. Why Lord? Where are the miracles we used to experience? Why do I only have a failure? Sometimes the Lord allows us times of frustration to bring us closer to him. Amid our disappointment, we learn to rely on him. We learn to count success and failure differently as well. Success is measured by doing what he wants, not by meeting society's goals or our own goals of success.

C. Listen to Jesus and see he is at your side v. 6 *Throw your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some*

Yet someone was watching from the shore. He told them to cast the net on the other side of the boat. It was a silly idea, but they did it anyway. At that moment, the fish filled the net, so they couldn't get the catch into the boat. It was a miracle, just like the one that had happened two years before. John shouts, "It is the Lord!" The miracle had opened their eyes and shown them that He was never far away. The gift reminded them that the power of Jesus was with them. By themselves, they could do very little. Then, following Jesus, they caught a group of fish like never before.

While doing the ordinary, listen for the voice of Jesus. Expect that he can do the miraculous in our everyday tasks of life. Begin each action with prayer and invite Him into whatever you are doing. Listen for the small voice that invites you to do things differently or a Bible passage that comes to mind. Know that your Lord is at your side and that He still does miracles. Guard against being so preoccupied with your work that you miss the quiet voice of Jesus. Sometimes it is the little things that Jesus does to encourage us in our ministry. Miracles that pronounce that he is there at our side watching over us.

D. Jesus will be there when you need him v. 12 *Jesus said to them, come and have breakfast. None of the disciples dared ask him, who are you. They knew it was the Lord.*

And as they came to land, he invited them to have fellowship with Him. They had caught 153 fish, but there was no need for them. Jesus had fish and bread waiting for them. It would not be their food that satisfied them, but the spiritual food that Jesus had prepared for them that fed their bodies and souls. At one time, they had eaten and walked with him constantly. Now things would be different. Jesus would not be confined to one space but could be with them all as they scattered to share the gospel. He would still be with them and always ready to do a miracle for them no matter where they were if they needed Him to do so.

Have fellowship with Jesus each day in word and prayer. You may not see him physically, but He can touch your heart. He may speak a word to you in scripture. He may touch your heart with a feeling that sends chills down your spine. He may do something you have no explanation for – a miracle just for you. He will be with you as you do your ministry in his name. He desires to have fellowship with you each day to encourage you and let you know that you are loved. He will be there when you need him. Open your heart and listen for his voice as you read your scripture and pray in a quiet place.

We all need a lift sometimes.

Tired, hungry, and frustrated, the disciples needed a lift. They had understood what it meant to follow Jesus, the rabbi, around Palestine. But, they still didn't understand their new roles as fishers of men. They still didn't comprehend how He would always be with them, ready to do miracles in their ministry. Our ministries change as well. We hit bumps in the road. We face new opportunities that we don't understand. We want it to be like it was where Jesus was doing miracles all the time, and ministry was going great. Yet, life has changed.

Jesus has not. He still walks at our side and offers us a deep fellowship. Our Lord gives us a chance to do ministry in new ways and promises to be at our side when we become discouraged or frustrated. He will teach us about our future work for him. He will lead us to greater things. And sometimes, he will do a miracle to get us moving in the right direction. He will do something unexpected just so that we know he is near and has given us the power to do the impossible. He will show his presence so that we rely on him, not on ourselves.

Intimacy with Jesus calms all our fears.

The miracle got their attention, but it was the time around the fire that calmed their fears and prepared them for the future. They had been through so much over the last couple of weeks. Sitting with Jesus and listening to His plan for their lives reassured them that it would be all right. Yes, there will be miracles in our ministry, but the quiet times with Jesus will calm your fears and keep you going. It will be the quiet times just reading the bible and letting him speak to you that tells you it will be all right and that gives you direction for your life and your ministry.

It will be when you pour out your heart in prayer, giving Jesus all your fears and concerns, and then hearing his reassuring voice tell you that it will be OK. Those conversations are priceless. They occur in that quiet room, walking in a city park, or just sitting on the patio by the fire. Miracles are nice and Jesus can use them to encourage us, but sitting with Jesus is even better. In such moments, we touch the heart of Jesus, and He touches ours. It is a place we can visit daily and lighten our load.

Transfiguration

Learning to Trust Jesus

Matthew 17:1-9

Big idea: Give your future to the one with divine power.

Matthew 17:1-9 1 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. 3 Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. 4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." 8 When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Waking up and seeing heaven's glory and power

It began as a typical day for the disciples. First, they head up a mountain to watch Jesus pray just like He did so much of the time. Then they find themselves sleeping because they are bored and tired since Jesus prayed for hours, not minutes. But as they wake, they see Moses and Elijah. They see Jesus shining like a light bulb and dressed in neon-white clothes. They were afraid and wondered what was going on. But it was all an attempt to prepare the disciples for something even more difficult to believe. They would go from here to Jerusalem and the cross.

Sometimes, God lets us see part of His glory if we are paying attention. He takes an average day and adds a surprise of fantastic news or a miracle of healing or help. God is getting you ready for what is to come in your life. The transfiguration was to teach the disciples to trust God and to trust Jesus. They were to see in the transfiguration the incredible power of Jesus and the fact that he would triumph in the end. It is a battle between fear and trust. It is a battle that will determine if you succeed or fail.

We want fear solved the easy way.

Living with fear v.6 *When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.*

Living without fear is not easy amidst the daily challenges that all of us disciples have. Look in the text and see the horror of the disciples. Before the disciples stood two Old Testament characters and a neon Jesus. Were they dead? Did the judgment day come, and they missed it? Sometimes we are confronted with the incredible power of God as well. We see God do a miracle in our lives and wonder if it is true. We see God save us in a car accident or when we are ill, and the future has changed. We shake our heads and don't want to believe it.

Why would God do such miraculous things? It is because life is filled with struggles. We all face illness, death, and layoffs, to name a few. They cause us pain and can make us sleepless at night. Yet, we fear them and the havoc they can play with our lives. God does miracles before our eyes to teach us to trust Jesus. He wants us to learn to pray, understanding that Jesus will help us. The trouble is that we all have prayed, and things take time before they happen. Perhaps they get worse. The fears come over us in force, and despair overtakes us.

We want the easy way out v. 4 *Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.*

Peter has the answer amid fear – take the easy way out. Having come to his senses, he decides that this is nice. Let's stay here on the mountain. Forget the problems of the world below. Forget the other nine

disciples. Let's remain here on the mountain, away from it all. Take the easy way out could be the slogan of our society. Take this magic pill that will get rid of your sickness or pain. Take a vacation to a distant place and leave your cares behind. Sit in the sporty car and drive away in peace with an 8-speaker stereo blaring your favorite music.

Everyone wants you to believe that you can sit at home in your easy chair with your feet up and that their product will take care of everything. Yet, we know that it doesn't work that way. We have known many people who ignored their problems and paid the price. Jesus never gives the simple way out to the disciples or us. He wants us to pray. He wants us to trust and follow Him when we don't know where we are going. That is not easy, but it is possible for the disciples and us. First, you have to know who Jesus is and trust Him.

Seeing Jesus differently

He is God v.2 *There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.*

That is why Jesus showed the disciples His true nature here. Until now, they knew Him as a great man who could do miracles and teach them about God. Here they see He is God as He shines in the glory of the Father like the light at the tabernacle or on Mt. Sinai. They can see the perfect glory of the Son, who shines like nothing else ever has on earth. It was to help them to know why he could heal people, raise others from the dead, and calm the storms. He was God's equal to the Father. Nothing was beyond his power.

Jesus will show us that he is God if we let Him. He will open up the pages of scripture to help us see the truth in new ways. He will answer our prayer as he heals a loved one or makes an unbearable situation work out. He wants us to see that He is God's equal with the Father and that there is nothing in our lives that he cannot do. There is nothing that our Jesus cannot help with and will not bring to a good ending if we let him. He is in control; we can trust him.

Seeing His victory v. 9 *As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."*

He also wants us to see what the cross is all about. Moses and Elijah are not just talking about things in general. Luke tells us that they spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Luke 9:31. It is the cross that is the power of the plan. The cross will bring victory as Jesus conquers sin and death. The disciples will huddle in fear on Good Friday but will find their hearts open with joy on Easter. They will finally begin to understand who He is and what He can do.

Look at the cross for a moment and see the power of Jesus. The cross in our church is empty, and it reminds us of what Jesus can do. Not even death can hold Him. If that is true about Jesus, what is in your life that he cannot do or help with? The cross of Jesus gives us reason to trust our God and know that he has a plan that will work for our lives. The cross conquers the world and evil with forgiveness and mercy for those who repent. It also seals the fate of those who refuse him. It is the ultimate miracle.

Making a choice

Trusting Jesus v. 7 *But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."*

The vision of the divine Jesus should have given these disciples courage for what they are about to face. The weeks ahead will see Jesus' passion and his cross. The picture of a transfigured Jesus should have told them He could handle it. When you pray to Jesus, see both the man and the transfigured God before you. See the man who understands what you feel, but also see the God who can do anything. So take courage in that you follow the God of the universe who can slay any evil and solve any problem.

Do not be afraid – he is God. He can protect you and watch over you every day of your life. Do not try to take the easy way out. Follow Him and know that He watches your life, ready to help and protect you in ways you are unaware of. Look for the signs in your life that He is there doing miracles in your life

behind the scenes. Look for His power so that you do not have to be afraid when trials come. He will comfort you. He wants you to trust him even when times get rough.

Giving Him your future v. 8 *When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.*

The transfiguration was over, and there was only one person to follow. They would come down the mountain following Jesus to Jerusalem, where they would have front-row seats at God's victory. There they would be given a new future. We have only one place to go after seeing the miracles that Jesus works in our lives. We need to follow Jesus and trust Him through the days ahead. We need to have confidence in the Lord. We need to lay our lives in his hands and ask where he wants to have us step tomorrow.

We want to do that because the path he would take us far better than any direction we might stumble on by ourselves. We follow Jesus with confidence because we have had a glimpse of his power and our future. The Transfiguration is a place of surrender. When the glory of the moment is gone, we follow Jesus, knowing that He can do all things. We come off the mountain, roll up ourselves and prepare for the work ahead, knowing that He and those who walk with Him will be victorious.