

PLENTY TOO MUCH WEEK 6
SETTING A TABLE FOR A MIRACLE
6/28/20

MAT. 14:19-20

I. Introduction

A. Rachel Beckwith had a dream. She heard about people in Africa, dying because they had no clean water to drink. For her birthday, she decided that instead of asking for presents, she would ask people to donate to give kids clean water. Her goal was to raise \$300. She came up just \$80 short, when she turned 9-years-old, in 2011. Tragically shortly after, she died in a horrific traffic accident. But news of her passion and selflessness spread and thousands of people heard and wanted to give to the cause she believed in. Her parents set up a non-profit and in several months over \$200,000 had been raised that enabled 40 wells to be dug and gave over 37,000 people clean water. This actually led to what can only be described as a movement to bring clean water to people in Africa.

Something so little created something so much. This is similar to the story in my book of my nephew Charlie. His generosity inspired my sister and brother-in-law to start *Charlie's Lunch* which helps churches in developing countries have a feeding program and as a result has served over 7 million meals.

It is also the theme of the boy with the loaves and fishes that has been at the heart of our sermon series and is the foundational story for my book, *Plenty-Too-Much*. Today, I want to focus on what I call, "*Setting the table for a miracle.*"

B. This sermon is based on chapters 8 and 12 in the book, which I think are my favorite chapters because they share what we have learned about partnering with God for miracles. If there has ever been a time that we needed miracles it is today. Millions of people are going to live devastated lives unless they discover not just human answers but sovereign solutions and interventions to human problems. We need miracles not just occasionally but continually in our lives. I like to say, "a miracle a day will keep the devil away."

Three reasons we need miracles.

1. Miracles allow people to get help they otherwise wouldn't be able to receive.
2. Miracles build the faith of those who participate in them, actually preparing them to see more and greater miracles as time goes by.
3. Miracles bring God glory and point people to Jesus as the answer that we need.

I couldn't be more excited about a miracle that is unfolding before our eyes. We have been giving in lots of ways to help people through this Covid-19 crisis. This has included opening a food pantry. Aaron and Debra and other volunteers have worked tirelessly and so many of you have given so generously to help the hungry. This week so unexpectedly, we were given the opportunity to be the distribution site for some nonprofits that work with farmers. The farmers have an abundance of produce they haven't been able to sell because of the situation and want to donate. We began receiving this week a semi-truck load of over 1500 boxes of food that we were able to distribute to 25 churches including our own. The boxes contain enough food for a family of four. And that is just the beginning as we have the opportunity to receive up to 3 semi-truck loads and up to 4800 boxes of food. Can you imagine? We will be feeding the 5000 every week.

The beautiful thing I have discovered is that as we take these to the neighbors, we get to lift up the name of Jesus and God is glorified.

We know and believe that hundreds of people are being drawn to Jesus in our community during this very time of crisis. What a miracle! We are literally seeing what happens when you set a table for a miracle.

This is what a little boy and the 12 disciples did 2000 years ago. Let's read the story. Matthew 14:19-20

II. Let me share with you some key observations from this passage.

A. This is a special miracle because it is not just a miracle Jesus did for His people; it is one, He did *through* His people. Before this time most of the miracles Jesus did, like raising the dead, and the disciples watched. But this one is different. I love how Jesus says to the disciples, "*You feed them*", when they suggest that Jesus turn the people away to go find food. I know all of us would like to be passive recipients of miracles but most miracles aren't just given; they are things we participate in. We might wish God would just zap our marriage, or our partner, but God chooses to work in and through us to bring healing to our marriage.

The significance is this:

1. God wants us to realize and remember that we are His hands and feet. When it comes to most miracles, He makes it clear, that "apart from Him we can do nothing", but at the same time apart from us He won't do all He wants to do. A little boy in a slum was telling his friend that he didn't

think God was good because God hadn't provided food for them. Another boy, said, "O yes, God is good, He did provide food for us by giving it to someone to give to us, but they just must have forgotten." What a tragedy when God's heart is moved but His hands aren't willing to move.

2. God wants to use us in miracles because when that happens not only do needs get met but our faith and character grows. I like to say, "If God tells you to embrace and put your arms around an elephant, it means He's going to help you grow really big arms." Such a huge part of learning a plenty too much mindset is learning to go from impossibility thinking to possibility thinking. Impossibility thinking was where the disciples were stuck. They were prisoners of expecting and asking God to do only what they had always seen Him do and expecting life to be the way it had always been. Jesus was creating a shift in their thinking that was going to result in a revival and revolution in the world. In our lives it is often true, "We have not because we ask not" (James 4:2). We ask not because we never expect God to do more than what we've always expected.

In the book, I talk about my Mom, stuck in a dark room, losing her eyesight to glaucoma and trapped in a terrible environmental illness. The whisper came to go to a meeting in California, a healing service. She was struck by the story of the lepers who were starving because an enemy had surrounded Jerusalem and cut off the food supply. They decided to march out of their box and risk something scary for the chance of appropriating something great. They said to themselves, "*Why stay here until we die?*" They ran into a miracle in the process, just like my Mom did in that service in California where she was completely and instantly healed.

B. The other big observation is that Jesus specifically used ordinary, weak, small, and unspectacular people who had very little to give in an incredible way. You might call this story "little people/Big God." The feeding of the 5000 speaks of this shift. God is not looking for superheroes or spiritual people to do His work. He wants to use ordinary, average, even goofy people like you and me to do extraordinary things by letting Him work through us.

God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called, which is every one of us. There are not two classes of Christians, the "anointed, priests, pastors, and missionaries" and the unqualified laymen who are just supposed to stay, pay, and get out of the way. All of God's people are called and in the era of the Holy Spirit, He has put all of His gifts, miracle possibilities, and anointings on the lowest shelf so that all of His kids get to do what Jesus did. God wants to redefine in our minds what a normal Christian is. A normal Christian is someone who attempts to do

what Jesus would do by the power of the Holy Spirit wherever they are and whenever they can.

This leads us to our memory verse, I Corinthians 1:27.

“But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.”

I love how the Message version puts it.

“Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don’t see many of the brightest and the best” among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn’t it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these

“nobodies” to expose the hollow pretensions of the “somebodies”? That makes it clear that none of you can get by with blowing your own horn before God. Everything that we have-right thinking and right living, a clean slate and a fresh start - comes from God by way of Jesus Christ. That’s why we have the saying, “IF you’re going to bow a horn, blow a trumpet for God.” (2 Cor. 1:26-31 MSG)

I don’t know about you but it encourages me, that God used so many people in Scripture who had issues and dysfunctions. Abraham was called to be a father but he was childless at 99. Moses had a speech impediment. Rahab was a harlot. David had an affair and was a murderer. Zacchaeus was a thief. Naaman suffered from leprosy. Elijah suffered from depression and mental illness. John the Baptist was eccentric. Jonah was disobedient. A little boy just had the equivalent of a happy meal. To top them all, Lazarus, when Jesus called him, was dead!

The point is that being used of God is not about being “anointed”, having a preacher voice, praying in a way that sounds like you’re on spiritual steroids. It’s not about you at all; it’s not about being anointed but being *obedient*. You and I are just earthen vessels but if we will put the little talent, treasure, time, we have in the hands of an unlimited God, and follow His lead, the little we have in the hands of a limitless God has the potential to change the world.

This is what I learned when I was barely 16 years old. I brought some school friends to the preacher, Josh Villasenor, and asked him to pray for them to be saved and healed. Josh told me he wouldn’t but I could because God called everyone to do His work and would use me. My mind had to shift. When I stepped out in my feeble way, God was faithful and they were saved and filled with the Holy Spirit.

III. What are the ways we can set the table for miracles? How can we partner with God in seeing miracles? Here are 4 simple things.

A. Take your eyes off of yourself and focus on showing love and care about the needs of those around you. Miracles happen through the lives of people whose eyes aren't on their desires but are asking how they can help people who are more in need than them. Faith always works through love. Everything shifted when a little boy cared about the people who didn't have a lunch. That started the ball rolling.

Back in March there were two kinds of people when the pandemic hit. There were those whose mind went to their survival. They were in lines trying to figure out how to hoard 6 months of bottled water, toilet paper and wipes for themselves. Then there were those like our missionary partners like Chris and Heidi who could've left Zambia but wanted to care for their disciples and stayed. Other partners realized there are kids and families who won't even be able to eat if the economy shuts down. The people who are thinking of others place themselves in a position to be used by God. God is love and He is working in the place where people hurt the most and have the least. If you go to that place, you will see miracles.

B. Sow a seed. Every miracle begins with a seed that is sown. The miracle started with a little boy giving all he had joyfully and sacrificially. You could say that opened the storehouse of Heaven. The miracles in and through our lives today are almost always the reaping of treasures stored up yesterday. Jesus taught us to store up riches in Heaven. We are taught to do this by giving, forgiving, adding value, going the extra mile to share. Even if people are ungrateful and don't remember our kindness, God never forgets. Those treasures in Heaven are not things you have to die to get. They are cashed in, in amazing ways throughout your life. You cast your bread on the water and in some way, it comes back to you. We sowed a food pantry and we are reaping semi-trucks.

I received a call from a man who was on a little league baseball team I had coached 30 years ago. I had encouraged him and his mom, brought them to church, helped them in some way. He's a truck driver and after going his own way and living a sinful life, He decided to come back to God. He remembered me and wanted to know if I would baptize him and help him and his girlfriend get married in the Lord.

Wherever you have a need for a miracle sow a seed. Have a need? Sow a seed. Some of you need a reconciliation and healing from a falling out with people in your life. God may be asking you to sow a seed of blessing and forgiving those who wronged you. Sharon's cousin was alienated from her father for close

to 20 years. She had married a man of a different race and her dad disowned her. It was very painful. She chose to forgive him and made several attempts to show love and to bless him and let him know she hadn't disowned him. Shortly before he died when he found out he had cancer, he had a change of heart and reached out. They were completely reconciled and he even had time to build a relationship with his grandchildren. It was beautiful because she sowed a seed.

C. Dare to prepare for a miracle by thinking, asking, and expecting God to do things you normally have never asked or expected him to do. The disciples knew they couldn't feed all those people but there was something they could do. They could obey Jesus by having the people sit and organize themselves for a food distribution miracle. This is the idea of setting the table. I remember hearing the story of George Mueller, who took care of over 2000 orphans by faith a little over 100 years ago. One day the cupboards were empty and the kids were hungry. He told his staff to set the table and told all of the children to prepare for breakfast. He could've panicked but he prayed and had the peace that he should ask in faith. Literally, as they sat for breakfast a milk truck and a bread truck broke down near the orphanage. They both ended up knocking on the door and offering all of their food to the orphanage. The kids had one of their best breakfasts ever.

As I've mentioned because we live in the era of the Spirit, God has put the gifts of the Spirit on the lowest shelf and made them accessible to all of us. Acts 2:17 says your young men and women shall prophesy and dream dreams, signs shall follow them, as well as the handmaidens and the old. All of the ordinary people will be invited into His ministry.

Many Christians have never even thought of prophesying or healing the sick. They have a closed mind and an impossibility way of thinking. I believe the moment someone begins to shift their thinking and is willing to ask, expect, and attempt ways for God to use them beyond what they could imagine, they will step into the miracle zone.

D. Be willing to step out of your comfort zone to ask and attempt things that are only possible if God intervenes. After all the people were seated, Jesus prayed and started handing the disciples pieces of bread and fish to distribute to the crowd. I have a feeling this took them way out of their comfort zones. See if I'm reading it right. Those little sardines and biscuit size pieces of bread didn't multiply until they were extended from the disciples' hands to the hands of others. Throughout the Bible we see God never does a miracle and then asks His people to step out in faith; He asks His people to step out in faith and then does a miracle. The Red Sea didn't part and then Moses walked through it. As Moses raised his rod and the people started to walk, the Red Sea parted.

So many times we are waiting for God to move while He is waiting for us to move.

I believe with all of my heart that all of the great new opportunities, breakthroughs, and miracles God has for your life in this coming year are things only available outside of your comfort zone. You will never know your capacity to see God move or use your life until in some way you step out of the boat onto the water.

I have found it true that in reaching out to people, awkward always comes before amazing. We are led to ask someone if we can pray for them, that feels awkward but becomes amazing. We start to serve in a ministry that we feel inadequate but then God provides talents we didn't know we had. When God called me to go to the Philippines, I felt I had nothing to give and had no idea what I would do, but in the going God opened doors.

About 5 years ago we had a wonderful move of God among our youth. A Mayfield HS student named Jacob Jones wanted to reach his classrooms for Jesus. He took a step and began playing worship songs with his guitar at school. Before we knew it, van loads of students were coming to church and getting saved.

We have no idea what our capacity is in God until we step out. The Navy Seals speak of tapping into your 40%. They say at the point you feel completely exhausted and can't take another step, the truth is your body still has 40 % more capacity. Christian, your capacity is so much more than the 40% of what you might be able to do for God. Your capacity is what Ephesians 3:20 says; it is more than you could ask or imagine because of the power of Jesus Christ who is in you. There is no limit to how big your "little" can become if it is placed in the Master's hands.

Conclusion

I love this simple way of saying it, God hasn't called us to be producers; He has called us to simply be His partners and participants. What a wonderful thought that God is right now on the move in ways bigger than we can imagine. We are seeing this with the semi-trucks. We didn't try to produce it; we just recognized it and jumped in. God is creating waves; He is asking us to grab our surf board and jump on.

God has ways He wants to work and things He wants to do in your life and family's lives that will amaze you. Miracles are in store for every one of you my friends. Will you be willing to think differently, expect differently, look beyond yourself, step out of your comfort zone, and feel God's heart for other people around you?

The miracle you may have been longing to see in your family, school, business, the city, or the world maybe Jesus wants to do it in some huge way not just for you but through you! Would you dare to believe?

I want you to ask God and think about what miracle you most need, want, and hope to see in your life today. Maybe you need a change of your life and heart. Sow a seed, give your heart to

Jesus. Tell Him you're tired of trying to be in control, that you can't do it without Him and want to surrender your life to Jesus.

Wherever else there is a need that is so big, God is able to handle it. Change your thinking. Expect Him to move. Ask the Lord what seed you could plant to see the need met by a miracle. Is there a step you can take, a gift you can give, a way to show undeserved forgiveness and love? Tell the Lord you're ready to give Him your lunch.

I tell you you're not only going to see miracles and blessings but blessings of the plenty too much kind. I love how the story of feeding the 5000 ends. After all God does in that meal, there are still 12 giant baskets left over. That's what God has for you: ***Plenty Too Much!***