

Our real need for rescue

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[0 : 00] On Wednesday morning this week, we woke up to some very interesting news, didn't we? News of a coup in Zimbabwe. The military, by Wednesday morning, had rolled into Harare, the capital, and taken over the government and put Robert Mugabe under house arrest, effectively ending his 37-year, rather disastrous rule.

And as you can see from the pictures behind me, the people of Zimbabwe aren't too bothered by the fact. That the military took over their government. And of course it was a surprise when we woke up to hear this news, but in some ways it really wasn't.

Zimbabweans have been needing something like this for a long time, haven't they? People have been unhappy, they've been waiting for a new leader to come in and take over and rescue them from this rut that the country is stuck in.

Now of course whether the new leadership will do that remains to be seen, and so we should be praying. We should be praying for Zimbabwe, our neighbors. That they would be guided, that their leaders would be chosen well.

We should be praying that there would be no bloodshed. And it has been a bloodless coup so far, so we can give thanks for that. But why do I talk about Zimbabwe this morning? Well I mentioned the situation there because it actually gives us a really nice context to understand the situation in our passage this morning, John chapter 6.

[1 : 23] Because you see the Jewish society back then wasn't that different from modern day Zimbabwe. It was also a country with a lot of tension, a country in need of new leadership.

They were under oppressive rule and the people were desperate for a change. And they had been, not for decades but for centuries. They'd been wanting a change. They'd been wanting new leadership. And it was fueled by the fact that God had actually promised them a new leader to come.

In their scriptures they were waiting for the prophesied Messiah. Who was a leader who could bring about the kind of change that they needed. And so it was a really tense time in Jewish society. There was a lot of tensions between the rulers and the people. And they were waiting for this Messiah. And it's into this situation, this tense situation that Jesus steps into.

And he then, as we've been seeing in the last few chapters of John, he starts to show all the signs of being this promised Messiah. And it's by now in John 6 that the people at large, the crowds, the Jewish society, is starting to notice this.

[2 : 35] And it's not long before things get serious. And that's what happens here. You see, what happens in this chapter is essentially a crowd of 5,000 men.

And that's just the men, not including the women and children. And I think John mentions the crowd of 5,000 men, telling us that there's 5,000 men there. Because this is basically enough for a small army.

This crowd of 5,000 men who want to change in leadership now come to Jesus. And essentially, they want him to lead them in a coup, much like happened in Zimbabwe.

And they want him to become their new king. We see this in verse 15. It says, They intended to make him king by force. They were serious. They wanted Jesus to be their new king.

Now, you can't really blame them, can you? It's not a bad choice for a king. I mean, if Jesus was running for our president, I'd vote for him. And I bet you would too.

[3 : 35] You couldn't really ask for a better leader than Jesus. And so what's surprising about this story is, as we read on, we discover that Jesus says no. He says no to their desire to make him their king, which is quite unexpected.

Because all this time in John, you've been expecting people to realize who he is. And now they're starting to realize it, and he basically runs away from them. He doesn't want to be their king. Why? Why not give these people the change that they're looking for? Well, that's what we need to figure out this morning, if we're going to understand John chapter 6. And so what we're going to consider, first of all, is why these people wanted Jesus to be their king in the first place. What was the trigger that caused them to realize and say to him, you know, be our king. But secondly, we're going to consider why he refused to be their king. So let's look at those. Firstly, why they wanted him as king. Now in this story, you'll have noticed when Richard read it for us, Jesus performs not one, but two miraculous signs. [4 : 39] The continuation of the signs that he's been performing in John. The first is the famous feeding of the 5,000 from verse 1 to 15. Incidentally, that is, by the way, the only miracle that all four Gospels record.

It's so significant, which we'll see in a bit. But then the second sign is Jesus walking on water towards his disciples as they were heading into rough seas from verse 16 to 21. So these are the two signs that happen. Now, of course, these miracles by themselves are astonishing. We've got, every now and again, you know, we've just got to sit and put ourselves there in that situation, in the disciples' boat or on that field when there was no food. And just imagine what it would have been like. These are astonishing miracles. I think we sometimes take for granted how amazing they are because we read them in the Bible and we're used to them and we're taught them at Sunday school. But they are incredible. But as with all the miracles in John we've been seeing so far, they have a deeper meaning as well. And these two miracles, feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus walking on water, are actually connected.

[5 : 46] They're not just independent, random miracles. John doesn't just record them randomly. There's a connection between them. And I think any Jew who knew his Bible at that time would probably have picked up the connection, would have picked up their meaning, but it's a bit harder for us 2,000 years later.

And so we first need to take a few minutes this morning to understand what these miracles actually mean, just what's going on here. Now, the first hint is in verse 4, the passage mentions that it was the time of Passover.

Now, that's no coincidence because Passover in Jewish society was the time of year when people look back to God's rescue of them out of slavery in Egypt.

Remember, it's all recorded for us in Exodus. But what's interesting is when you look back at how God saved his people out of slavery in Egypt, how did he do it?

Well, he did it also through a number of miracles, through a number of miraculous signs. Firstly, by parting the Red Sea to get the Israelites out of Egypt.

[6 : 51] And then 40 years later, after their wilderness wanderings in the desert, he parted another body of water, the Jordan River, to get them into the Promised Land. But then in the interim, between those two water miracles, there was this 40 years where they're wandering through the desert and they've got no food.

So as we read from Exodus earlier, God miraculously provided food for them in the wilderness, this food called manna, so that they could keep going towards the Promised Land.

Okay, so there are these two major miraculous signs God did for his people on their way out of Egypt. He basically provided food when they didn't have any and he made a way through uncrossable waters.

Now, I wonder if you're starting to see the significance of these signs that Jesus did in John chapter 6. Let's look at them. The feeding of the 5,000. Verse 1, Jesus goes, we're told, to the east side of the Sea of Galilee.

Now, that is across the Jordan where the wilderness was, where the Israelites, all those generations before, came from to get into Israel. He goes to the wilderness. He is followed by a multitude of people who can't feed themselves.

[8 : 10] Verse 5, Philip asks him, where shall we buy, or he asks Philip, where shall we buy bread for all these people? It sounds a lot like when Moses asked God in Numbers 11, where can I get food for all these people?

So, we're starting to see the links now. Then, verse 6, we're told, Jesus then tests Philip, not unlike how Moses was tested, to trust that God would provide over and above what his people need. And you know what? That's exactly what Jesus does. He miraculously provides food in the wilderness far more than is needed. We're told they had 12 baskets of leftovers. 12. That's an interesting number. It's like the 12 tribes of Israel. And that's no mistake. See, this miracle is packed with symbolism. And it's showing us that Jesus is now the one who provides for all the tribes of God's people, just like his father originally did in the wilderness. Jesus is basically saying, in this sign, that he is the new provider for God's people as they're going through the wilderness to the promised land.

[9 : 18] So, that was the first miracle. I hope you're starting to see the connections with the Old Testament. But what about the second miracle? Jesus walking on water. That's a little bit more difficult to connect.

But they're definitely there. There's a lot of connections there. I won't go through all of them. But basically, you need to understand that seas and waters in the Bible always represented chaos. There was symbolism for chaos. The Israelite people didn't like going on water much. But also, it wasn't just representative of chaos. It was representative of obstacle. Because in their great Exodus story, the main obstacles to them getting to the promised land were these bodies of water that they had to cross.

And so, one of the ways that God showed his power time and time again to his people was by removing those barriers to make uncrossable waters crossable so his people could go where they needed to go.

So his people could go where God wanted them to go. Like he showed to the Israelites, of course, when he parted the waters in the Exodus. But also, like Jesus shows here, by just walking on top of the waters.

[10 : 29] And then, when he joins his disciples, notice the end of verse 21, and immediately the boat reached the shore they were heading. The disciples were heading into a storm, a difficult wind.

The seas were rising. And suddenly, Jesus arrives, basically conquering the waters, walking on top of them, and taking his disciples exactly where they needed to go. See this symbolism?

He's showing that just like with the rescue of the Israelites, when the waters seemed uncrossable, they're not going to stop him from taking his people where they need to go.

That is the meaning of this miracle. And so these miracles are packed with links to the Old Testament. And if you read your Old Testament, you really can't miss them.

And if you're still not sure how the New Testament and the life and work of Jesus links back to the Old Testament and fulfills everything in the Old Testament, then look no further than this chapter and these miracles.

[11 : 34] It's clear what Jesus is doing here. He's identifying himself as the coming rescuer that everything in the Old Testament was pointing towards. The rescuer and the provider of God's people.

And so you can start to understand why these people reacted like they did to Jesus on this day. Because they knew their Old Testaments.

They could see the signs. Even if they picked up just a few of these links, it was enough to convince them they needed to make this guy their king. What is not so easy to understand is why Jesus deliberately avoids them.

Why he doesn't want to be their king. And that's the answer that we go on to see for that. And the main point really of this passage is that they were looking for the wrong kind of rescue.

That's why Jesus avoids them. They were looking for the wrong kind of rescue. Now what do I mean by that? Well, have a look at what Jesus says when they catch up with him again in verse 26. Jesus answered, Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me not because you saw the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

[12 : 45] Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you. Okay, so what Jesus is saying here to these people is that the reason, he's realized, the reason they want him to be their king is because he gave them food.

Because he fulfilled their physical needs. First and foremost, he satisfied them physically. And of course, that's the kind of king that people want, isn't it?

That's the kind of leader people will follow. We all want leaders who can provide for us and our country's physical needs. The coup in Zimbabwe on Wednesday happened partly because the country was not getting what it needed economically from their leaders.

And it came to a critical point that they said, no more. and they wanted a change. You see, we want leaders who will provide for our physical needs as a country.

Leaders who will create jobs. Leaders who will manage the economy. Leaders who will prevent inflation and provide economic stability so that we can save up and afford things and retire well with financial security.

[13 : 57] People follow leaders who will fulfill their physical needs and leaders who will defend them from their physical enemies. We want leaders who will put enough money in the budget into an army and a navy so that we won't be invaded by other countries.

So we look for leaders who can provide physically and who can rescue physically or protect physically, right? And Jesus says that is what these people were looking for in him.

That's why they were following him. Because he had just demonstrated obvious power to do those things. To provide for his people. Physically. He could do that.

And he still can today. But you see, in doing so, in these people looking for what Jesus could give them physically, they missed the point of his miracles completely. And that's what Jesus is saying here.

Because his physical miracles are meant to point to a deeper spiritual reality. That's why they're called science. And in this case, the deepest spiritual reality that these miracles are meant to point to is that just like we need physical food for life, which Jesus can provide, we also need spiritual food for spiritual life.

[15 : 17] Because the truth is, no matter how much food we eat in life, and no matter how healthy we eat, no matter how many, you know, lettuce salads we have, or how strict we are with our banting diets, or no matter what we eat, we're still going to die.

Sorry to say. But food, and eating food, which gives us physical life temporarily, is not going to prevent death. what diets and physical food can't give you is eternal life.

And that is the life that God intends for us to have and continue to have. But for that, no physical food is going to help. We need another kind of food.

Just as we need physical food for, you know, to live in the coming week, we need spiritual food to live in eternity. That is what Jesus is saying.

And just as the people of Israel needed to go through the wilderness to get to their promised land, physically, we, you and me, have to go through a wilderness, this life on earth, to get to our promised land.

[16 : 35] You see, these Old Testament stories were all pointing to a spiritual reality for all people in every age. You are on a journey to eternity right now, whether you know it or not.

But who will provide you with what you need to get there? You can't. And who will overcome all the barriers stopping you from getting there?

You can't. Jesus can. That is what he is proving to us here. see, Jesus came to this earth to remove the barriers stopping you and me from having eternal life, which is all of our sins, all of the sins we've committed against God from the day we were born.

and our sinful hearts, which continue to draw us away from God and to tempt us to do the things we know we shouldn't and say the things we know we shouldn't and think the things we know we shouldn't think.

Those are the barriers that are preventing us from getting to eternity, getting to the new, perfect creation. Sin. Sin cannot go there.

[17 : 53] And if we have sin in our hearts and on our lips and in our actions, those are the barriers, those are the waters, if you like, that are stopping us from reaching our promised land.

And of course, death is the result. Like the first generation of Israelites died in the desert because they didn't trust God. Well, Jesus came to remove all of those barriers for us when he died on the cross, which is really what the whole book of John is pointing towards and trying to explain and trying to help us to understand the significance of when Jesus dies on the cross.

It was there when he died willingly and deliberately for the sins of his people that he is providing food for eternal life, that he's overcoming all the barriers that are stopping you from entering eternity.

As we trust in that, as we look to that and trust in him daily, as much as we eat physical food, we look to the cross and trust in that for our spiritual food, for our spiritual provision as we head through the wilderness to eternity.

And that is why Jesus came. Not to rescue people from the physical problems they have, but to rescue them from an eternal problem. But sadly, of course, that's not what these people were interested in.

[19 : 16] they were interested in what he could give them then and there. But it's not just them. We often do the same, don't we?

Let's be honest. Our tendency, if we recognize Jesus as the Messiah at all, and it's hard not to if you read your Bible properly, but our tendency is then to look at him first and foremost to rescue us from our worldly troubles.

us. Let's be honest. We are interested in Jesus insofar as he helps us to get through the week. Insofar as he helps us in our job, with our family, with our finances, with our marriages, and insofar as he rescues us from the problems of life.

We're not nearly as interested in how Jesus rescues us from our sin, are we? Which is actually our biggest problem by far. And you can see it in how we pray.

Typically. How much are we praying daily for our sanctification, for our growth in holiness, for the mortification of sin in our lives, for spiritual disciplines, for growth in Christ-likeness, for the help to turn from specific sins in our lives?

[20 : 33] How much are we praying for those things as opposed to praying for our physical needs? Protection. Food. Finances. Ask yourself. It's quite sobering, isn't it, to realize how much we are like these people, how much we are prioritizing what Jesus can do for us physically over and above what he can do for us eternally.

And so here, Jesus is challenging us, not just challenging the people then, but challenging us today to ask ourselves, what are we really looking to Jesus to give us? why are we really following him, if you are at all?

What are we expecting from him in our lives? It's a good question to ask. You know, once Zimbabwe has a new president, there will be a lot of expectations on him, which he may or may not fulfill, or on her.

There's a lot of, when you make someone your leader, you have expectations of them. Well, if you've made Jesus your leader, if Jesus is your king today, ask yourself, why are you actually following him?

You don't submit to a king unless you want something from him. So what are you wanting from Jesus? What are you expecting from him in your life this week?

[21 : 56] Physical provision? Physical protection? Rescue from your earthly problems that you're going to face this week? Or provision for eternal life and rescue from your sin?

And as a church, what are we offering to the world out there? It's a good question. How are we trying to pitch Jesus? How are we trying to sell Jesus? You'll understand my meaning.

How are we presenting Jesus to the world out there? Because all too often, churches try to sell Jesus on how he can solve their problems here and now. How he can make you healthy and happy. You know, you read these joy magazines and you watch the God Channel and you listen to Joyce Meyer and it's full of that. And yes, I will mention names because she talks rubbish.

It's full of how Jesus can overcome your problems in life and empower you to live your best life now. That's what it's about if you listen to it. But that's not the reason Jesus came to earth.

[23 : 02] You're missing the point if that's why you follow Jesus. Jesus came to rescue us from something far more serious than our worldly problems. But what we go on to see in this passage is that to get that rescue, to get that eternal rescue, there's something we need to do.

And that is, we need to accept Jesus on his terms and not ours. You see, the problem that these people had is that they were, as I've already mentioned, they were looking for the wrong kind of rescue, so much so that they were blinded to the real rescue that Jesus came to offer them. Did you notice that? They failed to believe in Jesus as their true rescuer because he didn't fit their expectations as a rescuer.

We see it starkly in verse 29 to 30. Pick up your Bibles, have a look, follow me from verse 29. Jesus answered, the work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent.

So they asked him, what sign will you give that we may see you and believe? What will you do? Okay, so Jesus says he's come to give them a different type of rescue.

[24 : 15] He's trying to explain the rescue. He's really come to give them a rescue that you receive through faith in him. But you know what they say? You know what they have the cheek to say? Well, if you want us to believe in you, show us a sign.

Are you serious? What did Jesus just do? Jesus just showed you this incredible sign and you totally missed it. But it gets even worse because look how it goes on.

Look at the example of the kind of sign they want Jesus to show them. Our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness. As it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat. Now, that was a sign, Jesus.

Bet you can't do something like that. I mean, he just did. It's exactly what he did. John records this to show us the sheer stupidity, the sheer blindness of these people.

They were blind to who Jesus really was because he wasn't what they wanted him to be. But it's the same today. Blindness. Blindness to see who Jesus really is because he's not what people want him to be.

[25 : 26] Despite the clear evidence of scripture, despite all the signs Jesus has performed, people are blinded to see who he is because he isn't who they want him to be for their lives.

People are willing to accept Jesus but on their terms. If he does what they want him to do for them. but not on his terms. So what are his terms?

What does he want us to do? Well, verse 28 tells us. Verse 29. They ask him in verse 28, what must we do to do the works God requires? It's interesting, isn't it?

They were willing to do whatever Jesus wanted them to do as long as they as long as he fulfilled their expectations. As long as he was the savior they wanted him to be.

It's the same today. We're very willing to serve Jesus if he does what we want him to do. How often have you heard of those kind of negotiation prayers?

[26 : 25] How often have you prayed those negotiation prayers with Jesus? Jesus, if you do this for me I will go to church every week. Jesus, if you do this for me I will up my giving by 2%.

You know? Those kind of you do something for me and I'll do something for you. People are very willing to serve Jesus if he does what we want him to do.

But what does he want us to do? Verse 29, Jesus answered, this is the work of God to believe in the one he has sent. That's all. But it's harder than you think.

Because Jesus is saying, you see, rescue, real rescue, eternal rescue is not about what you do. It's about whether you believe in me as the Savior I really am.

The Savior who came to give you not the rescue you might want but the rescue you really need. And to believe in him as that rescuer, you need to be convinced that you need that rescue more than anything else in your life.

[27 : 28] And that is what true believing is. We say, you're saved by faith alone, which is true. You're saved purely by believing in Jesus. But what does believing really mean?

Well, believing, true believing, is believing that you are a sinner who can't save yourself. Believing that your greatest need in life is not physical, it's spiritual, and then looking to Jesus to provide you for that need every single day.

That is true believing. And so what is Jesus to you this morning? what do you expect of him in your life? What are you looking for him to give you?

Because you will only really follow him if he fulfills your expectations. So what are your expectations for Jesus in your life? Are you expecting to rescue you here and now from your problems in life?

And to give you all you need in this life? Because then you might be disappointed. And you might stop coming to church if he doesn't do those things.

[28 : 37] You might stop worshipping him and stop following him if he doesn't fulfill those expectations. Or are you looking to him and worshipping him as the rescuer?

He truly is the only one who can rescue you from your real problem. Are you feeling that that, are you believing that that is your greatest problem in the coming week? Not your boss. not your finances.

Your greatest problem is your sin. And the only one who can overcome that barrier for you is Jesus. He is the only one who can provide the food you really need. The food for eternal life.

Are you looking to him for that food? Is that what you're expecting from Jesus? Because if that is what you're looking to him for, if that is what you're expecting from him, you won't be disappointed. As he himself declares, verse 35, this is the promise he gives you, if that's what you're looking to him for. He says, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

[29 : 43] Jesus is the true provider of God's people. Let's give him thanks for that. Yes, Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are our provider, but you provide so much more than our physical needs.

thank you that you provide for our real needs, our spiritual needs, our needs for eternal life. Thank you that you've shown us in this passage clearly that you are the one who fulfills all of the prophecies to be the rescuer and the provider of God's people.

Help us in this coming week to look to you to rescue us and provide for us spiritually to help us to put off the flesh and to put off sin and to head towards our hope of eternal life and to please you and to serve God our Father.

Help us to do these things. Help us, Lord, to overcome the barriers in our life that stop us from pleasing God. Help us to overcome our sin.

Help us to overcome our unbelief and make us into the people you want us to be and take us where you saved us to go. In Jesus' name.

[30 : 55] Amen.