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Sermon Notes

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Keeping Focus on Kingdom Matters

Matthew 16:5-12

One of the most amazing things about Christ is how He is able to build His church out of such poor building material and with such poor laborers

The church is made up of sinners... faulty, forgetful, weak, easily distracted

We are like sheep constantly going astray, following our noses after the next sweet patch of grass until we slip over a cliff

We are easily distracted, and therefore must be warned constantly against dangers in the Christian life

What's so reassuring about the Bible is that it is evident how normal all this is in the Christian life and how capable God is of handling it!!

I. Honesty About Their Sinfulness, and Ours

A. Apostles: Heroes of the Faith

1. Chosen by Christ after a night of fasting and prayer
2. The human foundation of Christ's future work
 - a. Their eyewitness testimony to Christ was the first step in the long road of conquering the nations to the ends of the earth
 - b. Peter and the other Eleven stood up on Pentecost and preached so effectively that 3000 were added to the church on one day
 - c. They would write down their eyewitness accounts of Christ's incredible teachings, His amazing miracles, His gracious encounters with penitent sinners, His patient and godly handling of sinful opposition, His death on the cross and His resurrection... all of it they had seen with their own eyes:
3. They would step out in faith and lead the church through the most critical stage of its entire history... the first era after Christ when nothing had been established yet

4. They would establish the doctrinal and practical life of the Church through their preaching, teaching and leadership
5. They would courageously testify to hostile leaders and would suffer and die martyr's deaths for Christ
6. They were incredible heroes!! YET...

B. Apostles: Examples of Weakness and Sin

1. They frequently misunderstood Christ; frequently displayed carnal attitudes and actions
2. They displayed selfishness when they were indignant at James and John's request to sit at Jesus' right and at His left in the Kingdom
3. They displayed arrogant insensitivity when they hindered the little children from coming to Jesus
4. They displayed unbelief and prayerlessness when they couldn't drive out the demon in Matthew 17
5. They displayed ignorance and sluggish hearts when they couldn't understand Jesus teaching about declaring all foods clean
6. They displayed cowardice when they all deserted Him and fled for their lives the night He was arrested
7. They displayed unbelief when they refused to believe reports from the women that Jesus had risen from the dead; and when they refused to believe the Scriptures that Christ had to suffer and die and rise on the third day
8. The apostles were ordinary men with ordinary sin patterns
9. In this one chapter, we have abundant evidence of both the godliness and the sinfulness of the apostles
 - a. Godly in that they have left everything to follow Jesus; sinful in that they still can't trust Him to meet all their needs as they follow Him
 - b. Godly in that they believe Christ did those miraculous feedings by the power of the living God; sinful in that they don't apply that principle to their immediate needs
 - c. Godly in that they are committed to following Christ's character and becoming like Him in every way, but sinful as they ARGUE with each other about forgetting to bring bread

- d. Godly in that Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, but ungodly when He then rebukes Jesus for predicting His own death

C. How Can Both Be True?

Martin Luther: “At the same time just and a sinner”

1. First of all, note that the consistent honesty of the Bible about the sinful failings of its heroes is GREAT EVIDENCE of its truthfulness
 - a. Abraham lies about Sarah in order to save his life
 - b. Isaac his son does the exact same thing with Rebecca
 - c. Jacob is a conniver and a liar
 - d. Judah sleeps with a prostitute
 - e. Moses commits murder
 - f. Moses tries to beg out of going back to Egypt, saying “Lord, please send someone else!!”
 - g. The Jews reject Moses as leader again and again
 - h. The Jews receive the Ten Commandments, then immediately break them by making a Golden Calf
 - i. The Jews refuse to trust God enough to enter the Promised Land... Ten times in the desert they test God and sin against Him again and again
 - j. After they enter the Promised Land, they sinned by taking some of the consecrated items from Jericho
 - k. In the Book of Judges, once established in the Promised Land, they sin by following the false gods and goddesses of the Canaanites in a cycle of rebellion that occurs again and again
 - l. Even their best King, David, is clearly and honestly depicted in his worst moment... committing adultery with Bathsheba and having her husband murdered to cover up his sin
 - m. Solomon worships false gods and leads to the break up of Israel
 - n. Godly King Uzziah became prideful and tried to offer incense though he wasn't a priest, and God struck him with leprosy

- o. Even the godly men and prophets displayed their sin nature: Job called God unjust in what He'd done to him; Jeremiah also called god unjust and deceptive; Elijah was terrified of Jezebel, ran away from her and wanted to die; John the Baptist, imprisoned and about to die, doubted whether Jesus was really the Messiah

A.W. Pink: As is well known, human historians are inclined to conceal or extenuate the faults of their favorites. A forged history would have clothed friends with every virtue, and would not have ventured to mar the effect designed to be produced by uncovering the vices of its most distinguished personages. Here then, is displayed the *uniqueness* of Scripture history. Its characters are painted in the colors of truth and nature. But such characters were never sketched by a human pencil. Moses and the other writers must have written by Divine inspiration

2. Why This Honesty? Because It is TRUE and HELPFUL

Luke 5:31-32 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Ecclesiastes 7:20 There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.

Martin Luther:

3. Luther's Reformation Discovery: *Simul Justus et peccator*

Martin Luther: "Righteous and at the same time a sinner."

The saints in being righteous are at the same time sinners; they are righteous because they believe in Christ whose righteousness covers them and is imputed to them, but they are sinners because they do not fulfill the law and are not without sinful desires. They are like sick people in the care of a physician: they are really sick, but healthy only in the hope and insofar as they begin to be better, healed, i.e., they will become healthy. Nothing can harm them so much as the presumption that they are in fact healthy, for it will cause a bad relapse."

- a. Justified by faith, all our sins forgiven at the first moment of faith
 - b. Thus begins the long journey of sanctification...
 - c. Throughout that whole journey, we are perfectly righteous in God's sight, yet we sin day after day, and perhaps every moment of the day
 - d. The bible portrays its heroes honestly because we need to be honest ourselves
4. The Bible also portrays its lesser heroes honestly so it can set out in stark contrast its greatest hero: Jesus Christ, who was perfectly sinless

D. God Calls Us to Honesty... and Repentance

1. We are NO BETTER
2. We should be honest about our sinfulness and not try to stand in robes of self-righteousness... we only make progress in the Christian life when we readily and whole-heartedly acknowledge how sinful we are and how much we need Jesus EVERY SINGLE MOMENT
3. When we read this account and see the unbelief, pride, bickering and arguing that the disciples did, and all of it based on hardness of heart and unbelief, we should quickly repent of these exact same things ourselves

Jonathan Edwards Resolutions: Resolved, to act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God

4. Our whole lives MUST be characterized by repentance and humility

Martin Luther's first of the Ninety-five Theses:

Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said "*Repent*", willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.

5. Quotes:

Bishop Berkeley (A.D. 1670.) wrote, "I cannot pray, but I sin; I cannot preach, but I sin; I cannot administer, nor receive the holy sacrament, but I sin. My very repentance needs to be repented of: and the tears I shed need washing in the blood of Christ."

Jonathan Edwards (A.D. 1743.) wrote: "When I look into my heart and take a view of its wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell. And it appears to me, that, were it not for free grace, exalted and raised up to the infinite height of all the fullness and glory of the great Jehovah, I should appear sunk down in my sins below hell itself; far below the sight of everything, but the eye of sovereign grace, that alone can pierce down to such a depth. And it is affecting to think how ignorant I was, when a young Christian, of the bottomless depths of wickedness, pride, hypocrisy and deceit left in my heart."

II. Forgetfulness: Covered by Christ's Grace

A. Forgetting to Bring Bread

Matthew 16:5 When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread.

1. At one level, a small failing; at another level, a significant one
2. There were no restaurants or supermarkets where they were ministering

3. It is the steward's job to be sure the master's servants get their food at the proper time
4. It showed the sin of neglect, the sin of self-focus, of presumption
5. When people are counting on you to provide for their needs, it is a significant failing not to do so

B. Daily Life Forgetfulness: Evidence of Weakness

1. Forgetfulness is evidence of sin... it is a sign of the frailty of our nature
2. To forget to pray for something you said you would pray for, to miss an appointment, to be late in mailing a birthday card, to fail to return a phone call because you were too busy to remember... these are all parts of the same selfish way we think and live our lives
3. Some of it is moral, some is not... more physical than anything
4. People with Alzheimer's forget the basic facts of their lives: their names, their home address, the faces of their loved ones
5. Mental illness is just one more physical effect of the disease of sin that entered the world with Adam

C. God (Only) Helps Those Who Help Themselves?

1. Benjamin Franklin's famous adage (and no, it's NOT found anywhere in the Bible)

"God helps those who help themselves."

an ancient proverb that shows up in the literature of many cultures, including a 1736 edition of Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanack

By implication: God ONLY helps those who help themselves

Even worse: God helps them by the way they help themselves and by no other means

Consistent with Benjamin Franklin's overall Deist outlook that God generally stays out of the affairs of men and in effect says "You made you bed, now lie in it."

In other words, you better look out for yourself, 'cause God isn't cleaning up your mess after you

In a Barna Poll, 75% of all Americans believed this verse is actually in the Bible

Truthfully, it lines up VERY WELL with a spiritual and daily SELF-RELIANCE that is openly DENIED in the Bible

2. We CANNOT completely care for ourselves
 3. We certainly can't save ourselves
 4. God provides for us and meets our needs... and any kind of self-reliance and the corresponding anxiety that comes from it is abhorrent to Christ
- D. Covered by Christ's Grace...and Aren't You Glad!
1. We are so frail, so weak, so dependent
 2. We get our food from rainfall, sunshine, a good harvest... from farm animals multiplying and thriving on the farm... and over all these things we have no control whatsoever
 3. Jesus rebukes our arrogance AND our self-reliance ALONG WITH the corresponding anxiety by reminding us of our limitations

Matthew 5:36 you cannot make even one hair white or black.

Luke 12:25-26 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

4. God is committed to caring for our needs entirely
 - a. Some of the time, He uses our own industry and diligence to do it
 - b. Other times, He simply provides for us by His grace
5. This was the humbling lesson of the manna that God taught Israel

Deuteronomy 8:2-5 Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³ He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. ⁵ Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.

Later, when they entered the Promised Land, God wanted them to know they were still totally dependent on Him for everything:

Deuteronomy 8:7-14 the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land-- a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; ⁸ a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; ⁹ a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a

land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. ¹⁰ When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹² Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

6. Our forgetfulness, negligence, sinfulness, and weakness are ALL taken into consideration... and all of it is covered by God's grace
 - a. So when you do something foolish, like forget to bring the bread, remember that the Lord's grace is sufficient to cover your failures
 - b. AND when you are totally on the ball, and remember your passport, and your plane tickets, and your luggage is perfectly packed, and you have your proper medications and immunizations, and you follow your itinerary perfectly, and your trip goes exactly like you planned, remember not to be arrogant or boastful... God helped you do all that careful planning and He provided all you needed for the trip

III. Arguing: Covered by Christ's Grace

Matthew 16:6-8 "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." ⁷ They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread." ⁸ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?"

A. "I Thought It Was Your Turn...!"

1. One of the untold stories behind the scenes
2. The disciples were like any other human beings... prone to disputing, to arguing, to bickering

Same Greek word used in Luke 9:46:

Luke 9:46 An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest.

3. Jesus was seeking to teach them a spiritual principle about the Pharisees and Sadducees... but their conflict over forgetting to take bread overtook them
4. Perhaps it was Peter's turn, and he thought he did it last time... who can say??

5. In verse 8, the NIV calls it a “discussion”, but the Greek implies a dispute

B. Bickering a Great and Prevalent Sin

1. The gift of words is a great gift, but this kind of arguing is a great and prevalent sin
2. Blame shifting, avoiding taking responsibility... pointing the finger... defensiveness, all of it comes in at these moments
3. So the Lord commands us to stop arguing at moments like this

Philippians 2:14 Do everything without complaining or arguing,

C. Arguing: Covered by Christ’s Grace

1. Thanks be to God that even these kinds of ugly disputes are covered by grace
2. The most natural thing to do when we forget to bring the bread is to divide and argue about it
3. But even with this sin, Christ is gracious and points them immediately to His real point, the Kingdom of Heaven

IV. Hardness of Heart: Covered by Christ’s Grace

Matthew 16:8-11 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? ⁹ Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? ¹¹ How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread?"

A. Already Seen Two Great Miracles... and Still Anxious

1. They were eyewitnesses to the feeding of the 5000... and how Jesus took five small barley loaves and two small fish and fed perhaps as many as 20,000 people
2. Then, He did it again... eyewitnesses to how Jesus took seven loaves and a few fish and fed 4000 men plus women and children
3. Mark’s gospel tells us they did have ONE loaf...

Mark 8:14 The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat.

4. Perhaps they knew this, and knew what Jesus had done before, but maybe He couldn’t do it again!!

B. You of Little Faith

1. Jesus upbraids them because of lack of faith
2. The clear expectation is that these experiences should color their present attitudes
3. “Little faith” is a world of difference from having no faith
4. They are saved by their faith in Christ... but they are failing to apply to THIS trial what they learned in the LAST trial
5. You don't really need more faith... but to apply to this present time what you have already learned from the Bible and from living in Christ's Kingdom

C. Mark's Diagnosis: Hardness of Heart

1. The real issue is not forgetfulness, but hardness of heart

Mark 8:17-18 *Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?"¹⁸ Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?*

2. After Jesus fed the 5000 and then walked on the water, Mark described very clearly how hardness of heart was the reason why they were afraid of Jesus

Mark 6:49-52 *when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out,⁵⁰ because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."⁵¹ Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed,⁵² for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.*

3. Hardness of heart hinders understanding... and from the understanding we react, have emotions, make decisions
4. Hardness of heart also is in direct contradiction to a life of faith
5. Hardness of heart means God shows us everything we need to trust Him, and still we don't trust Him but respond with carnal anxiety, arguing, and other sinful reactions
6. Our eyes are like those of a blind person, our ears are deaf to God's still small voice; our mind is like a sieve, forgetting quickly the lessons God has taught us

D. Hardness of Heart: Covered by Christ's Grace

1. BUT thanks be to God, hardness of heart is also covered by Christ's grace
2. God has the power to transform our hearts and make them soft and yielded to Him
3. The key to that is the power of good solid teaching of the word of God

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

4. Because good teaching is so absolutely vital in the Christian life, Jesus saw fit to warn His disciples about false teaching... that's what the whole lesson was about anyway

V. The Real Danger: The Yeast of False Teaching

Matthew 16:6 "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

A. Seeing Through the Distractions

1. The constant need of our physical bodies is a major distraction from the Advance of Christ's Kingdom
2. We get hungry three times a day... but filling the stomach with food brings us no closer to the Kingdom... it is little more than a distraction
3. People who live as though their god is their stomach see everything through this one lens... "Will it meet my needs and desires?" They can scarcely look after something as invisible as the Kingdom of God

B. Seeking First the Kingdom

1. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had taught them to put their priorities in place
2. To see everything through this one lens: the Kingdom of Heaven

Matthew 6:31-34 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

C. The "Yeast" of False Teaching

1. Context: Matthew 16:1-5... Pharisees and Sadducees came demanding a sign from heaven
 - a. Pharisees: Corrupted by their vigorous commitment to their own righteousness gained through external obedience to the Laws of Moses and the traditions of the elders... thinking they needed no Savior; they prided themselves by judging others
 - b. Sadducees: Corrupted by their love for the present world, love for power, love for money; rejecting the inspiration and authority of the Bible, rejecting the doctrine of the resurrection and of the invisible spiritual world that surrounds us constantly
2. Jesus sees fit to warn His disciples against both of them
3. False teaching like yeast because it spreads so quickly and defiles everything it touches with its corrupting influences
4. The only remedy is CONSTANT VIGILANCE doctrinally... "BEWARE"
Jesus says, "WATCH OUT"
5. The very thing the Apostle Paul would warn the elders of the Church at Ephesus about

Acts 20:28-31 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

6. This is one of the primary responsibilities of church leaders... to be constantly vigilant for false teaching that spreads like yeast, like gangrene, like the plague
7. Once the disciples were over the hardness of their hearts, they understood this warning:

Matthew 16:11-12 How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." ¹² Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

D. The Doom of Unrepentant False Teachers

1. False teaching is the most serious attack of the devil on the Church of Jesus Christ
2. For this reason, false teachers are promised the worst punishment available in 2 Peter 2

2 Peter 2:1-3 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them-- bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. ³ In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

2 Peter 2:17 Blackest darkness is reserved for them.

E. False Teaching: Covered by Christ's Grace

1. BUT Christ grace will forever protect His true followers from the scourge of false teaching
2. False teachers may appear like wolves in sheep's clothing, but the true sheep always sniff them out

John 10:1-5 "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³ The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

John 10:27-30 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

Matthew 24:24-25 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect-- if that were possible. ²⁵ See, I have told you ahead of time.

Jesus here in the boat was WARNING His church leaders ahead of time about false teachers, so that they in turn would warn the church, and that warning coupled with the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is sufficient to protect the church from the rapidly spreading corruption of false teaching

1 John 2:18-22 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. ²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. ²¹ I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. ²² Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist-- he denies the Father and the Son.

VI. Application

A. Stop Your Worrying About Daily Issues

1. God's providence will care for you
2. Even when you make foolish mistakes, when you forget your passport or forget to bring your wallet and end up missing the flight, even when you forget to plan for some important detail... STILL trust in the providence of God
3. Don't PRESUME on God... He may allow you to taste the fruit of a lack of planning, and you certainly should never DEMAND that God cover for your mistakes

Proverbs 19:3 A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.

God is not required to snatch our irons out of the fire... if we foolishly forget to bring the bread and God allows us to go hungry for a night as a result, we can't blame God or accuse Him of wrongdoing

4. But God is big enough and sovereign enough to cover for the failures and weaknesses of His people

B. Focus First and Foremost on Kingdom Issues

Matthew 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

1. It is so easy to live for temporal needs... to be consumed with daily life issues
2. We can mean to get involved in ministry, but Monday was busy, then Tuesday was nuts, then Wednesday we got up late and scrambled the rest of the day, then Thursday the car broke down, then Friday, we had another commitment... soon ten years have gotten behind us and we haven't done any of the things we meant to do
3. "Tyranny of the Urgent"

C. Beware of False Teaching

“Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees”

Pharisees: salvation by works... resulting in arrogance or despair

Sadducees: doubting God's word about resurrection... thus living a merely materialistic lifestyle

1. Deadly dangerous attack on the church
2. Test everything by the word of God
3. These two forms of false doctrine especially dangerous and common

D. Grow in Active Trust in the Lord

1. When you forget the bread, learn to trust Christ's power
2. When you face trials of many kinds, learn to trust in Christ's power
3. Believe that the miracle accounts are in the Bible to show you Christ's all-surpassing power, and that you might know the kind of power that is clearly at work within you to finish your salvation