

John 6 - Nearly Undone by Success

Hook (20%) – A raise, a promotion, a good review, a bit of fame – these are the things for which we hope and pray. Sometimes we receive them, but when we do there is always a danger of them turning out bad.

Last week we discussed the gift of God – do we want it, have we done our part to receive it, do we give Him glory for it, and how can we avoid it turning out bad. This week we will focus more on the last question.

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| Recognize the Danger | How to Avoid Being Undone by Success | Retreat Temporarily from the Situation |
| Return to Your Ministry and Reveal the Difficulties Ahead to Others | | Relate the Truth without Regard to Consequences |

Book – John 6:14-15, 26-35, 59-66

Look (50%)

Recognize the Danger

VV 14-15 – “Those men” refers to the men in the crowd, and “that prophet” refers to the Messiah. Thus the people who had just been fed, taught, and many healed, by Jesus, wanted to make Him king. They would use force if necessary. And in the minds of those there, why not? An army led by Jesus would be unstoppable. He could feed and heal them with a word. The Jews would regain their national independence and become the premier power in the world. Jesus’ disciple Judas Iscariot was probably in full agreement.

What they did not understand was the spiritual transformation that Jesus offered, the change He spoke of to Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. They sought power to rule in this life while He offered power to live forever. They sought vengeance on their enemies while He offered forgiveness for all. They sought a king who could meet demands but never demanded while He offered a king who demanded everything but gave even more in return.

This was a dangerous time in His ministry because most other men would have been swept along with the tide of public opinion. How many politicians allow themselves to be cajoled into actions against their will? How many public figures ride from one wave of public opinion to another in the hopes of staying in power? How many are constantly taking their clues of right and wrong from the fickle crowds?

Jesus never did that. Sensing the danger, He cooled the situation by retreating alone to a nearby hill where He could not readily be found. While other men would have given a speech, basked in the applause and met with their closest supporters to plot their next move, Jesus intentionally backed off. He did everything on His timetable and in His way; the way of the Father.

Illustration/Application

There is danger in being too successful:

1. Failure to stay on mission. Jesus knew what His mission was and knew when success threatened His mission. We often do not have a clear vision of God’s work in our lives and His commands so we do what seems right:
 - a. Jesus warned His disciples that the days would come in which people would kill them and think they were offering service to God.
 - b. Paul thought he was doing right in persecuting Christians.
2. The addictive nature of success and adulation. When you get something good, like a promotion, money or a good review, you naturally want more. You also want it sooner. Like a drug addict wanting our next high, our desires escalate and end in disaster.

3. Overreach and disaster. At the outset of World War I in Europe, British forces landed near the Shatt al Arab and Abadan in Mesopotamia to protect their sources of oil. They encountered light resistance and consolidated their positions around Basra, ensuring their oil supply for the foreseeable future. The British repulsed an Ottoman counterattack with little difficulty.

Sensing a strategic opportunity, the British advanced northwest towards Baghdad, hoping for a victory to offset German efforts to incite jihad against the British in Persia and Afghanistan. Their advance was steady but the logistics were difficult. By 22 November 1915 the British were at Ctesiphon, 25 miles south of Baghdad. They fought an inconclusive battle and withdrew 75 miles southeast to Kut due to their vexing problems with resupply. The Ottomans encircled the British army on 7 December 1915, and relief efforts failed. The British surrendered unconditionally on 29 April 1915, losing 13,000 men. It was one of the greatest military disasters in their history.

Retreat Temporarily from the Situation

Illustration/Application

Why did Jesus retreat?

1. To cool the emotions of the people, yours and theirs.
2. To spend time alone and refocus on His mission.
3. To take careful stock of the situation (METT-TC).
4. To provide an example to others.

Why should we retreat?

1. The same reasons that Jesus did
2. To cool our emotions.
3. To check ourselves against the pride and other sin that success can bring.

Once we retreat, refocus and recalibrate we are able to go on to the next steps.

Return to Your Ministry and Reveal the Difficulties Ahead to Others

VV 25-27 – The people wanted to know how and when Jesus arrived, but Jesus wanted to talk to them about their hearts. They wanted Jesus because He met their physical needs, but Jesus wanted them to realize their desperate spiritual need. Meeting physical needs is easy compared to acknowledging and meeting the need of a dead spirit. If they realized their spiritual need they would seek the food that only Jesus, given the seal of approval of the Father, could provide.

VV 28-29 – The people asked how to do the works of God, and Jesus replied that they needed to believe in Him. Notice that even though the Bible refers to many people as “believing” in Jesus (cf. John 6:14), such belief was essentially selfish and inadequate for salvation.

VV 30-31 – These verses seem incredible. How could a group of people, having just been healed and fed by this miracle worker have the audacity to ask for another sign to help them believe in Him? What did they need to convince themselves? The answer is as follows:

1. The Messiah was expected to be greater than Moses, the greatest of the Old Testament leaders.
2. Jesus had fed them for a day while Moses had fed them for 40 years, with manna in the wilderness.
3. Feeding for 40 years is greater than feeding for a day, and therefore Moses’ miracle was greater than Jesus’ miracle.
4. If Jesus was claiming to be greater than Moses, He needed to perform a miracle greater than Moses did.

Therefore the peoples’ question seemed entirely reasonable to those who asked it. This is the case for most people when they ask questions.

V32 – Jesus attacked their underlying assumption. Moses did not give them bread from heaven and therefore did not feed them for 40 years. Rather that miracle came from Jesus’ Father, the God of the

Universe. The claim that God was the Father of Jesus was incredible, Moses never made it for Himself but only for the people of Israel. Thus Jesus was making a claim that would puzzle and offend. Eventually it cost Him His life.

Not only did Moses not give the bread from heaven, but even the bread from heaven that they associated with him was not the true Bread from Heaven. Moses' bread was temporal, filling for a moment but doing nothing for eternal life.

V33 – The true Bread from Heaven gave eternal life to the world.

V34 – Just like the Samaritan woman who asked for Living Water so that she would never thirst (physically) again (John 4:15), these crowds asked for the Bread of Life so that they would never hunger (physically) again. As with Nicodemus, the great teacher of the Jews, the people were so focused on the physical part of their being that they couldn't grasp the spiritual truths that He was teaching.

V35 – Jesus detonated a bombshell. The people were thinking of honey-flavored wafers from heaven (Exodus 16:31) and He said that He Himself was the Bread of Life. Jesus then stated that the way to never hunger or thirst again was to come to Him.

Illustration/Application

Having spent time alone and completing his updated analysis of the situation, Jesus returned to His ministry context – His disciples, His location (Capernaum), His setting (the synagogue), and then to His ministry among the people.

Relate the Truth without Regard to Consequences

V59 – Jesus taught these things in the synagogue at Capernaum.

VV 60-61 - Many of His 70+ disciples struggled with this teaching. Jesus recognized this and continued.

V62 – Jesus asked the people if this teaching caused them to stumble, what would they do when they saw Him ascending into heaven. Jesus' teaching was radical, but how much more radical would be His greatest act, rising from the dead? If trying to conceptualize eating His flesh and drinking His blood caused consternation among the crowds and His disciples, how much more difficult would it be to understand, and accept, His resurrection.

V63 – Repeatedly in His ministry Jesus tried to get His hearers to focus on the Spirit, not the flesh, because the Spirit gives life. He did it with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, His disciples, and now the Jewish crowd and their leaders. We spend our lives focused on our physical pleasure, physical needs, and physical accomplishment, but we think little of our lives as spiritual beings. But the spirit, not the body, will live forever. And if the Spirit of God does not give life to the spirit of each man, little that happens in the man's body will matter.

V64 – With His acute perceptions, human and divine, Jesus knew who would believe and who would not. He also knew who would soon betray Him.

V65 – The Lord told His hearers to believe, and also told them that the only ones who would believe were the ones that the Father drew to Him. This suggests that the hearers had no role in their own salvation; that they could no more believe on their own than a man could fly from earth and touch the sun in his flesh.

The Bible teaches that salvation comes from the Lord alone; that those He calls are saved, and none other. However it also teaches the man is responsible for his actions, and for his decision in salvation. Since God is perfectly just, it is not clear how to reconcile these seemingly irreconcilable truths. Nonetheless both are true and worthy of belief and obedience.

VV 66-67 – Jesus' teaching was so troubling that many of His outer circle of disciples stopped following Him. He asked the Twelve if they would desert Him as well.

Illustration/Application

We crave fame and popularity, and many will do almost anything to achieve it. Napoleon Bonaparte said “Glory is fleeting, but obscurity is forever.”

Jesus was so focused on the Father’s mission that He cared nothing for temporal rewards such as fame and money. He cared nothing for our many followers He had, and was more concerned with speaking the truth than with hiding it so more people would stay with Him. By staying with the Father’s mission, Jesus built a strong foundation and guaranteed a far greater, most lasting success.

To use a negative example:

As Allied Air Forces learned in the World War II strategic bombing campaigns over Germany and Japan, explosives blast and their effect quickly goes away. They do a lot of damage. Incendiaries begin slowly but their effects last until the fire is finally out. Their effects are more like nuclear explosions.

| | Firebombing - Dresden | Firebombing - Tokyo | Nuclear - Hiroshima | Nuclear - Nagasaki |
|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Date | 13 February 1945 | 9 March 1945 | 6 August 1945 | 9 August 1945 |
| Casualties | 35,000-135,000 | 80,000-130,000 | 90,000-140,000 | 75,000+ |

Took (30%)

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Verdict – What do you want them to DO as a result of the truths they have just received?

Additional Reading – MDHarrisMD.com

Closing Prayer