

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *The Color of Redemption*, No. 1

Brown

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John 6:16-35 (NIV)

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 about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. 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.

²² The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. ²³ Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

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. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

²⁸ Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

³⁰ So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

³² Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

³⁴ "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

We're in John's gospel this morning, if you'd turn back there with me. The book of John, Chapter 6.

If redemption had a color, it would be brown.

The color of redemption is brown.

It's been asked, "What can brown do for you?"

Ah—more than you might think.

Brown is the color of redemption.

You say, "That makes no sense."

I say, "Ah, yes it does."

And for several reasons.

First of all, brown is the color of the redeemed—God's most cherished creation—people.

God's most valuable objects of redemption are brown.

Contrary to what we tend to think—and to the labels we tend to stick on ourselves and on others, you and I are not really *black* or *white* or *yellow* or *red*. If you really

look at humanity, you see that we are all, actually, different shades of brown. From very dark to very light. From taupe to tawny to toast to tan.

People—men and women and boys and girls, the objects of Jesus' redemption—are brown.

So that's one reason that the color of redemption is brown.

Another, of course, is that Jesus, the Redeemer Himself, was brown, and He was far darker brown than most Westerners typically picture.

I mean, Middle Eastern males are brown.

And Jesus was a single, Middle Eastern male with no real home and, for the last three years of his life, no job. Jesus would be quite the profiling target today, wouldn't He? Lots of people would probably be uncomfortable sitting next to Him on an airplane.

And if He and His disciples were in America today, they'd be watched as a terror cell.

Primarily because they were brown.

Jesus was brown.

The Savior Himself, the Redeemer, was brown.

So, the color of redemption is brown.

And, the *instrument* of redemption was also brown.

The cross upon which Jesus suffered and died for your sins and mine, Jesus' cross, was not white or silver or gold as it is in so many places.

No, the cross was brown.

No one knows, of course, what species the wood was that made up its beams. Scholars guess it was probably made of either olive, pine, cedar, dogwood or acacia. Those were the common trees of the region, and you can find stories about the cross being made of any one of those types of woods.

Although, those stories are just legends; none of them are Scriptural.

Scholars would also say that, considering its purpose, the wood the Romans chose for their crosses was probably strong, but also cheap and very likely used. Just as we would re-use a plank from an old house or shed or something for some more menial purpose, the Romans certainly would not have used anything new or fine for their crosses, their instruments of torture and death.

But regardless of the species of wood, the cross itself, the instrument of redemption, was most certainly some shade of brown.

So, can you see that the color of redemption is brown?

Still skeptical?

Well, what if one of the most prevalent and powerful *signs* of the Redeemer also happened to be *brown*?

That's what we see in the text today.

This passage that was read comes right after Jesus' feeding of the five thousand, or more accurately, we should say, His feeding of the *multitude*—because it was 5,000 *men*, not counting the women and children, who

were fed there on the hillside, according to Matthew's reporting of it.

Of the thirty-some recorded miracles of Jesus, this is the only one, apart from the resurrection itself, that appears in all four gospels, which is a signal that we should take special note of its message.

And what is that message?

The message is: there's something happening here.

There's something happening here, and what it is wasn't exactly clear.

If you have a certain musical appreciation, when you hear those words strung together, you probably think of a song from the late 60's by Buffalo Springfield.

"There's something happening here; what it is ain't exactly clear."

People think that song was written as a Vietnam war protest song, but it wasn't. Stephen Stills actually wrote the song about a group of teenagers being harassed by police over protesting the closing of the Pandora's Box nightclub in West Hollywood.

So, it really *wasn't clear* what was happening back there when that song was written.

Just as it wasn't clear what was happening to those watching Jesus feed that crowd, although it should have been – although it should have been.

Something big was happening on that hillside: far more than just the actual, technical miracle of loaves of bread and dead fish multiplying like rabbits.

You see, in doing what He did there, Jesus was painting a picture of who He really was, and of the greater work that He was there to do.

But the people observing – and eating – could not see the broader image. They could not see the painting as a *whole*.

N.T. Wright gave this analogy: he says, "Imagine an art student doing research for a dissertation or final paper. She moves very quickly from gallery to gallery, collecting all the little, technical details of the world's greatest paintings, but never stopping to actually look at and see – to appreciate the images, themselves, for what they truly are."

You get all the information. You get all the details, but you never see the composition and its significance.

That's what the people did regarding Jesus' miraculous multiplication here.

They got the pieces, the component parts.

They were amazed at this or that individual brush stroke.

They loved the colors He chose.

They were impressed with the quality of the canvas.

They even liked the frame.

But they never stepped back to see the whole of the painting.

Jesus wanted them to see the painting. He wanted them to realize, "Ah, there's something happening here. This is something big. It's something that's actually – strangely – familiar. This bread from nowhere, suddenly appearing and feeding us. Where have we seen this happen before?"

"Oh yes...the Exodus...all those years ago...for our ancestors...in the wilderness."

God doing what was humanly impossible: God supplying the bread, the food for His people in need. Manna, appearing out of nowhere, so everyone could eat and be filled.

You see all this that Jesus was doing here: it was all designed to make the people there think, "Hmm, this reminds me of God. This is...this is like...this is the sort of thing that God does...that God has, in fact, already done."

This reminds me of God. This speaks of God and His character and His greater design.

That's the intention of the painting. That's seeing the painting as a whole, and not just its component parts.

Which is what a "sign" really is, as John refers to signs throughout his gospel.

The sign is the painting and its point.

The sign is the whole of the thing.

But the people there, they didn't see the sign.

They saw the *parts*, and because of that they tried to make Jesus King – by force. They wanted Him to be their mighty, human leader – the one who would restore greatness and independence and power to Israel.

And Jesus knew that was their intention, as verse 15 there lets us know, and that's why He left before they could act on their plans.

But they did not give up. Some of them actually followed Him across the lake, and when they caught up to Him, they asked Him, "Oh – when did you get here?"

As though they were surprised, "Well Jesus! Imagine bumping into you here!"

You notice that Jesus doesn't even answer them.

You can't hide stuff from Jesus, you know? Even our motives. He knows the real reasons we do what we do.

That's why He doesn't even answer their question. He jumps, instead, right to the issue:

"The truth is," He says, *"You are here to be fed again."* (v. 26)

They were there only for a temporary earthly reward, whether that meant another free lunch or maybe the entertainment factor that always goes along with the truly miraculous, or maybe even their hopes of Jesus agreeing with their plans to make Him king.

The reason they were there was earthly. There was nothing eternal about either their interest or intent, because they could not see the whole of the painting.

They did not see the sign *in* the bread.

All they saw of the sign *was* the bread.

But there was so much more, which is why Jesus tries to interpret. He tries to get them to see the whole of the sign, down in verse 32 there.

"Look," He says, *"It wasn't really Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, you see? It was my Father. God the Father gives true bread from Heaven, because the bread of God is He who comes from Heaven and gives life to the world."*

The painting here is of God the Father feeding His people: giving them what they need, not just to live but to thrive, and to escape the wilderness and come into the Promised Land. That's what they were supposed to see

there on the mountainside: the very same God who fed His people in the wilderness was feeding His people again. That same God was providing here not just bread for their stomachs, but bread that would carry them out of their slavery and into salvation.

The painting is not just of a God who feeds, although He does.

The painting is of a God who provides comprehensively, not just for today, but forever.

The painting is of a God who cares about the whole person: a God who saves, a God who redeems.

And you see, it's all built around bread: the most basic, fundamental necessity for life. (At least it was before all the carb-killing keto and gluten intolerances overtook us.)

In Jesus' day, just like back in the wilderness of Moses' day, He who provided the bread provided the life, because the very survival of the person depends on the bread.

The good of the person,
the health and strength of the person,
the future of the person,
the salvation of the person: they're all bound up in bread – the presence and provision of bread.

Which is also why the color of redemption is brown.

Wheat-bread brown, or, actually, we're told it was barley-bread brown – which is just about the same shade of brown as Jesus, the true bread from Heaven.

"I am the bread of life," Jesus says in verse 35 there.

"I'm the bread. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry."

You see: eternal satisfaction. Not temporary. Eternal.

That's what God wants for all of us. Jesus declares it there in verse 40, *"It's my Father's will that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life."*

You see, all of this, all of it, from Moses in the wilderness to Jesus on the mountainside: the painting is of God providing for His people, and it was all designed to illustrate (to lead their eyes and minds and hearts to Jesus) the Bread God was giving them, and the life (the redemption through the Bread) that He was providing.

They say brown bread is good for you – better than white bread.

And the browner it is, the better it's supposed to be, because, supposedly, the browner it is, the more substantial it is. It has all those little seeds and grains in it that stick in your teeth, but that have vitamins and minerals and fiber in them that keep you, well, healthy.

Honestly, when I was younger, I didn't have much use for brown bread.

As I get older, I appreciate it more and more.

And the same is true for me about the Bread of Life. As I get older, I appreciate Him more and more.

I appreciate the brown – what brown has done and still does, for me – because I see the bigger painting.

I see the sign for what it means.

Do you?

Is Jesus some optional, ancillary addendum to your existence, or is He truly your Bread of Life?

Do you see Him as simply one who's there for you to call on when you'd like Him – or when you need Him – to feed you or clothe you or heal you?

Do you see Him as One who's there just to meet this or that or the other earthly needs you have as they come up? Like the crowds there, do you follow Him only when convenient – only for what He can give you here and now?

Or, has Jesus become the One in your life without Whom you could not live?

Is Jesus the one who provides the bread for your life?

Or is He your Bread of Life itself?

Do you see the painting for what it is?

Can you see that the color of redemption is – brown?

Prayer:

Jesus, we don't want to be like the crowds there on the mountainside, whose interest in you was only for what you could do for them in the moment.

Help us to see past our imagination of you as a mere miracle dispenser to satisfy our wants and whims.

Help us to see that without you, we are nothing –

We can do nothing –

We are lost –

We are hungry and needy and eternally condemned –

Bring us to the place where we realize that you truly are the bread – the essential element of life – to us.

That we might see the painting as a whole – and realize all that brown has done for us. Amen.

Service of Holy Communion

Closing Song: *Satisfied*

Benediction