

The Circle Maker Sermon 2

Text: *Numbers 11*

Reading: *The Circle Maker*, chapters 5-7

## **Introduction**

Before the first raindrop fell, Honi had to feel a little foolish. Standing inside a circle and demanding rain is a risky proposition. Vowing that you won't leave the circle until it rains is even riskier. Honi didn't draw a semi-circle. He drew a complete circle. There was no escape clause, no expiration date. Honi backed himself into a circle, and the only way out was a miracle.

Drawing prayer circles often looks like an exercise in foolishness. But that's faith. Faith is the willingness to look foolish. Noah looked foolish building a boat in the middle of a desert. The Israelite army looked foolish marching around Jericho blowing trumpets. A shepherd boy named David looked foolish charging a giant with a slingshot. The wise men looked foolish tracking a star to Timbuktu. Peter looked foolish getting out of a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. And Jesus looked foolish wearing a crown of thorns. But the results speak for themselves. Noah was saved from the flood; the walls came tumbling down; David defeated Goliath; the wise men discovered the Messiah; Peter walked on water; and Jesus was crowned the King of Kings.

Foolishness is a feeling that Moses was very familiar with. He had to feel foolish going before Pharaoh and demanding that Pharaoh let God's people go. He felt foolish raising his staff over the Red Sea. And he most certainly felt foolish promising meat to eat for the entire nation of Israel in the middle of the wilderness. But it was his willingness to look foolish that resulted in epic miracles: the exodus of Israel out of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, and the quail miracle.

Drawing prayer circles often feels foolish. And the bigger the circle you draw, the more foolish you'll feel. But if you aren't willing to step out of the boat, you'll never walk on water. If you aren't willing to circle the city, the wall will never fall. And if you aren't willing to follow the star, you'll miss out on the greatest adventure of your life.

In order to experience a miracle, you have to take a risk. And one of the most difficult types of risk to take is risking your reputation. Honi already had a reputation as a rainmaker, but he was willing to risk his reputation by praying for rain one more time. Honi took the risk and the rest is history.

The greatest chapters in history always begin with risk, and the same is true with the chapters of your life. If you're unwilling to risk your reputation, you'll never build the boat like Noah or get out of the boat like Peter. You cannot build God's reputation if you aren't willing to risk yours. There comes a moment when you need to make the call or make the move. Circle makers are risk takers.

Moses had learned this lesson well: *if you don't take the risk, you forfeit the miracle.*

Optional Illustration:

Share an example of a prayer or promise that felt foolish. Example from *The Circle Maker*: purchasing the first drum set for National Community Church (*TCM*, pages 114–115).

Text: Numbers 11

Context:

After 400 years of slavery, God delivers the Israelites out of Egypt. But it's much harder getting "Egypt out of the Israelites" than getting "the Israelites out of Egypt." Despite the memories of slavery and miracles of deliverance, the Israelites want to go back to Egypt.

*The people of Israel began to complain, "Oh, for some meat!" they exclaimed. "We remember all the fish we ate used to eat for free in Egypt. And we had all the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic that we wanted. But now our appetites are gone, and day after day we have nothing to eat but this manna!"<sup>1</sup>*

The Israelites were complaining. I know, shocking! Instead of manna, they want meat to eat. And as a hardcore carnivore, I understand that. If you haven't eaten at an all-you-can-eat Brazilian steakhouse, you aren't ready to die yet. But talk about selective memory! The Israelites longingly remember the free fish they ate in Egypt, and forget the little fact that the food was free because they weren't. The Israelites weren't just slaves, they had been the victims of genocide. Yet they missed the meat on the menu? And isn't it just a little ironic that the Israelites were complaining about one miracle while asking for another one? Their capacity for complaining was simply astounding, and we scoff at the Israelites for grumbling about a meal of manna that was miraculously delivered to their doorsteps every day, but don't we do the same thing?

There are miracles all around us all the time, yet it's so easy to find something to complain about in the midst of those miracles. The simple act of reading involves millions of impulses firing across billions of synapses. While you're reading, your heart goes about its business circulating five quarts of blood through a hundred

thousand miles of veins, arteries, and capillaries. And it's amazing you can even concentrate given the fact that you're on a planet that is traveling 67,000 mph through space while spinning around its axis at a speed of 1,000 mph. But we take those manna miracles, the miracles that happen day in and day out, for granted.

## **Mental Math**

Despite their incessant complaining, God patiently responds to their food tantrum with one of the most unfathomable promises in Scripture. He doesn't just promise a one-course meal of meat. God promises meat for a month. And Moses can hardly believe it. Literally.

*Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot and you say, "I will give you meat to eat for a whole month!" Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?²*

Moses is doing the math in his mind and it doesn't add up. Not even close! He is trying to think of any conceivable way that God could fulfill this promise and he can't think of a single scenario. He doesn't see how God can fulfill His impossible promise for a day, let alone a month.

Have you ever been there?

You know God wants you to take the job that pays less, but it doesn't add up. You know God wants you to go on the mission trip, but it doesn't add up. You know God wants you get married, go to grad school, or adopt, but it doesn't add up.

Illustration:

Share a personal story or a story about someone in your congregation that made a tough decision, a decision to do what they believed was the will of God even though it didn't add up. Example from *The Circle Maker*: Adam Taylor giving up his job and making the move to Ethiopia (*TCM*, pages 47–48).

This predicament that Moses finds himself in reminds me of another food miracle that happened in the Judean wilderness about fifteen hundred years later. A crowd of five thousand is listening to Jesus speak and he doesn't want to send them away hungry, but there aren't any eating establishments anywhere. Then a nameless boy offers his brown bag lunch of five loaves and two fish to Jesus. It's a nice gesture, but Andrew verbalizes what all the other disciples must have been thinking: "How far will these go with so many?" Like Moses, Andrew starts doing the math in his head and it doesn't add up.

In terms of addition,  $5 + 2 = 7$ . But if you add God into the equation,  $5 + 2 \neq 7$ . When you give what you have to God, He multiplies it so that  $5 + 2 = 5,000$ . Not only does God multiply the meal so that it feeds five thousand, they actually end up with more leftovers than they had food to begin with. Only in God's economy! The twelve baskets of remainders means the most accurate equation is this:  $5 + 2 = 5,000 R12$ .

If you put what little you have in your hand into the hand of God, it won't just add up. God will make it multiply.

Optional Illustration:

Share a "this is crazy" story from your life when you wondered if your act of faith was really an act of foolishness. Example from *The Circle Maker*: paragliding in Peru (*TCM*, pages 50–51).

Application:

What is the "step of faith" that you need to take in pursuing your big dream?

Illustration:

Share a story from your life or the life of someone in your congregation who took a step of faith. Keep it real. Share the challenges experienced, not just the victories won. Example from *The Circle Maker*: writing our first \$50 check to missions (*TCM*, page 51).

### **Quailmeggedon**

*Now a wind went out from the LORD and drove quail in from the sea. It scattered them to up to two cubits deep all around the camp, as far as a day's walk in any direction. All that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered quail. No one gathered less than ten homers.<sup>3</sup>*

The Israelites were parked in the wilderness of Paran, a region about fifty miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea and fifty miles southwest of the Dead Sea. The significance of that is this: quail tend to live by the water and they don't fly long distances. If it weren't for a supernatural west wind, they would have never made it this far inland. So this is a meteorological miracle. And it's not just a miraculous west wind. The clouds burst and rained quail from the sky.

Based on the Hebrew system of measurement, *a day's walk* was approximately fifteen miles in any direction. So if you square the radius and multiply by *pi*, we're talking about an area that was almost 700 square miles. To put that into perspective,

Washington, DC is 68.3 square miles. Not only is that an area that is ten times larger than the nation's capital, the quail were piled three feet deep.

Can you imagine seeing that many birds fly into the camp? It was a like a bird blizzard. Quailmeggedon. The cloud of birds was so massive that it seemed like a solar eclipse. For the rest of their lives, when the eyewitnesses who were there that day closed their eyes at night, they counted quail.

Once the quail stopped falling, the Israelites started gathering. Each Israelite gathered no less than ten homers. Ten homers multiplied by six hundred thousand men equals six million homers at a minimum. A homer equated to roughly 200 liters, and assuming that the quail were of an average size, it rained somewhere in the neighborhood of one hundred and five million quail. You read that right: *One hundred and five million quail*. God doesn't just provide in dramatic fashion. God provides in dramatic proportion.

Moses could have never anticipated this answer to prayer. It was unpredictable and unprecedented, but Moses had the guts to circle the promise anyway! And when you circle the promise, you never know how God will provide, but it's always cloudy with a chance of quail.

Application:

Is there a promise you need to circle? Maybe you need to circle a promise for your marriage or your children. Maybe you need to circle a promise for this stage of life. Maybe you need to circle a promise for a fear you are facing or a dream you are pursuing.

Illustration:

Share about a promise you have circled. Example from *The Circle Maker*: a faith promise we made prior to my first book contract (*TCM*, pages 54–55).

### **Sizing Up God**

Before the quailstorm appeared on Doppler radar, God asks Moses a question. It's more than a *question*. It's *the question*. Your answer to this question, *the question*, will determine the size of your prayer circles.

*Is there any limit to my power?*<sup>4</sup>

The obvious answer to that question is *no*. God is omnipotent, which means by definition, there is nothing God cannot do. Yet many of us pray as if our problems are bigger than God. So let me remind you of this high-octane truth that should fuel

your faith: *God is infinitely bigger than your biggest problem or biggest dream.* And while we're on the topic, His grace is infinitely bigger than your biggest sin.

The modern mystic, A. W. Tozer, believed that *a low view of God* is the cause of a hundred lesser evils, but *a high view of God* is the solution to ten thousand temporal problems. If that's true, and I believe it is, then your biggest problem isn't an impending divorce or failing business or doctor's diagnosis. Please understand: I'm not making light of your relational or financial or health issues. I certainly don't want to minimize the overwhelming challenges you might be facing. But in order to regain a godly perspective on your problems, you have to answer this question: are your problems bigger than God or is God bigger than your problems? *Our biggest problem is our small view of God.* That is the cause of all lesser evils. And it's a high view of God that is the solution to all other problems.

*Is there any limit to my power?*

Have you answered *the question*? There are only two options: *yes* or *no*. Until you come to the conviction that God's grace and power know no limits, you will draw small prayer circles. Once you embrace the omnipotence of God, you'll draw ever-enlarging circles around your God-given, God-sized dreams.

How big is your God? Is He big enough to heal your marriage or heal your child? Is He bigger than a positive MRI or a negative evaluation? Is He bigger than your secret sin or secret dream?

Moses was perplexed by the promise God had given him. How could God possibly provide meat for a month? It didn't add up! But at that critical juncture, when Moses had to decide whether or not to circle the promise, God posed *the question*.

*Is there any limit to my power?*

When God prompted me to pray for a \$2 million miracle, I had to answer *the question*. It seemed like an impossible promise to me, but to the God who can provide one hundred and five million quail out of nowhere, what's \$2 million?

*The size of prayers depends on the size of our God.* And if God knows no limits, then neither should our prayers. God exists outside of the four space-time dimensions He created. We should pray that way!

It reminds me of the man who was sizing up God by asking, "God, how long is a million years to you?" God said, "A million years is like a second." Then the man asked, "How much is a million dollars to you?" God said, "A million dollars is like a penny." The man smiled and said, "Could you spare a penny?" God smiled back and said, "Sure, just wait a second."

With God, there is no big or small, easy or difficult, possible or impossible. That is difficult for us to comprehend because all we've ever known are the four dimensions we were born into, but God is not subject to the natural laws He instituted. He has no beginning and no end. *To the infinite, all finites are equal.* Even our hardest prayers are easy for the Omnipotent One to answer because there is no degree of difficulty.

If you're like me, you tend to use bigger words for bigger requests. You pull out your best vocabulary words for your biggest prayers as if God's answer depends upon the correct combination of words. Trust me, it doesn't matter how long or how loud you pray. It comes down to *your answer to the question.*

*Is there any limit to my power?*

## **Conclusion**

Illustration:

Share a story about how "one small step" became "one giant leap." Example from *The Circle Maker*: giving myself a deadline to write my first book (*TCM*, pages 56–57).

When God gives a vision, He makes provision. We just need the courage to step out in faith when God is calling us to get out of the boat. Otherwise we'll forfeit the miracle. We have to believe that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He can send a west wind that brings 105 million quail into the camp. But we need to do our part and our part is taking a step of faith in pursuing the dream God has put in our hearts.

So what step of faith do you need to take? What decision do you need to make? On what promise do you need to put down a stake?

Application:

Share about your corporate "big dream" as a church and/or a personal "big dream". Example from *The Circle Maker*: the \$2 million promise and \$3 million miracle (*TCM*, pages 59–62).

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<sup>1</sup> See Numbers 11:4–6.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers 11:21–22.

<sup>3</sup> Numbers 11:31–32.

<sup>4</sup> See Numbers 11:23.