

Hard Teaching and Desertion

Our lessons last week led us directly into the events of this week's study. I hope you are as intrigued as I have been in seeing these events in a new light. This week we will be joining the disciples on a sea-tossed boat in the middle of the night and experiencing a new revelation of our Lord. We will then hear Jesus teach and confront the Pharisees and Religious Leaders about inner purity. Finally we listen in on Jesus' discourse about the Bread of Life and experience the turmoil his teaching reveals. It promises to be an interesting and revealing week of study.

As we follow Jesus through his ministry, events seem to take on deeper and deeper meanings and connections that reveal Jesus as the divine Son of God. The closer we approach the Triumphal Entry of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem for his final Passover week, events become darker and more momentous. We see Jesus' urgency in preparing his disciples for upcoming events. As I am preparing these studies for you I am drawn into these events with Jesus and his disciples and my mind is just reeling with the import of what I am studying! I look forward to your opportunity to see Jesus in a new light as you study these events, too, and come to know Jesus better and better. God bless you for your participation in this study because it spurs me on in my preparations. We only have a few weeks left in our study before we go with Jesus to Jerusalem and are welcomed with Hosannas and palm branches. Keep persevering in your study, our Father is so proud of all that your curiosity in knowing his son is gaining for you.

Jesus Walks on Water

The famous story of Jesus walking on water is recorded in three of our Gospels. Our main focus will be in Matthew, but Mark and John provide some details that we don't want to miss! Our study takes off today just where we left on in our group meeting where we looked at the Feeding of the Five Thousand.¹ We saw how this miracle turned from a beautiful lesson of Jesus as our Provider into the crowds pushing and almost rioting for Jesus to claim the throne of Israel. We join Jesus and the disciples in a very tense moment as Jesus sends the disciples away and he slips off to spend some time in prayer with the Father. Let's take Jesus' example and spend a few minutes with the Father before we continue on with our study today. Heavenly Father, I pray today that you will give us the insight to understand your scriptures that we might learn something new about your Son, and your plan for your children. Bless this child of yours with insight and hunger for your word –Amen.



Turn to Matthew 14: 22-33. Read the passage and answer the following questions.

¹ If you haven't read the notes for this lesson entitled, *"Loaves and Fishes"* please do so before starting your homework.
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"Who Do You Say I Am?"

Lesson 7 Homework

What did Jesus do while the disciples set off in the boat?

According to John 6:14-15, what was the sentiment of the crowd and what were they planning to do *by force*?

Where did Jesus go by himself, and what did he do?

Why do you think Jesus went by himself and spent such a long time in prayer?

We are told that Jesus immediately made the disciples get in the boat and leave the area where Jesus had fed the five thousand. There is a sense of urgency and insistence in Jesus' actions. He dispersed the crowd and went off by himself to a solitary place on the mountainside to spend some time in prayer. His insistence on sending the crowds away and sending the disciples off, point to his concern over the crowd's increasing intention to force him into becoming king and leading a revolt against Rome. This is not the Father's plan, nor is it Jesus' plan. But is there a possible temptation for Jesus to confront at this turn of events? Once before we saw Jesus turn to his Father for strength in order not to fall to the tempting prospect of a cross-less throne by-passing the agony of the crucifixion. When Jesus was tempted in the desert, Satan offered him a cross-less throne (Luke 4:5-8). Jesus response was *"It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only,"* recalling his allegiance to the father and thereby being strengthened in his obedience as the son of God. We also know that Jesus turned again to his Father in Gethsemane for the strength to face the imminent future leading to the cross (Luke 39-45). All three instances bear a strong resemblance of a possible cross-less kingdom where Jesus turns to a solitary place to seek his Father for strength and determination. Ultimately, Jesus is obedient to the Father's will because he knows he has come into the world to do his Father's will, not to satisfy his *human* desires. Obviously a cross-less kingdom would not fulfill his Father's plan to redeem his children and Jesus is obedient to his Father's plan. What else could have accounted for the hours of solitary prayer? When Jesus fed the 5000 it was late in the afternoon. When Jesus goes to meet the disciples in the boat, we are told that it is *"about the fourth watch of the night"* which is between 3am and 6 am.

What is going on at the boat when Jesus meets them as he is walking out on the water?

Jesus immediately speaks to assuage their fear. Fill in the missing words of his response. *"Take courage! _____ . Don't be afraid."* (v. 27)

When Peter gets out of the boat and starts toward Jesus, he became afraid and cried out what? (v. 30)

A miracle happens the moment both Jesus and Peter get into the boat. What happens and what instance does this remind you of from last week's study? Of what should it remind the disciples?

Look up Mark 6:51-52. What additional information does Mark provide on this occasion?

✕ What do these two endings of the story reveal to you about the nature of the disciples understanding of who Jesus is, and what they missed about who Jesus is? What do you think it means that "*their hearts were hardened*"?

When the disciples first saw Jesus walking toward them across the water they were terrified and amazed. (The word translated "amazed" is that same word we have seen before, "beside oneself with amazement, out of one's mind with amazement, slack-jawed with amazement.") If they had truly grasped the meaning of Jesus providing bread to the 5000 as something more than just the immediate and miraculous provision of physical food, it would not have been as terrifying seeing Jesus walk across the water. Jesus had previously proven his mastery over nature in calming the seas. The Feeding of the 5000, if they had understood it, would have explained to them that just as God provided manna in the desert, *he*, Jesus of Nazareth whom they have been following, also provides spiritual nourishment – eternal manna from heaven which is key to eternal life. "*Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*" (Deut. 8:3). Their hardened hearts refers to their inability to grasp that this *man* Jesus, from Nazareth, whom they have been following and observing perform miracles, is indeed the *eternal and divine Son of God*. They are having trouble making that final leap of faith that Jesus is not just a human man, but the One and Only Son of God.

Jesus' response to them in Matt 14:27, would be better translated as "I am" rather than "It is I" which calls to mind God's revelation of himself in Exodus 3:14, "*I Am Who I Am*". Jesus' response to them is an attempt to get it through to his disciples that he and Yahweh are One. Just as Yahweh had provided manna in the desert; so, Jesus had just provided bread for the crowd of 5000 in the presence of the disciples. Interestingly, if we combine Jesus' self identification of "I

am" with the full meaning of the miraculous loaves, we arrive at "*I am the Bread of Life*"² which he will discuss at length in John 6:22-40 and we will study this week.

I hope that this fresh reading of Jesus' miraculous walk on the water is forever altered and deepened in your understanding. In whatever circumstances you face, if you turn to the Father, he will strengthen you. When you need encouragement in times of fear, Jesus is the only "*I Am*" we need. He tells us "*I Am* the creator of the world", "*I Am* your provision", and "*I am* the Word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

Inner Purity

In our next passage of scripture we rejoin Jesus and his disciples as they have landed at Gennesaret, on the coast of the Sea of Galilee, south of Capernaum. We are told that some Pharisees and teachers of the law had come from Jerusalem. Most likely, they were sent to Jerusalem by the Religious Leaders at the Temple in Jerusalem taking direction from the Sanhedrin to find reason to arrest Jesus. In his discourse on inner purity, Jesus will reveal the danger of lifting religious tradition up to the same level of importance as God's Word. Before we begin, take a few minutes to pray for the Lord to give you clear understanding of Jesus teaching, and a heart ready to receive and live according to his Word.



Read Mark 7: 1-23 and answer the following questions.

What do the Pharisees criticize Jesus and his disciples for *not* doing?

The Pharisees were condemning Jesus and his disciples for not obeying ceremonial rituals, not for eating with dirty hands.

What do the Pharisees do that prompt Jesus to call them "hypocrites"? (v. 6-7)

What is the example Jesus uses in verses 9-13?

According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary:

"*Corban*" is the Greek (and Eng.) transliteration of a Hebrew term used to refer to a **gift devoted to God**. It was a dedicatory formula pronounced over money and property donated to the temple and its service by an inviolable vow. Such gifts could only be used for religious purposes.

² John 6:35, New American Commentary

If a son declared that the resources needed to support his aging parents were "Corban" then, according to scribal tradition, he was exempt from this command of God, and his parents were legally excluded from any claim on him. The scribes emphasized that his vow was unalterable (cf. Num. 30) and held priority over his family responsibilities. So they **no longer let him do anything for his parents.**

In verse 13 Jesus says, *"Thus you nullify the word of God by _____ tradition that you have handed down."* What do you think Jesus means?

In their zeal to worship the Lord, the Pharisees over time had created an ever increasing subset of laws or traditions to be followed in order to show devotion to God. They added hundreds of regulations to God's laws and forced the people of Israel to follow them. They claimed to know God's will in every aspect of life, and had a regulation to govern virtually every aspect. Instead of encouraging faith and helping people to better understand God's laws, these traditions became stumbling blocks to the true worship of God. It is idolatry to establish a code of regulations pertaining to the worship of God giving it equality, or even precedence over, the Word of God.

Jesus was not against tradition so long as tradition did not supplant God's word. Good traditions will illuminate God's word, and motivate us to obedient service to others. Tradition should explain and reinforce the teachings of God, not replace it. God's word should always be our focus. Traditions are meant to bring God's word to life, and to enable us to understand and implement his word in our lives.

✕ Jesus says that it is not what goes into the mouth that makes one unclean, but that which comes out of the mouth makes him unclean. What is Jesus telling his listeners?

- Matthew records this same account in his Gospel. Read Matthew 15:12-14. In what way do you think Jesus offended the Pharisees?

- Why were the Pharisees blind guides?

What makes a person unclean and how does it happen? (Mark 7:18-23)

Jesus explains that nothing from the outside can morally defile a person. Food ingested enters the stomach, not the heart. The heart is the center of human personality and controls moral nature. Things from the outside influences that affect our morality can defile us morally.

Are people as concerned about what influences their hearts and minds as they are about the things they eat? Are you?

Pay attention this week to the things of the world that try to influence your heart. What are you reading, watching on TV, and listening to that might try to lead your heart away from God?

Jesus, the True Bread of Life

For today's scripture lesson we will return to the Gospel of John. John makes a strong connection between the Feeding of the 5000, Jesus Walking on Water, and the discourse on the True Bread of Life. As we study today, keep what you have learned over the last couple of passages in your mind. Take a few minutes to pray that God will help you to understand the meaning of Bread of Life to its fullest. It is a beautiful image of Jesus meant to sustain us in this life.



Read John 6:22-40 and answer the following questions.

John makes a point of identifying this discussion with Jesus' feeding of the 5000. In verses 22-26 what phrases connect this passage with that episode?

What does Jesus recognize as the crowds motivation in finding him?

Twice Jesus says, "*I tell you the truth*". This phrase emphasizes something Jesus is about to explain to the crowd. What does Jesus tell the crowd the first time he says "*I tell the truth*"?

What are some of the ways that God had set his seal of approval on Jesus? (Think of the miraculous.)

What do those signs attest to?

Who does Jesus say will provide the "*food that endures to eternal life*"?

What does Jesus say is the *work* God requires?

Why do you think the Jews have such a difficult time with "works" versus "belief" leading to eternal life? Paul expended a lot of effort on teaching this concept where ever he went. (See Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; and Titus 3:5.)

Why do you think the Jews demand another sign if they had just witnessed and participated in the feeding of the 5000?

What does Jesus tell the crowd the second time he says "*I tell the truth*"? (v.32)

✂ What is the difference between Moses' provision of Bread, and Jesus' provision?

What is it that the Father has sent the Son to do?

Jesus rebukes the crowd for seeking him for physical food. He knows that they have misunderstood the sign when he fed them bread the previous day. The crowds were more concerned with their immediate hunger and not their spiritual needs. Jesus was saying the people should work for that which will last forever. Physical food is short-lived, but spiritual nourishment leads to eternal life. *"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."* (Matt 4:4). The miracles and signs, the most recent of which they had just eaten the day before, are God's authentication of Jesus' claim that He is the "true bread of Heaven". The Jews then transition to "works" that will lead to eternal life. They struggle with the idea that *belief* alone in Jesus being the Son of God, is the only "work" that needs to be done. The whole Pharisaical system focused on obedience to the laws and regulations as actions to *earn* righteousness. God says we cannot earn righteousness; it is a free gift from him upon our belief in his son. We must recognize our inability to earn salvation and accept it as a gift from God.

The Jews then ask for another miraculous sign because what they observed in Jesus feeding a crowd of 5000 seemed to them a lesser *work* than when Moses fed all the Israelites manna from heaven. Jesus points out to them that it was not Moses, but God who provided the manna, and goes on to say that *"[T]he bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."*(v.33) John is making it clear that the gift of bread from heaven provides life to the whole world, and that the bread is in fact the incarnation of God in the body of Jesus. Whoever believes what Jesus says about himself and God will receive that spiritual nourishment leading to eternal life. Jesus goes on to say that he has not come to the world to do as he desires, but to fulfill that which God sent him to do. He was sent to protect those whom God has entrusted to him and to raise them up to God on the Last Day, the Day of Judgment to receive everlasting life.

Hard Teaching

As we continue on with Jesus teaching about the Bread of Life, his discourse takes a turn that many are not ready or equipped to follow. As we discussed in our homework with the parables, Jesus began teaching in parables in order to further instruct those who truly believed what he was teaching. Those who didn't believe would not understand the truth contained within the parable. As Jesus said in his own words, *"Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."* That statement alludes to belief and understanding of who Jesus is. Jesus' discourse here in John, takes that understanding and belief to a whole new level of meaning. For those who believe and understand, that belief and understanding is tested and strengthened. But, for those who don't truly believe and understand, what understanding they had will be lost. Not only will their understanding be lost, but their very souls will be lost as well. As you prepare to study this passage, take a few minutes to ask the Lord to increase your understanding of Jesus' teaching and to nourish you with the Bread of Life.

As tempting as it is from our post-resurrection perspective, don't add your understanding of how this passage ties into Communion at this time. The Last Supper doesn't occur for another whole year in the timeline of Jesus' ministry. The Jews, even Jesus' closest disciples would not be able to even conceive of how this discourse fits in with receiving the bread and the wine in Communion. This discussion will come up later with a close study of the Last Supper. For the time being, let us consider the Bread of Life in its immediate sense and save the prophetic meaning for future discussions.

✕ According to the passages of scripture we have studied this week, with what should we equate the Bread of Life?

Jesus' discourse on the Bread of Life shifts to an allusion to future events that render the rest of his message extremely difficult for his hearers to accept. They refuse to understand his teaching in a spiritual context and focus on a literal interpretation of his words that make it sound like Jesus is advocating cannibalism and the consuming of blood which was strictly prohibited in Leviticus 17:10-14. The majority of the crowd listening to Jesus don't believe in who he truly is. In their understanding he is only *"the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know"* (v. 42). They are not willing to accept that his Father is indeed God himself.

Complete the following verse:

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this _____, he will live forever. John 6:51a (NIV)

- How is Jesus the living bread?
- How do we eat this bread?

This bread is _____, which I will give for the _____ of the world." John 6:51b (NIV)

- According to Leviticus 4:32-34, what two things are offered as an atonement for sin?
- Who did John the Baptist proclaim Jesus to be (John 1:29)?
- In offering himself, what is Jesus saying about his flesh and blood?

In John 6:53-56, Jesus says we must eat his flesh and drink his blood so that he may remain in us. What do you think this means within the pre-crucifixion context? (The full extent of the meaning would not be complete until after the crucifixion and resurrection and therefore requires a leap of faith on the part of those in Jesus' audience.) Consider 1 John 3:24 and 4:15 in framing your answer.



Continue reading John 6:60-71.

The word "disciples" in verse 61 refers to much larger number of disciples that up until this time were followers of Jesus. Luke 10 records Jesus sending out 72 "messengers" or disciples prior to the events recorded in John 6. John refers to Jesus' inner circle of disciples as "The Twelve" (v. 70)

Who were grumbling (v. 61)?

What does Jesus say the words he has spoken are?

For those who have the ears to hear, Jesus is telling us that his words are the spiritual bread of life. But many refuse to believe him. In fact verse 66 tells us, *"From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."* Jesus has made it clear that he has no intention of being their political king and delivering them from Rome. Surely the crowd gathered was anticipating a political speech rallying the crowds to Jesus and to stand against the Romans, but what they received was a teaching about eternal life. Many in the crowd had no recognition or understanding of the true meaning of the teachings of the Torah. They had no willingness to understand and relate to God beyond what they perceived as a "right relationship" as exemplified by the Pharisees and a conviction that because they were children of Abraham they would inherit eternal life anyway. They could not come to terms with what Jesus was saying to them. Jesus was stressing repentance and atonement for sin, a demand for personal and individual faith in him, and the inability for anyone to come to salvation by one's own effort (good works) and instead must rely upon God's forgiveness through believing that Jesus was the son of God (grace). All of these tenets of Jesus' teaching proved unpalatable for many people. They would rather reject God's anointed and seek another political messiah, than put their eternal souls in the hands of Jesus. They were more concerned with their present circumstances than with eternal consequences.

"Who Do You Say I Am?"

Lesson 7 Homework

Only the Twelve remain with Jesus. When Jesus asks them if they too want to leave him, what does Simon Peter reply on behalf of the Twelve?

Peter says *"We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God"* (v. 69). What does this mean? What is it that they have come to believe and know? Do you think they understood everything they heard, or are they taking the "hard teachings" on faith because of what they have already come to believe and know about Jesus?

✧ The more the crowd heard Jesus' difficult teachings the more divided they became in either continuing to follow him or being offended and angry with him. Many times Jesus' teachings can be hard for us to understand and accept. What can we do to get through these teachings that challenge our faith? Do we ignore them? Decide to reject them because they don't "sound like a loving and just God"? What should we do with difficult and seemingly contrary teachings? What did the Twelve do? Think about this for a bit and write a reflection on it, or a prayer to the Lord helping you come to terms with difficult teachings. If you are willing, you may share your thoughts with the group during our discussion.