

Living Word Weekly Bible Study (March 13-18, 2017)

Monday: John 6:1-15

Just like the rest of us, there were times when Jesus wanted to be alone. He was under continuous stress, people were always wanting something from Him---and being human, He needed rest. In addition, He wanted to get His disciples alone to lead them into a deeper understanding of Himself. And most importantly, He needed time for prayer. On this particular occasion, He knew He had to get away, or a head-on collision with the authorities would take place, and He also knew He could not let that happen, for the time of the final conflict had not yet come.

From Capernaum to the other side of the Sea of Galilee was a distance of about four miles and Jesus set sail. The people could see where He was going, so they simply followed Him around to the top of the lake by land. At first, Jesus went up into the hills behind the plain and was sitting there with His disciples. Then the crowd began to appear in droves. At sight of the crowd, Jesus' compassion is clear: they were hungry and tired, and they must be fed. Philip was the natural man to go to for he came from Bethsaida (John 1:44) and would have local knowledge. Jesus asked him where food could be got. Philip said that even if food could be got it would cost more than two hundred denarii to give this vast crowd even a little each. A denarius was the standard day's wage for a working man. Philip calculated that it would take more than six months' wages to begin to feed a crowd like this.

Then Andrew appeared on the scene. He had discovered a boy with five barley loaves and two little fish. Quite likely the boy had brought them as a picnic lunch. Jesus told the disciples to make the people sit down. He took the loaves and the fishes and He blessed them. The people ate and were filled. When the people had eaten their fill, Jesus told His disciples to gather up the fragments left. Of the fragments, twelve baskets were taken up. This miracle was enormously important to the Gospel writers, for it is the only one, save Easter that is in all four Gospels.

- Many people followed Jesus. Why were they interested in Jesus?
- Like many other times, huge crowds of people are following Jesus. The people needed to eat at some point. Philip was from that area. What did Jesus ask Philip?
- If Jesus already knew His own plans to feed the people, why would He test Philip? Why not just feed the people?
- What did Jesus do? Did He wait for the disciples to figure out an answer?
- When everyone finished eating Jesus said, "Don't waste any food." How much food did they pick up?
- When Jesus tested Philip, how did Philip want to get food? Where should Philip have asked for food?
- Sometimes we pass a test, sometimes we fail. Either way, we can still learn from a test. What do you think the disciples should have learned from this test?
- After the people saw the miracle, what did they want to do? Did Jesus agree with their plans?
- Why do you think the crowd of people wanted to force Jesus to become King? What were they most interested in?
- Jesus tested the disciples, not the crowd. Do you think the crowd learned anything good from the test? Why or why not?

Tuesday: John 6:14-15

The Jews were waiting for the prophet Moses had promised to them. "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—Him you shall heed" (Deuteronomy 18:15). In that moment they were willing to accept Jesus as that prophet. But it was not so very long before another mob was clamoring: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

- Why was it at that moment that the people accepted Jesus?

For one thing, they were eager to support Jesus when He gave them what they wanted. We know this because Jesus says so in about ten verses. He had healed them and fed them; and because of this, they would have made Him their leader. There is such a thing as a bought loyalty, which of course is a rather shameful thing---but are we so very different? When we want comfort in sorrow, when we want strength in difficulty, when we want peace in turmoil, when we want help in face of depression, there is no one so wonderful as Jesus and we talk to Him and walk with Him and open our hearts to Him. But when He comes to us asking us to tithe, asking us to pick up the cross and follow

Him, we suddenly are not nearly as interested in Him; not nearly as loyal to Him. When we examine our hearts, it may be that we will find that we too love Jesus for what we can get out of Him.

Another problem was the people's preconceived notion of what the Messiah should be. They looked for a Messiah who would be king and conqueror, who would set His foot upon the eagle's neck and drive the Romans from the land. They had seen what Jesus could do; and the thought in their minds was: "This man has incredible power. We can use this power to finally set ourselves free!" Again, are we so very different? When we appeal to Christ, is it for strength to go on with our own schemes and ideas, or is it for humility and obedience to accept His plans and wishes? Is our prayer: "Lord, give me strength to do what You want me to do" or is it in reality: "Lord, please intervene for me, so I get what I want"?

That crowd of Jews would have followed Jesus at that moment because He was giving them what they wanted and they wished to use Him for their own purposes. That attitude still lingers. We would like Christ's gifts without His Cross; we would like to use Him instead of allowing Him to use us.

- Why do you suppose the people were blinded by their expectations of a Messiah, therefore were unable to see what God foretold or what they needed?
- What can you do to make sure that you never take God's provision for granted or waste it? How has Jesus met your needs? Seeing this, how can you now trust Him even more?
- What do you think you need to be challenged in your faith and expectations? If Jesus were to test to see what is real and worthwhile in you, what would He find?
- What decisions/actions can you make to improve or to refine your faith?

Wednesday: John 6:16-24 (part 1)

After Jesus used a boy's lunch to miraculously feed thousands of people, He went away into a lonely place to be one with the Father. The disciples went down to the shore of the lake to wait for Jesus, but He did not come back and it was getting dark. Thinking that Jesus must have already crossed, they got in their boats and headed across the lake to Capernaum. Suddenly, a violent storm came up; they tried to row through the storm and managed to get a few miles off, but the wind and the waves were too powerful for them. Jesus looked across the water and saw His disciples struggling, and frightened. The disciples were about half way across the Sea of Galilee when they saw Jesus, walking across the water! He was headed right for them and the disciples did not know what to think. Their first reaction was sheer terror. Jesus, calling out to them, said, I am here, do not be afraid! They let Jesus into the boat and suddenly they were at their destination, a miracle of time, arriving at one's destination without travel and walking on a surface that could not hold someone up. Then, the crowd figured out Jesus was gone and hightailed it for Capernaum to try and find Him.

This miracle, like all miracles, has an element of teaching to it---Jesus revealed who He was through these miraculous signs. The Jewish people had an erroneous understanding of the Messiah, they were expecting the Messiah to be a warrior king like David. Jesus was teaching the people that the Messiah was not a geo-political warrior King, but rather the Messiah was a Savior---and what would really blow the minds of the Jews---the Messiah was actually God--the Great I AM incarnate. So to make His identity clear---Jesus does what God did in the Old Testament. For example, the feeding of the 5000 paralleled the gift of manna in Exodus 16. The raising of the son of the widow of Nain paralleled the raising of the son of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17. This miracle parallels the crossing of the Red Sea, for Jesus rescued the disciples just as God rescued the Israelites from Pharaoh when they crossed the Red Sea.

- How has Jesus rescued you in the past? What do you think you need God to rescue you from today?
- In what ways did you fail to recognize that Jesus was there in a time of need or stress? How can seeing what Christ did for you in the past help you trust Him more in the future?
- What does it mean to you that you have freedom from fear? How is Jesus your Lord and partner in life and faith?
- Our confidence is in Christ and not in situations. So, what can you do to encourage others in your life and church to not be afraid, but to put one's confidence and trust in the Lord?

Thursday: John 6:16-24 (part 2)

Christians, of course, are not immune to the hurts and heartaches of this world. As followers of Christ, we need to understand that storms will come. Either you are in a storm, coming out of a storm, or in the middle of the eye of a storm surrounded by a storm, but not seeing it. You cannot live in a broken world and remain immune to the effects of brokenness. What we need to embrace is that Jesus never promised to keep us shielded from the storms---He simply promised to be with us in the very midst of the storms. The disciples must have wondered what had happened; they went from such a high point (the feeding of the 5000) to such a low point mentally, spiritually, and physically---to the middle of a storm, fearing for their lives. It seems that Jesus sent them from the mountain top experience of joy into a major storm; from fame to threat of danger. Then, when all seemed lost, Jesus came; He literally walked on water to them in the midst of a storm that had them stuck in the middle of a lake, perhaps even facing death. We will all experience incredible joys; we will also all face threats and perils, and when it seems that no one cares or is looking, Jesus will come. Yet, did He ever leave? No! We have to see that Jesus does not leave or forsake us; He never left. He is here, always here, even when it is hard to see Him. Jesus cuts across life's obstacles and miraculously intervenes in the storms of life. He is here, and He says to us, "It is I; do not be afraid!"

- How do you respond to difficulty and hardships? What do you do when the storms of life come upon you?
- What are some tests of faith and thinking you have faced? How have these experiences helped you grow in the faith?
- If real faith is shown when the storms come, what does your faith show right now? What assumptions do you have that need to be convicted?
- Have you noticed in your life that once the fears are gone, it is easier to look and trust in Jesus? Why? How can you better remove your fears and frustrations so you can allow Christ to occupy more in your boat of life?

Friday: Philippians 4:10-20

In this letter, St. Paul commends the Philippians for doing a good job in solving problems, rejoicing in the Lord, praying and learning from godly teaching. They have continued to generously give both the volunteer help and financial support they should give to the ministries of God. They have supported the missionary efforts of Paul and the worldwide spread of the Gospel. Paul is not thanking them so that they will continue to support his ministry. He acknowledges that he really does not need other Christians to take care of him. He knows that God will supply everything needed for the work of the ministry (verses 11-13).

- So, what do you suppose was his motive for doing this?
- The Philippians have allowed God to supply for the needs of Paul through them. For that, he is thankful. Paul was confident that God could supply through anyone he chose. It was the willingness of the Philippians to be used by God that Paul was grateful for.
- How do we as the church do this today?
- Why do some people not do this, or do it so sparingly?
- Paul also thanked them for communicating with him and caring for him.
- What are the two results that Paul mentions that come from their care of him?

Again, Paul is not thanking them because he wants more money, help and physical goods from them. Paul is encouraging them to stay involved in the ministry because the fruit that comes from his work will build the Kingdom and makes disciples, and be added to their account in heaven (verse 17).

Secondly, Paul says that God's blessings will be on them because they have been involved in God's work. After Paul thanks them for their involvement in the missionary effort, he turns around and says that as they have supplied his needs, God will supply their needs (verse 19). Many people want to quote this verse out of context and say that we don't need to worry about anything financial because God will supply it all. If you read this verse as it is presented in Philippians 4 you will see that it is conditional on the church people being involved in the ministry of others. We are blessed when we choose to be a blessing to others.

- List the ways that you volunteer to help at church, the ministries that you are CURRENTLY volunteering in. How does it look?

- If it is not what you know it should be, what ministries could you help with?
- Are you generously (according to God) supporting the ministries of God at Living Word with financial gifts? If your financial support is not what God expects, what are you going to do to correct that?

Saturday: Matthew 7:7-12

Prayer is not a vending machine where we can pick what we want, and what we want to do. Rather, it is submission--it is making the conscious choice to align our desires with God's. This passage has led many people to think that God is a cosmic Santa Claus who will give us what we seek, what we want if we just have enough faith. But, that is plainly not the message this passage gives to us. Yes, we are to seek, we are to knock, we are to be persistent with our prayers. But, we are not to seek just to help our selfish concerns. Prayer is seeking the Son-ship/Lord-ship of Christ because He is in control, not just because of a friendship with Him. Prayer is the instrument for seeking how to get His will done, not our will.

Ask and it will be given--this is a very bold and direct statement, which is rare, if not non-existent in other languages and cultures of the time, including Hebrew law and writings. This passage is saying that we have the right, and ability (by what Christ has done on the cross) to go directly to God in prayer. There is no need for intermediaries or special priests or rituals. There is a promise in this passage that gives us the confidence that He hears our prayers and even answers them. But, we are not to assume that God answers our whims and desires. We are not the focus of true prayer, nor are we God. He, God and Lord of the universe, is sovereign, and His will is to be sought, brought into our hearts and minds, and then put into practice. We also have to have confidence that His answer is best! We often seek those things that are not beneficial or right for us because our view, understanding, and thinking do not include all of the information. We only see our temporary and immediate needs, whereas God sees it all--the outcome that we do not see. God's answers are conditioned upon our abiding in Him and His will (John 15:7; James 4:3; 1 John 5:14-15). How sad it is that so many Christians never enjoy God's favor, simply because they do not ask.

- Have you asked, sought, or knocked today? If you did, did you take the time and effort to LISTEN?
- How much time do you spend in prayer? How much should you? What is in the way?
- Have you considered the value of perseverance and its application to prayer?
- Why would some Christians think that prayer is like a vending machine or that God is like a bellhop; that we can seek what we want, and what we want to do if we have enough faith? Why is that appealing to some people? How appealing is seeking His will? Which really requires more faith, to get what you want or to serve Him?
- Prayer is getting our mindset aligned with God's. What are some of the things that get you sidetracked from pursuing your faith more deeply through prayer?
- What are the conditions we must meet in order to have our prayers answered?

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