

BIBLE STUDY

The Life of Jesus Christ

The Third Passover and The Feast of Tabernacles

Study Section 9



Jesus Christ: Part 19

Third Passover

We now return to the Gospel of John and his record of Jesus' ministry. (Chapter 6) Twelve months had passed since the healing of the impotent man in Jerusalem. Jesus and His Disciples had resumed their work in Galilee, and they had enjoyed great popularity. During that time notable events and miracles had taken place, which have been recorded all or in part by the other 3 Gospel writers. Jesus had astounded His Disciples through the calming of a stormy sea. He had healed the Gadarene man with the mental illness. Jairus' daughter had been raised from death and the woman with the continuing hemorrhage had been healed. Sight had been restored to blind men and a mute was enabled to speak. Yet during a brief visit to Nazareth, Jesus had been once again rejected by His former townsmen.

He had sent out His 12 Apostles as six pairs in order for them to preach on their own. For this preaching task He had endowed them with Divine powers of healing like His own as a temporary gift. This provided a foreshadow of events subsequently described in the Acts of the Apostles. When the Apostles were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit following Jesus' resurrection and ascension into Heaven, they were able to endow others to assist them in their preaching efforts. The imprisoned John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod during that year.

Each of these records contains significant elements of Christ's ministry, and messages for His followers, and subsequently to us. Unfortunately, it is impossible for us to cover every aspect of Jesus' life in this series of studies. Following that year, opposition was soon to set in. But for the moment, despite occasional problems, progress was being made.

At the point at which we pick up John's narrative in chapter 6, the six pairs of Apostles had returned from their mission of preaching the need for repentance and healing the sick. They reported to Jesus what they had done and what they had taught, but they also brought the sad news regarding John the Baptist. (Mark 6:7-30)

The Herald of the King had done his work faithfully, and his death, while received by Jesus with deep grief, would also remind Him of the trials and tragedy that lay before

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Him in the final year of His mortal life. But there was too much activity in Capernaum for quiet meditation, and to take stock. So Jesus said to His Disciples:

“...Come away by yourselves, to a lonely place and rest a while. (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat).” Mark 6:31

They, therefore, went by boat privately, crossing the lake to Bethsaida. (Luke 9:10) John then records the fourth and fifth of the eight signs of his Gospel. These provide beautiful illustrations that Jesus Christ is the bread of life, and the only one able to still the storm and lead His people to salvation in the Kingdom of God. The fourth sign, providing strong lessons for Israel, reveals that spiritually the Jews for the most part were unable to achieve the level of spiritual response to which Jesus was endeavouring to lead His followers. In its aftermath, we begin to see a decline in public favour which introduced Jesus to His final year's service, a period of growing opposition.

All four Gospel writers record the miracle that John includes as his fourth sign. (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6: 1-14)

The fifth sign (John 6:15-21), is also included by Matthew (14:22-30), and Mark (6:45-52).

However, we will use the continuity of John's narrative to consider these two signs.

The Multitude Follows

When Jesus arrived at Bethsaida with His Disciples, He took them up into a mountain. The multitude had seen them go, however, and they hurried on foot around the head of the lake to find Jesus on the other side. Their search for Him was obviously born of a desire for the miracles of healing that they had seen Him perform. (John 6:1-4) When Jesus saw the approaching throng, He was moved with compassion towards them because they were as sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things. (Mark 6:34)

The work of teaching went on well into the day until it became quite late. It became evident to the Disciples that in the deserted area in which they were located at that time, such large numbers of people would require food. Where would it come from they wondered? (Mark 6:35, 36)

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In this setting, we see the detail that John provides in establishing the significance of the signs that he records. In describing this he makes note of the fact that the Passover Feast was near at hand. (John 6:4)

Passover commemorated Israel's exodus from Egypt, when God sustained the nation in the wilderness with manna, bread from Heaven. John makes certain that his readers grasp the significance of this Bible echo. The people had left comfortable cities to come into a deserted area in search of God's goodness manifested in Jesus. The children of Israel had followed Moses, a type of Christ, out of Egypt into the wilderness.

This scene at Bethsaida re-captured the circumstances and spirit of the exodus. As the One who was "the true bread" (verse 32), "the bread of life" (verse 35), Jesus would make this plain by feeding them. The Disciples had determined that there was available only five barley loaves and two fish to feed these 5,000 people.

The Fourth Sign - John 6:10-14

The Lord directed the multitude to be seated in a place where there was "much grass." (A subtle reminder of the season related to Passover) Jesus lifted His voice in thanks to God, and He held up the bread and fishes, and broke them, handing them to His Disciples, who in turn gave them to the multitude. In this manner distribution continued until everyone present was filled. On Jesus' instruction, the Disciples gathered up the remaining fragments filling 12 baskets with pieces of the 5 Barley loaves which were left over. Mark's words catch the drama of the Lord's actions:

"...Looking up toward Heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves..." Mark 6:41

We see a direct foreshadow of Jesus breaking bread and sharing it at the institution of the Memorial Supper just prior to the crucifixion. At the Passover Feast, just a year after the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus would take bread, break it, give it to His Disciples and say:

"Take, eat; this is my body." Matt. 26:26

The feeding of the 5,000 at Bethsaida provided a symbol for the Lord's great sacrifice on behalf of humanity, a body given, that sin might be condemned and that God's righteousness might be openly declared. Even the manner of distributing the bread by His Disciples provides a significance and foreshadow. After the Lord's ascension, the

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word of life handed on to the Apostles and Disciples, was distributed by them to the people.

Care was to be taken that “nothing be lost” of the food which had been miraculously multiplied. (John 6:12) This was to teach that the word of life was to be carefully preserved and distributed to those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness.

Twelve baskets were left over, one for each of the twelve Apostles, those who would be sent forth to distribute the word. Twelve also stands for the tribes of Israel, to whom the wonderful message of the true bread of life would first be preached. (Acts 26:7) Thus, the miracle had been designed to reveal Divine care for those who would follow Jesus and depend on His Father. But on that day in Bethsaida, this eager multitude missed the message that was being provided.

Then, as it has been throughout the ages, men and women can be so intent on their own view point, that they miss God’s intent. The Jews were eager to throw off the Roman yoke, and as a first step in this direction, they would have welcomed another Moses to free them from foreign domination and give them food to eat. They certainly saw the striking resemblance between Moses and Jesus and declared that this was “the Prophet who is to come into the world.” (John 6:14; compare Deut. 18:15, 18, 19)

Jesus perceived that their only thoughts related to a Nationalistic desire to make Him King, by force if necessary. So He promptly withdrew again to the mountain by Himself, alone. (John 6:15)

The Fifth Sign - John 6:16-21

As Jesus was preparing to go up into the mountain alone, He told His Disciples to get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida. It is probable that even the Apostles were being affected by the mass excitement of Jesus’ popularity with the multitude at that moment. He obviously wanted to be alone for the time being and desired to remove them from this influence. Thus the scene was set for the next miracle, or sign, that John perceived as presenting a significant message to Jesus’ true followers.

To avoid confusion it should be noted that there were two Bethsaidas, one near the point at which He had fed the 5,000 and the other, across the lake close to Capernaum. It was to this latter location that He now sent the Disciples. (Mark 6:45-46)

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They had only six or seven miles to go, but it was late when they started, and a wind storm arose. The winds were obviously strong enough that their sails were made useless and we have a picture of them struggling to row against these heavy winds and high waves. (John 6:16-19) With characteristic significance John records:

*“It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them”
John 6:17*

We can very quickly see a foreshadowing of the time when Jesus would ascend to His Father. It would be necessary for them to struggle through a stormy world of sin and darkness without His physical presence. In the midst of perils, they would find blessings for themselves, and for all who subsequently followed them, because they would believe although they would not see Him. In that dark hour, Jesus came to them, miraculously walking upon the water. Their cries of fear brought Him towards them. Immediately there came the reassuring response:

“...It is I, do not be afraid.” John 6:20

Typically, it is impetuous Peter who calls back to Him across the water, anxious to show his love and confidence:

*“...Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”
Matt. 14:28*

Confidently, Peter clambered over the side and walked toward His Lord. But he did not keep the beginning of his confidence firm until the end. His eyes left his Master's face, and looked fearfully out into the boisterous night and the swirling waters below him. In that moment his faith wavered and he began to sink. He instantly cried out for help, and immediately Jesus was there. Stretching out His hand, Jesus lifted him up out of the water, and together they walked back to the safety of the ship. (Matt. 14:30-32) Peter's failure was not in his decision to join the Lord, but in his loss of confidence, during the turmoil and turbulence of his walk toward Him.

The Disciples gladly received them into the boat, and immediately they were safely at their destination. (John 6:21)

Many lessons emerge from this night on the sea. They are not limited to the benefit of His Apostles alone. Life for all of us can at times present a picture of a dark and turbulent sea, feeling that Jesus is far from us. It is a slow triumph of faith for us to always picture Jesus above in communion with His Father, interceding on our behalf.

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Sometimes His help comes to us in the midst of storm and darkness in our lives, coming in an unfamiliar form which we must learn to recognise. As we strive to get closer to Him and His Father in our hearts, we slowly learn that we should not be dismayed by the darkness, the winds or the waves as we walk in faith. We must believe that His power is far greater, and that He can save us in the uttermost circumstances. Our faith can only be sustained by keeping our eyes fixed lovingly and obediently upon Him. *When we do fail, however, we are comforted in the knowledge that we have but to cry out to Him and He is there.*

Finally, there is a foreshadowing of Jesus' return in this miracle, as we perceive the troubled times prior to that **Great Day**. Even now in the turbulence in the nations and the people throughout the world we see the sea and the waves roaring. As we see conditions such as those that existed in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the time of Noah, prior to God's judgment, we see men's hearts failing, their resources spent. In the last watch of the night, the Son will leave His Father's presence and come with His word of peace to those who yearn for Him. And with Him will come the dawn, and the desired haven of the Kingdom age.

The Bread of Life - John 6:22-69

The next day, the multitude who had been fed in the vicinity of Bethsaida Julias, returned to that spot. They knew that the Disciples had departed in their boat, and were obviously aware that Jesus had not gone with them at that time. They would have reason to believe that He was still in the vicinity. However, unable to find Him, they apparently reasoned that He must have rejoined His Disciples at Capernaum somehow. Utilising small boats that came from Tiberius, they went to Capernaum seeking Jesus. (John 6:22-25)

Realizing the true reason for their efforts in locating Him, Jesus said to them:

"...Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him, the Father, even God, has set His seal" John 6:27

Jesus endeavoured to instruct them regarding the correct approach demanded by God of those who would come to Him. Their lives must be directed to spiritual objects, not carnal ones. They must learn that the greatest "work" that one can offer God is to have faith - - that is to believe in Jesus whom God has sent. They must cease from

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demanding signs and accept Jesus as “the bread of life” if they are to live forever. (John 6:26-40)

This had been the message in the echo regarding the children of Israel that had been provided to them in the miraculous provision of food the day before. As a result of it they tried to make Him King because they wanted assurance of food, the bread that perishes. In a single gesture, Jesus now swept away the enthusiasm that came from that miracle. It had dazzled their eyes, and diverted their attention from the true bread. What they had received the day before would temporarily sustain them, but it would be nothing in a brief span of time. Their only hope lay in labouring for that food which His Father had sent Him into the world to give. The food that is not subject to change and decay, but endures as a transforming power, issuing finally into everlasting life.

They could not accept the fact that He was the true bread and had been sent by God to fulfil this purpose. They began to murmur and grumble, just as the children of Israel had done in the wilderness so many centuries before, in spite of the “miraculous manna,” which God had provided to sustain them. Jesus then explained that their rejection of Him was the natural outcome of their rejection of God. (John 6:43-51) He was the living bread which they were to eat:

***“...If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.”
John 6:51***

The vast majority were unable to accept or understand the spiritual application of His message:

“This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?” John 6:60

This marked the beginning of the turning point in regard to His popularity among the multitudes:

“As a result of this many of His Disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore.” John 6:66

The twelve Apostles remained faithful to Him, with their allegiance being expressed through the spokesman Peter. Even as they professed their loyalty to Him, Jesus presented a foreshadow of what was to come shortly by saying that even one of them was a “devil,” who would betray Him. (John 6:67-71)

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LESSON FOR US

When Jesus said “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53), he meant in the sense of absorbing and making His thoughts, His words and His deeds a part of themselves. The Greek “trogo,” used in verses 54, 56, 57 and 58 means to eat in the sense of “chewing thoroughly.”

The message to that multitude, and to us, is that we are to inwardly digest the words which Jesus delivered. In so doing we become enlightened in Divine ways and are sustained in our walk toward the Kingdom.

Similarly, when we become associated with Him through baptism, we are required to “eat the flesh” and “drink the blood” of the Lord Jesus Christ. He becomes a part of us, and so, we reflect upon the glory of His Father, just as Jesus Himself did.

Jesus had provided a sign. The spiritual importance of it was lost on the majority of them. We should seek the Father’s blessing in requesting that we will be preserved from a similar fate.

“I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.” 1 Cor. 10: 15-17

Test Yourself

1. What were two lessons from the parable of the feeding of the 5000 people
2. What did Jesus mean when he spoke of Himself as the ‘Bread of Life’
3. Why did the people find it hard to accept this teaching of Jesus?

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Feast of Tabernacles

Once again, because of the limited time available to us for these studies we must reluctantly move forward in time through our Lord's ministry, until the final year.

His second year, one of growing popularity, began with the miracle at the pool of Bethesda, on the occasion of His second Passover and ended with the feeding of the 5,000 about the time of His 3rd Passover. Admiration and popularity throughout this period were widespread, but the attitude of Israel's leaders hardened toward Him. They realised that He was a man to be feared, and they watched Him closely.

The Lord's final year was one of increasing bitterness toward Him, as He pursued the pathway that was to lead to His death. We note His concern for His Disciples, His desire to instruct, and prepare them for the sacrifices they would also be required to make in the work of redemption. It is an example of selflessness that should inspire our own service before Him.

When the 5,000 were fed miraculously, Jesus began to challenge the people to see their need for the word of God and its discipline. They were not prepared to change, and His popularity waned sharply. He warned Disciples and listeners alike of the life to be lived and the attitudes to be respected if they would obtain salvation. Many of them, believing themselves already free from sin, were incensed at Him and angry words followed. Then after many of His followers left Him, (John 6:66), the period of opposition began in earnest.

The feeding of the 5,000 and the incidents in Capernaum had taken place about the time of the 3rd Passover. After a tour of Phoenicia, He continued preaching and healing in the area of Decapolis. It was here that the miracle of the loaves and fishes was repeated, but this time to a group of 4,000 Gentile listeners. Jesus was intent upon instructing His Disciples that, in God's Will, it was as important to save Gentiles as it was to save Jews. He then travelled by boat across the Sea of Galilee to Magdala in Dalmanutha. (Mark 8:10)

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Upon arrival they were confronted by a deputation of self-centred haughty Pharisees and materialistic Sadducees. They demanded a sign that would serve to authenticate His mission among them. (Matthew 16:1-4) Jesus knew that they were hypocrites and referred to them as an evil and adulterous generation. Abruptly He left them, and departed, refusing to work in their midst. In departing He told them that the only sign that they would receive would be that of the Prophet Jonah. In Israel's history, God directed Jonah to preach to the Gentiles of Nineveh when such work in Israel was proving ineffective. (Reference - Book of Jonah) Jesus had provided those who confronted Him with a significant echo which obviously they missed.

Jonah was a type of Christ. When his preaching was rejected in Israel, he was swallowed by a great fish at sea. He spent 3 days in the belly of the fish before being vomited on to dry land. Nineveh repented of its evil doing as a result of his subsequent preaching and was preserved. These Gentiles later became a desolator of Israel. This echo regarding Nineveh was also a foreshadow of Gentile Rome's destruction of the Jewish state in A.D. 70. Just as Jonah was 3 days in the belly of that great whale, before being released, so Jesus was to be 3 days in the tomb before His resurrection and release from death.

After leaving Magdala, Jesus took great pains to warn His Disciples regarding the Pharisees and Sadducees. He wanted to make sure that the Apostles were clear about His own identity as the Son of God, and give them an indication of what He and they were going to experience in the future. (Matt. 16:5-28) As followers of Christ's teachings, we should all take note of the great challenge in Discipleship that Matthew recorded in verses 24-26 of this chapter. We might picture Him speaking to each one of us:

- 1. Deny yourself - - - self must be dethroned in order that God might be exalted.**
- 2. Take up His cross - - - worldly comforts should be set aside in favour of expressing concern for others more than self**
- 3. Follow Jesus Christ - - - not just sacrifice for its own sake, but with the motives and desire for service before God as revealed by Christ in His own life.**

The antagonism against Jesus continued to grow as the time grew closer for His death and departure from the Jewish people.

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We now return to the record of John (7:2-9). He records Jesus' decision regarding the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths), which was held in the 7th month. This feast was drawing near. It preceded Passover by six months. This was all the time now left to Him.

The Decision

Jesus had spent about six months in Galilee where He was more generally accepted. He had not visited Judea in that period, being aware that plans were being laid for His death. This news reached Jesus at the time of preparation for the special annual Feast of rejoicing, the Feast of Tabernacles. It celebrated the nation's deliverance from Egypt under Moses. It also marked the final gathering of the harvest reminding everyone of the loving and gracious hand of God. (John 7:1, 2)

His Relatives

Members of Jesus' family prepared to go to Jerusalem for the Feast. It appears that they were doubtful about Jesus because they considered that He was conducting Himself in a secretive manner. So they urged Him to go to the Feast so that He could openly declare Himself. In this they were suggesting that He go into the one area that reflected intensely the adverse attitude of the Priests, and the greatest amount of hostility was directed toward Him. We might detect an element of sarcasm in their suggestion, as John records:

“For not even His brothers believed in Him.” John 7:5

Jesus response was significant. His “time was not yet come.” (John 7:6) He was not yet prepared to make known His intentions regarding Himself. He urged them to go without Him. (John 7:6-8) However, Jesus waited in Capernaum until after their departure. Then, with His Disciples, with whom He still wished to spend private time, He departed for the Feast.

While Jesus was travelling, His absence in Jerusalem caused more disturbance than His presence. The Jewish rulers searched for Him. They were now determined to arrest Him. Unable to find Him they asked each other, “where is He?” There was equal speculation, but without such decision, among the people. Many said “He is a good man.” Others said, “no, He leads the multitude astray.” Much murmuring prevailed, but at this point no one was speaking openly about Him. (John 7:11-13)

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We can well understand the commotion and the mixed emotions that were prevailing in Jerusalem at that time. This city and the Temple contained the centre of antagonism toward Him. But there would be many visitors to the city at this time, many of whom would have nothing but praise for Him, especially those from Galilee.

Jesus had been away from Jerusalem for a long time. During the interval the whole of Galilee had acclaimed Him. He found it necessary to restrain the people from making Him King and marching with Him into Jerusalem. He had shown miraculous powers in dealing with individuals and multitudes. Only the Disciples had received insight into what lay before Him in Jerusalem in regard to His death. The great majority still clung to the hope that He would manifest Himself in power at the right moment. Thus the appearance of Jesus in Jerusalem at one of the great Feasts in their eyes held a potential for being of great significance.

The Jewish rulers awaited His coming with apprehension. Some people were hoping and some were fearing. The Galileans would anticipate His arrival joyfully, convinced of His intentions. The people of Jerusalem, absorbing the opinion of the Priests, would answer that He was a deceiver. But the great Feast was half over when Jesus arrived. He went into the Temple and began to teach. (John 7:14)

Discourse in the Temple - John 7:14-36

The people hearing Jesus were immediately impressed, and wondered among themselves whether the failure of the rulers to apprehend Him was explained by their knowledge that He was, indeed, the Messiah. (John 7:25, 26) But they were perplexed by the lack of mystery that surrounded His origin. (verse 27) Jesus pointed beyond the beginnings which they thought they knew, to the real purpose of His coming and the identity of the One who sent Him. This was their fatal ignorance:

“...You both know me and know where I am from; and I have not come of myself, but He who sent me is true, whom you do not know.” John 7:28

Such statements always provoked the rulers of Israel. The Pharisees became intent on seizing Him. But they hesitated, and did not take Him, because His hour had not yet come. (John 7:30) The people were obviously quick to notice this hesitation and believed in Him:

“...When the Christ shall come, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?” John 7:31

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Seeing the growing influence of Jesus over the people, but realising their own inadequacy to deal with it, the Pharisees sought the co-operation of their enemies. The Chief Priests obliged sending the Temple police to take Him. (John 7:32) But Jesus was not taken. He told the people that He was only going to be with them for a short while, and then going away to the One who had sent Him. When He had taken that journey they would seek Him but not find Him. (John 7:33-36) The Messiah had been in their midst. They would reject Him, and thus their opportunity would be gone.

The Last Day of the Feast - John 7:37-53

The Feast of Tabernacles came to its climax in a “Holy convocation” on the 8th day. (Lev. 23:35-44) A convocation was a meeting of a Religious nature involving ceremonial activities. On each of the first seven days of the Feast, there was an impressive ceremony of water pouring. Priests went in a procession to the pool of Siloam. They filled a golden vessel with water, carried it to the Temple Court, and emptied it out (with wine also) at the altar. (Foreshadowing - water mixed with blood on the cross)

The water pouring ceremony was intended as a reminder of Israel’s wilderness journey, when God saved them from perishing by providing an abundant supply of water from a rock that had been struck. The discontinuing of water pouring on this 8th day of the Feast was designed to remind Israel that after the wilderness wandering, God gave them their land of promise, “a land of brooks of water.” (Deut. 8:7)

On this day, Jesus was now to remind them that their hearts were still dried up for the want of the true water of life. The “smitten rock” was, of course, a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ Himself. It was a fitting moment for Jesus to step forward and make His great proclamation:

“...If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, from his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.” John 7:37, 38

Once more His words caused strife and divided opinions. Many proclaimed Him to be the Prophet, others, the Christ. There is a strange irony in the fact that there were some who refused to believe at all because the Messiah should be the seed of David, and be born in Bethlehem. Even this point they had missed. (John 7:40-43)

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Presently the Temple Officers returned to the rulers empty-handed. Going to arrest Him, they had been overwhelmed with the power of Christ's teaching. They left Him, to confess their failure to their own masters:

"...Never did a man speak the way this man speaks." John 7:46

The Pharisees vented their disappointment and bitterness on the Temple Soldiers. "So this man had managed to defeat them too! Is it not enough that the rulers refused to accept Him? The people doubtless are moved, but they know nothing of the law and are cursed." (John 7:47,48) Then quite unexpectedly, the quiet voice of Nicodemus intervened. He was the one who had previously visited Jesus. His knowledge of Him and his own sense of justice prevailed. He showed how wrong the Pharisees were. It was not true that none of the rulers believed in Jesus. It was the Pharisees, not the people, who appeared to be ignorant of the law by condemning a man without hearing him or considering his claims. The rest of the Pharisees challenged him. There is no record of Nicodemus accepting that challenge and proclaiming any allegiance to Jesus at that time. (John 7:50-52)

Preaching in Jerusalem - John 8 through 10:21

Following the Feast of Tabernacles, the rulers of Israel left the Temple for the comfort of their own homes. The Messiah left the Temple and climbed the slopes of Olivet, no doubt to commune with His Father.

Early the next morning, Jesus was once more in the Temple. The people crowded to Him and He sat down to teach. Although the Feast was now over, it is probable that many of the worshippers stayed in the city because of the presence of Jesus. The events of the previous day had created a situation of tension. The Scribes and Pharisees obviously remained determined to apprehend Him, seeking only the smallest pretext. So far their efforts had only brought humiliation upon themselves, but who could say when they would break through His defences, enabling His arrest.

The Pharisees had not learned their lesson. They were embarrassed, but not discouraged and proceeded to investigate and confront Him. Their efforts began immediately that first morning in the Temple as they brought before Him a woman caught in adultery. Under the Law of Moses, this called for stoning to death. They would be reasonably certain that He would not allow her to be stoned, but either way they felt that they would be winners. If He rejected this penalty, they could accuse Him of denying the Law of Moses. If He endorsed it, He would incur the displeasure of the people for His inconsistency in regard to love and mercy and could be faced

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with the Political charge that He was challenging the prerogative of Rome regarding a death sentence. His challenge to them left everyone speechless and they quietly dispersed:

“...He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” John 8:7

Left alone with the woman, He absolved her of condemnation and told her to go on her way and sin no more.

This incident has proved invaluable to all true followers of Christ throughout history. It is a graphic illustration of the Master’s words on the Mount, “judge not, that ye be not judged.” However damning the evidence might be against another Brother or Sister of Christ, if we pause and look into our own hearts, we shall go quietly away and leave them with the Lord. There are times when it becomes necessary to take action, but that action is not taken because of condemnation, it is taken only because of the Lord’s command to separate ourselves from that which is wrong. Any action will be taken in the painful consciousness of our own unworthiness, and with a love which will plead for help and intercession before the Throne of Grace. We shall wait with eagerness for the first signs of penitence.

After the incident with the adulteress woman, Jesus continued to speak in the Temple. He proclaimed Himself to be “the Light of the world.” The claim was immediately repudiated by the Pharisees, and a verbal battle ensued which resulted in many of the people, and even some of the rulers believing in Him. But in most of them, it was a superficial faith which failed the test to which it was now exposed. The end result of this discourse was that they picked up stones to throw at Him. Jesus went out of the Temple. (John 8:12-59)

Following this event, a significant and revealing miracle on a Sabbath would provide the Pharisees with another opportunity for attack. This involved the curing of the man blind from birth. (John 9:1-41)

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The Blind Man

Once again John makes a point of carefully noting factors which relate to the 8 miracles of Jesus that he recorded as signs. Jesus had just declared Himself to be “the Light of the world.” Following and during the subsequent discourse, the Jews proved themselves to be blind to the Messiah and to the Light He provided. John carefully notes that it was at the conclusion of this discourse that Jesus encountered the man “blind from birth.” (John 9:1) Jesus indicated to His Disciples that His Father’s works would be manifested in this blind beggar. (John 9:4, 5) By his natural and spiritual sight, this beggar would be a witness to the Light of the world.

Jesus made clay of spittle and applied the clay to the man’s eyes. He then told him, “go, wash in the pool of Siloam.” (John 9:6, 7) Without hesitation the man obeyed, blindly making his way through the narrow crowded streets of the lower city. John records simply:

“...So he went away and washed, and came back seeing.” John 9:7

The Bible student is commended to a detailed study of the events that followed in this wonderful sign, seeking out the significance in the detail that John provides. In so doing, to then compare them with the considerations offered in the following lessons for us.

Attention is drawn to the fact that this man was thrust out of the Temple by the Religious leaders of his day. Jesus found him again, and the man demonstrated that he had received both spiritual and physical sight:

“...Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him.” John 9:38

LESSON FOR US

This miracle presented by John as a sign relates to the claim that Jesus had made in the Temple a few hours before. It showed Him to be the Light of the world. The blind man begging at the gate of the Temple is a powerful symbol of the blindness and poverty of man, proclaiming his need at the gateway of the Kingdom. The power to fill his need is revealed by the coming of the Son of Man.

In the same manner, our blind eyes are touched by the ointment prepared by the mingling of the dust of the ground with the moisture from the mouth of Jesus who was sent from God. But this does not cure us. We receive the command to go and wash in the waters of discipleship. (John is careful to point out that Siloam mean "sent") It is a long and difficult journey. Some do not undertake it at all. Some begin, only to give it up, and resume their begging at the gate. Often this journey is made shorter and easier by the friendly guidance of one who can see.

It is the responsibility of all those whose eyes are opened by the Light of the World to listen for the groping of the blind and the cry to be directed to the waters of Siloam.

Faith and obedience are rewarded. With the washing of the waters, (a Bible echo of baptism) we can enter a new world illuminated by the Son of Righteousness. This may mean rejection, persecution and sacrifice, but it will also be an opportunity for witness and loyalty. Jesus will know. He will seek us out and invite us into a fellowship so deep and abiding that all the former relationships are like the phantom sounds and movements of the dark world from which we have been delivered.

"...For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see; and those who see may become blind." John 9:39

Test Yourself

1. When the Pharisees demanded a sign from Jesus to authenticate His authority, what sign did he give them and what was its meaning.
2. Why didn't the Temple Officers arrest Jesus?
3. Briefly describe the lessons from the healing of the man blind from birth.

Jesus Christ: Part 21

Parables of Redemption

The next few studies will deal extensively with the last few months of Jesus life on earth. The Gospel records covering that period provide a great deal of insight into Christ's purpose, His death, resurrection and ascension. In the records regarding the earlier portions of Christ's ministry we often see references to the fact that "His hour had not yet come." But in the latter days of His life, the hour did come. Throughout His ministry, Jesus remained focused upon the ultimate purpose of redemption which His Father had promised right back in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:15). The time to fulfil that promise through His Son had now come. In view of this mighty work, it is fitting at this stage in our studies, to consider five powerful parables that Jesus provided regarding the redemption of sinners. They are recorded in Luke, chapters 15 and 16.

Wherever Jesus went, He drew to Himself Publicans and Sinners - - - men looked upon as separated from the righteous by their means of livelihood and their way of life. It was one of the Pharisees' greatest problems. They could not understand the attitude of Jesus in allowing these men even to approach Him. That He should talk to them, and sink to the depravity of accepting their hospitality, was horrifying. They were overwhelmed with their contempt for these people and the sense of their own righteousness, which they felt was properly marked by separation from sinners.

This is the background to the circumstances that Luke describes in recording these "parables of redemption." Jesus' words were so powerful, that even those who had previously disregarded the Word of God pressed in to hear Him speak:

"Now all the tax-gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him." Luke 15:1

The Scribes and Pharisees did not like it and murmured among themselves:

"...This man receives sinners and eats with them." Luke 15:2

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Jesus heard them and answered their remarks with these parables. They are not the simple tales they appear to be on the surface. On the one hand they were as deadly arrows aimed at the hearts of Jesus' enemies. On the other, they are precious words of comfort for sinners who repent. Indeed, the five stories are hardly separate parables at all. Luke records that he told them "this parable." (Verse 3) Then follows with barely a break between them, Jesus' words regarding "the Lost Sheep," "the Lost Coin," "the Lost Son," "the Unjust Steward" and "the Rich Man and Lazarus."

The Lost Sheep - Luke 15:3-7

The Pharisees called those who did not keep the law "the people of the land." The barrier between the Pharisees and such people was complete. These Religious leaders looked for such peoples' destruction, not their restoration. Contrasting their attitude to "lost" men and women was the attitude of a shepherd regarding even just one lost sheep out of a flock of 100. A shepherd fulfilled his responsibility regarding loyalty to the flock. He acknowledged his duty to account for every sheep entrusted to his care. (Bible echo - John 17:6, 12) He would leave the 99 secure sheep to go in search of the one that had strayed.

The village where he lived shared his concern for the lost sheep and would watch for his return. When they saw him striding home with the lost sheep across his shoulders, they would shout with joy and with thanksgiving. With Jesus in the position of the true Shepherd, we see an echo from Isaiah:

"All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." Isaiah 53:6

The Pharisees saw themselves as the descendants of Abraham, "the friend of God." (Isaiah 41:8) But they were not. Abraham was a shepherd. (Gen. 12:16; 13:2) They were certainly not shepherds in the spiritual sense and Jesus had already condemned them for not doing the deeds of Abraham. (John 8:39) They falsely saw themselves either as shepherds leading the flock, or as sheep who never strayed, 99 just persons needing no repentance. (Luke 15:7)

The Lost Coin - Luke 15:8-10

Now Jesus presents the sinners as coins - a piece of silver, the price of redemption under the law. (Bible echo - Exodus 30:11-16; 38:25, 26)

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The picture becomes a more intimate one. The countryside has become the house. The 100 sheep become 10 coins. The shepherd has become the poor woman. Lighting a candle, she sweeps the house and diligently searches until she finds it. Then she calls her friends and neighbours bidding them to rejoice with her because she has found what she has lost. Once again the emphasis is directed toward the love of God and of Jesus, the importance of those who were lost, and the joy of restoration.

A sheep can stray or become lost of its own accord, but a coin cannot. The coin was lost through no fault of its own. Someone else was to blame. It was the careless Scribes and Pharisees who had lost the sinners in need of redemption in the first place. Why didn't they light up the house of Israel with the Word of God, (Luke 8:16), and search for them? In Jesus a lamp had been lit, and sinners were gathered around to hear the word of redemption spoken in their midst. The Pharisees, whose holiness and righteousness was a hypocritical conceit, did not rejoice.

The Lost Son - Luke 15:11-32

We now see another change of figures. The Scribes and Pharisees are a sullen elder son resenting the return of the repentant "Publicans and Sinners." In this parable, these repenting sinners are the erring younger brother. Like the Pharisees in Luke 15:1,2, the elder brother stood outside the feast and grumbled about what went on within. (verse 28)

It is true that the Publican and Sinners had turned away from God. They had deliberately become lost. But they "had come to their senses" (verse 17), and had turned to come back to the Father. (verse 18) The younger son was repentant. The Scribes and Pharisees (the elder son) were not repentant. Outwardly they made a show of serving God, but Christ's words opened their hearts for all to see the loveless motives of their "service." The detail Jesus provided in this parable laid before the Pharisees an unmistakable picture of themselves. As we look at the reaction and words of the elder son, we see them clearly reflected:

- **The Pharisees were trying to place God in their debt: "for so many years we have been serving you" (verse 29).** Their whole attitude shows that their years of obedience to the Father had been years of duty, in which they sought to place God in their debt. These were not years of loving service. The professed love of God was a mask for love of self. (Compare Luke 17:10; Romans 4:4)

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- **They were egotists.** Notice the personal pronouns “I,” “me,” “my” - the elder brother’s assessment of himself.
- **They disclaimed any association with these repentant sinners.** Notice how the elder son refers to his brother as “your son,” not as “my brother.” (verse 30)
- **They were disobedient liars.** They refused to obey the Father’s request to join the feast (verse 28), but claimed to be sinless: “I have never neglected a command of yours.” (verse 29)
- **They were ready to think the worst about others.** Notice that there is no mention of association by the young brother with “harlots” until the elder brother declares it.” (verse 30)
- **They were envious of the sinners’ way of life:** “...you have never given me a kid, that I might be merry with my friends;” (verse 29). He obviously had friends not among those whom his father had invited. The Scribes and Pharisees, though publicly disdainful of the Publicans and Sinners, were inwardly longing for their way of life.

The real prodigal was not the repentant son, but the surly elder brother. The real sinners were not the people gathered around Jesus, but the Pharisees. So this parable not only condemned the Pharisees, it comforted the sinners, showing that the father awaited anxiously for the return of the errant son. If they would “come to themselves,” and turn to God, He would see them “from a long way off” and would welcome them. All He required of them was that journey toward Him. (Luke 15:18-23)

The Pharisees heard this story with some grimness. They could not miss its meaning, nor its invitation to join the Publican and Sinners, in joining Jesus in order to share in the blessings of His Father’s love. But the elder brother maintained his position. He preferred to continue in his hurt self-righteousness and, therefore, maintain his position of praise and acceptance with others which he so dearly loved.

Jesus saw that the appeal of His word pictures was lost upon them. He turned to His Disciples and described these men to them, to further bring out the inconsistency and hypocrisy of these Religious leaders.

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The Unjust Steward - Luke 16:1-18

The elder brother was the real prodigal after all, and the true waster of his father's substance. This phrase is now used in a story told by Jesus of a steward accused by his master that he had wasted his goods. (Luke 16:1) The master called upon his steward to give an account of his stewardship. In a last desperate act, the steward called his master's debtors to him and sharply reduced their debts. He did this to place them in his debt, so that when he was dismissed from his stewardship they would be willing to support him. The master did not say that the steward had done "justly," for he was an "unjust steward." But he had to admit that he acted "shrewdly." (verse 8) With these words the parable ended, and Jesus drew its lessons for His Disciples:

- **They should act consistently with what they professed. (verse 8)** The steward was commended, not for acting dishonestly, (that is unjustly), but for acting shrewdly (that is consistently). He wanted to secure his future in this world, and he did everything within his power to do so. Jesus provided the comparison for His Disciples, contrasting the position of the unjust steward with the "children of light," (Compare - Ephesians 5:8) who say their interest is in the world to come. But they sometimes act as if their main interest is in this world. The unjust steward was at least consistent.
- **Possessions are to be held in trust, and must be used to make true friends (verse 9).** If a servant of Christ does possess worldly wealth ("the mammon of unrighteousness"), he must use it as held by him in trust from God. By using it in accordance with the terms of such trust, he would make "friends" of God and His Son. Such a friendship will endure beyond death, and with the coming of the Kingdom will mean "eternal dwellings" for the truly faithful stewards. (Compare John 15:14)
- **Unfaithful use of riches shows unfitness for immortality. (verses 10-12)** A man's control of worldly possessions, "the unrighteous mammon," lasts as long as he lives. His "stewardship" in material things is very limited. On the other hand, immortality, once given, is "your own" forever. Jesus' point was a simple one. If disciples are not faithful in the discharge of a temporary stewardship, how could they qualify to receive a permanent one?

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- **Divided service is impossible. (verse 13)** A slave belonged absolutely to his master. The word “serve” used by Jesus means “to be a slave.” No man can serve as a slave to both God and mammon. Slavery was all demanding, and the demands of God and mammon are mutually exclusive, or opposed to each other. Service to God demands the whole person. It is a full time job.

At this point, the Pharisees, who were “lovers of money”, could stand it no longer. They broke into the Master’s discourse and scoffed at Him. (verse 14) Instantly, He accepted the challenge, showing them that the unjust steward portrayed their own dishonesty exactly:

- **The Pharisees justified themselves before men. (verse 15)** It was not God they served but men, whose favour they sought.
- **They were already “dismissed.”** They would no longer be stewards.(vs. 16). No matter how they might try to retain their power and prestige, it was useless. John’s coming had signalled the end of the era of the Law, within the context of which they sought to retain their power. Now people were crowding in to listen to earth’s coming King.
- **Their “discounting” of God’s Law would not be accepted anyway. (verses 17,18)** Jesus finally gave a specific illustration of the work of these “unjust stewards.” As an example, their treatment of Moses’ regulation of divorce gave the people license to divorce at the slightest whim. This was an attempt to involve the people in their own blind failings, so that, being themselves corrupted, the people could hardly ask for removal of stewards who were just as corrupt as themselves. The Pharisees discounted God’s laws in the same manner in which the unjust steward discounted the debts. Although the master acknowledged the worldly shrewdness of his steward in obtaining the support and favor of others, he was still going to be dismissed from his position.

Jesus had called the Pharisees, “uncaring shepherds,” “careless householders,” “prodigal sons” and “unjust stewards” - but more was to come.

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Rich Man and Lazarus - Luke 16:19-31

The Scribes and Pharisees had forgotten that they were God's stewards. They saw themselves as the rich man himself, instead of being his stewards. They hoarded the Law and the Prophets to themselves. So Christ presents them as a rich man who, thoroughly deceived, spends "his" riches on himself and does not remember whose they are until it is too late.

A "leper being licked by dogs" (for the word "sores" in verse 20 is the wound of leprosy), was the Pharisees' view of Christ surrounded by Publicans and Sinners. (Luke 15:1, 2) Publicans were tax-gatherers for Rome, no better in the Pharisees' opinion than Gentiles, whom Jews referred to as "dogs." (Mark 7:27) Christ being regarded by the Pharisees as a leper provides an echo from the Prophet Isaiah:

*"Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried;
yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and
afflicted." Isaiah 53:4*

Christ presents the dead as speaking in this parable. His words are an ironic thrust at the terrifying scary tales with which the Pharisees described the pains of "hell," compared with the joys of "heaven." They used these in maintaining influence over the people.

Jesus obviously did not support their views, as shown in the record of His activity in raising the real Lazarus from the dead. If He did, He would not have wept at Lazarus' death, nor would His comfort of Lazarus' relatives be considered in terms of hope in the resurrection. (John 11:23-26) Nor would Lazarus have been pleased in being called back from such bliss.

But the Pharisees taught these things, which they had absorbed from Greek Culture. Josephus, a Pharisee of the next generation, provides a very detailed and vivid description of their view of Hades. It bears a strong relationship to the Greek mythological view regarding the afterlife and parallels phrases and the picture presented by Christ in this parable.

So Christ portrays their dismay, when, personified as the dead rich man, they gaze across from Hades to see Lazarus, not only in Abraham's company, but in his bosom. He was Abraham's special friend. (Compare John 13:25)

Practical Issues/ Passover Study Section 9

Nowhere does the Scripture present a literal picture of a heaven and a hell from which the occupants of each can view and talk to each other, let alone send someone from heaven to hell with a drop of water to cool the tongue of a sinner burning and suffering in intense fire.

To further support the fact that this is a parable, we have Jesus' own words that "...no one has ascended into heaven,..." (John 3:13). As a further demonstration of this, we have the words of the writer to the letter to the Hebrews, providing a list of faithful people throughout history who had died in faith. Abraham was included in that list. It was stated of these people, years after Christ's resurrection and ascension, that:

"And all these having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, Because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect." Hebrews 11:39, 40

Coming back to the parable, we see that the rich man pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus back to his surviving relatives:

***"...But if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!"
Luke 16:30***

But Abraham, "a faithful rich man," refuses:

"If they did not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead" Luke 16:31

This was a crushing statement to the sneering Pharisees and a foreshadow of condemnation to them. For Christ did raise a real Lazarus from the dead, and the Scribes and the Pharisees did not repent. Nor did they, in general, repent when He Himself was raised from the dead. They not only, in their minds, "needed no repentance" (Luke 15:7), they would not even be convinced of their need by a resurrection of the dead.

But the Publicans and Sinners pressing around Jesus to hear Him, had obviously been convinced of their need and thus were in the way of salvation. Not only so, but, as "dogs," the Publican and Sinners in pressing around the Master to hear Him speak, were actually helping Him endure the trial that His role as Saviour brought upon Him.

LESSONS FOR US

In these human stories, Jesus brought out the wonderful truth that, while the Pharisees were murmuring on earth, and keeping their distance from these men who had come to Jesus, the Father Himself and the Holy Angels were rejoicing that those who had been lost were now found. Moreover, the further lesson emerges, that the position of the sinner who comes to the Father is far happier than the position of those who cling to ceremonial self-righteousness. These so called Religious leaders, bound up in traditions and conventions, coupled with their own human reasoning and Greek philosophy, did not come to Jesus in repentance. There is more joy in heaven for a repentant sinner than for these self-righteous men who could not recognize the fact that they were sinners.

“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

Luke 5:32

Test Yourself

1. Briefly discuss the meaning behind two of these ‘human’ parables that Jesus taught.
2. What was the reaction of the Scribes and Pharisees to these parables?
3. What lessons can we learn from these events?