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**Day 305 - November 1**

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## **Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)**

### ***Miracles and Multitudes***

**Readings: *Matthew 14:14-36; 15:1-20; Mark 6:34-56; 7:1-23; Luke 9:11-17; John 6:2-71; 7:1***

### ***Reflections:***

- Jesus' compassion for the crowds is again obvious. His deep desire is for community to be led by caring shepherds just as his desire is for children to have a loving parent. He welcomes them and then teaches them and heals their sick. His love is obvious.
- The feeding of the five thousand is another one of the over the top miracles that Jesus performs. In many ways it echoes the story of Israel in the wilderness. Here is a crowd in a remote place and very hungry. Rather than bringing quail or manna, Jesus takes the simple act of other-centeredness of a young boy and uses it to illustrate God's power when we live other-centered lives. God doesn't need much. He delights to show his power through the little that we have. In feeding the five thousand men (and their households), Jesus organizes them into smaller groups of fifty and one hundred. This likely would have brought to mind Moses' reorganization of the Israelites under Jethro (Exodus 18:13-27) where Moses organizes people into groups so that their needs can be met. Here in this miracle we see affirmed the value of organization and structure as a part of God completing the miraculous. The twelve baskets of leftover pieces no doubt must bring to mind the twelve tribes of Israel. Could Jesus be suggesting that if Israel would have chosen to serve the Gentiles (the masses) that even after they had given all they had he would have still blessed all twelve tribes with abundance? It is no surprise that at the end of this miracle, with all its parallels to Israel's past and the leadership of Moses, the people respond to say that this surely is the Prophet who is to come into the world. There are some more liberal commentators who suggest that the boy's offering inspired generosity and people all shared what they had. In the end, because people shared everyone's need was met with lots left over. Although I think it is a true principle that when we share, people's needs are met; in this story it seems clear that the people in the end believe Jesus did a miracle.
- Jesus withdraws again because the crowds want to make him king by force. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. The crowds mistake his intent and so he must withdraw from them so that they don't turn violent. Jesus did not come to kill or set up a national

kingdom through the use of the sword. He came to save lives and establish a spiritual, relational kingdom through the Spirit with God changing people from the inside-out.

- Jesus had sent his disciple on ahead of him to Bethsaida in a boat. It gets dark and a strong wind comes up on the water. The disciples are out rowing to save their lives for over three miles. In other words, they are completely and utterly exhausted. It is between three and six in the morning (the fourth watch). Jesus comes walking on the water and is about to pass by them. Now first of all this is a crazy miracle. Jesus not only has power over nature, he has power over the natural laws. At first the disciples are afraid and think it is a ghost. Jews were very afraid of water (as we mentioned earlier) and of ghosts. They were terrified. Sometimes Jesus calls us to face our greatest fears as a part of him showing us his power and presence with us. He doesn't always take away fear but calls us to face our fears and then find that his perfect love can permanently remove that fear from our hearts. Peter asks if he can walk to Jesus on the water as a confirmation that it is really Jesus. This sounds crazy but in the moment we see here Peter's bold faith. Jesus calls him and Peter does walk on water until he takes his eyes off Jesus and begins to focus on the wind and the apparent danger. He sinks until he cries out to Jesus and Jesus immediately saves him. Peter is then rebuked by Jesus for having little faith. In context, this is not as unkind as it might seem. Peter has witnessed one miracle after another and he was actually walking on water. All he had to do was keep his eyes on Jesus. Jesus rebukes him for failing to do that one simple thing. Yet, how easy is it after God has done so much for us for us to take our eyes off God and begin to doubt, be afraid, and then sink down in depression or discouragement into our own struggles. The key is to keep that constant, moment-by-moment focus on Jesus. When our focus is right, then everything else starts to fall into place. As soon as Jesus enters the boat, the wind dies down and all is well.
- Some liberal commentators suggest that Jesus was walking on the shore nearby and the disciple thought he was walking on water. Again, this doesn't fit with the second part of the story where Peter walks on and then sinks into the water. People who don't believe the accounts of Jesus' life have to make up stories to explain away the miraculous power of God.
- This story ends again with something very unusual. Mark writes that the disciples were amazed or astonished because they had not understood about the loaves because their hearts were hardened. This seems a bit odd at first but what Mark is capturing here is that the disciples consistently didn't get the meaning of these miracles. Their hearts were not fully absorbing what Jesus was trying to show them. They do worship him as the son of God, as the Messiah, and yet they still do not fathom what it all means. It will take the resurrection and the coming of the Spirit before their hearts are really changed from the inside-out. Even these over the top miracles and even knowing the truth does not change their hearts. They can get so much of it right and yet not really understand

what it means. This will become very apparent when the disciples want to go to war when Jesus is arrested.

- Jesus popularity as a miracle worker continues. We see here that people start to see that even if they have the faith to touch Jesus cloak, the sick will be healed. It is amazing that Jesus allowed this kind of experience to happen. We can assume that Jesus could force people to touch him directly but he seems to allow his healing to flow through his clothes. Is this a foreshadowing of the church, the body that he clothes himself with, carrying the ministry of healing to the sick?
- John now captures Jesus' teaching following his miracle of feeding the masses. In this account we see that people are just following Jesus to get their needs met. They are curious how he miraculously crossed the water but what they really want is free handouts. Jesus confronts them on this and tells them that all they want is their stomachs filled. They are fundamentally self-centered in thinking "What can you do for me, God?" He challenges them that what they need to do is place their faith in him. They then want a miracle before they believe and have the gall to suggest he provide manna (again a cover so that they get free food) like Moses. This is after Jesus miraculously fed them all. I am amazed here that Jesus doesn't snap and blast them for being so spiritually blind and self-centered. Jesus simply goes on to point them to himself as the bread of life that has come down from heaven. He is the true manna of God. If you want to experience a miracle, feed on Jesus. Drink his spirit into your inner being. Again, these are powerful images of internalization and being changed from the inside out. Jesus also states that he will not drive anyone away who comes to him to receive life and that in the last day, all those who have trusted in him, who look at him, he will raise up or restore to life. Here we see an illusion to the resurrection, something the Jesus' followers anticipated in the Messianic age. The idea of looking to Jesus would have brought to mind the healing of the Israelites when they looked at the bronze snake to receive their healing from the judgment of biting snakes.
- The religious leaders (just called "the Jews" by John) begin to grumble against Jesus and what he is saying. They take offense because they know his family and Jesus said he came down from heaven. You can imagine if someone said that today. It makes sense that they say, "Yah, right!"
- Here they refer to Joseph and knowing him personally. Does this suggest that maybe Joseph is still alive even though it would appear in the other Gospels that he is no longer around or maybe passed away? Some of these stories are hard to place chronologically but based on this account, it would suggest that Joseph is still alive.
- Jesus now goes on to explain himself and says just about everything he can think of to completely offend the religious leaders:
  - The only people that can come to Jesus are those that God draws. This means that God is not working in their lives because they are rejecting Jesus;

- The Prophets teach that everyone will be taught by God (See Isaiah 54:13). Their role as teachers in Israel are being bypassed by God and God is drawing people to Jesus by God so that they are no longer needed;
  - Only Jesus, God's son has really seen God the Father. In other words, Jesus has completely unique status as God's son;
  - You need to eat my flesh and drink my blood to have life. This obviously points ahead to the Lord's supper but must in this context suggest a wild form of spiritual cannibalism;
  - Jesus says all of this in a synagogue!
- You can see why the religious leaders were completely offended by this kind of talk. Yet Jesus goes on to clarify. "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." Jesus is speaking metaphorically about internalizing into their lives his very life. This is not spiritual cannibalism but rather spiritual internalization. Jesus is offending the mind to reveal the heart. He is saying things to intentionally get a reaction so that people will engage the truth. It works. It goes on to say, "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." They wanted the side show. They wanted the spectacular. They wanted the special effects. They wanted the free food. They wanted their needs met. They didn't want to press into the true meaning of why Jesus came. They didn't want what God was revealing in Jesus. They remained self-centered from start to finish and Jesus' radical teaching pushed them over the edge.
  - In this passage it also talks about the Father drawing people to Jesus. Does God draw people through the Spirit to Christ? Yes. Does this mean that we are puppets that have no role to play? No. God's spirit works in people's hearts. If we have a humble and soft heart (and God alone knows this), he draws us towards Jesus. We must humbly partner with God and still choose to believe. If it was all automatic, Jesus would not have to call people to believe in him. Rather we see that being drawn by God does not automatically create faith. We must still partner with God to choose faith. From start to finish, God is relational and wants his wooing to be responded to with an open and freely chosen response of love and trust.
  - Peter again affirms that Jesus is the Messiah and here we see the disciples do not turn back. We also see that Judas is now starting to be named in the text as the disciple who will betray Jesus. It is interesting that at this turning point in the story, Judas is identified as the betrayer. Maybe within Judas heart he is one who rejects Jesus in his heart and yet remains quietly a member of the twelve.
  - Jesus now has a direct run in with religious leaders over one of the hottest of all issues. Jesus and his disciples intentionally break one of traditions of ritual cleansing, washing your hands before eating. The religious leaders were obsessed with ritual cleaning, from hand to pitchers and cups. They were the spiritual perfectionist – neat freaks. Jesus'

approach is messier and they don't like his disregard for their traditions. Jesus' response cuts to the heart of the matter. He quotes Isaiah 29:13 and clearly outlines what the problem is with a religious approach to life. You become obsessed with appearances and externals and yet your heart is far from God. You become entrenched in traditions and don't get God's laws of love. In the end, you trade living for God for obsessing about your own human-invented traditions and rules.

- Jesus goes on to show how the religious leaders devised a way for people to devote their wealth to God in such a way as they no longer needed to care for their aging parents. Jesus is showing how religion can partner with people's self-centeredness and as a result promote injustice and have people failing to live a life of love and service, even within their own family. How many families have suffered because a father or mother or both have devoted themselves to God and as a result have neglected their children or extended family? Countless. Although we should not love our families more than Jesus, our love for Jesus should transform our lives so that we are the most loving children and parents we can be.
- Jesus now turns away from the religious leaders and speaks to the crowds following him. He again makes it explicit. It is all about the heart. "Nothing outside a person can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that makes him 'unclean.'" With this one teaching, Jesus completely rewrites the entire dietary law of the Old Testament. As we saw in our the study of the dietary Law, the Old Testament used food as a way to teach the concepts of clean and unclean as well as to promote health for the Israelites. Yet, they become fixated on food rather than grasp the purpose of why it was given. Jesus clarifies that before God no food is unclean. It is ultimately our hearts that make us clean or unclean. The religious leaders had become fixed on the law rather than seeing the principle behind the law.
- Jesus then warns his disciples to basically leave the religious leaders alone. He basically says that we can trust God to deal with the religious people. We don't have to root them out of community but can just let God deal with them. They are blind guides and any who follow them will fall into a pit along with them. This pit, this black hole that traps people is a life of blind bondage to rules, rituals and regulations. It is a pit of judgment that traps the religious. We don't have to do anything against them but can simply put our entire focus on following Jesus and loving people. Again we see Jesus does everything he can to ensure we don't focus on hating our enemies but rather leaving any who oppose us for God to deal with.
- At the end of this story Jesus outlines all of the sins that come out of people's hearts that make them unclean before God. From our thought-life to actions, from indulgence (greed, theft, adultery) to anger (murder, slander), from pride to foolishness, the real problem with humanity is our self-centered, self-saving hearts. This is what needs to change and no amount of managing or controlling our external environment will change

us from the inside-out. God must change our hearts through his presence working within us. Only then can we live truly holy, clean, loving lives before God.

- We see at the end of this story that the opposition is mounting. Jesus must stay away from Judea because the religious leaders were waiting to kill him. It is now a matter of time.