

Are You in the Field?

Today In Your Reading...

Jesus returned to Nazareth to visit friends and family, but He did not find a warm welcome there. The people were so familiar with Him that they could not make the transition from local carpenter to the Son of God, the Messiah. Thus, their unbelief stifled His ministry there and He soon had to depart to the surrounding region.

Everywhere Jesus went, He was swamped by the crowds. So many people were hurting or sick. "He felt great pity for the people because their problems were so great, and they didn't know where to go for help... **The harvest is so great,**" He told His disciples, "**but the workers are so few.** Pray that the Lord, who is in charge of the harvest, will send more workers for His fields" (*Matthew 9:35-38*).

It was this need for workers that prompted Jesus to send out His disciples to the cities of Israel, to preach the Gospel and to minister to the poor, sick, and lame. He sent them out in groups of two and challenged them to take nothing with them, so that they would have to rely upon the Lord for their provision, through the people they helped. This "sending out" is why we call these men "apostles." A disciple is a student, a learner, but an apostle is one who is sent on an important mission, in this case, to seek and save God's "lost sheep" (*10:5*).

This commissioning must have had an impact on Matthew, who provided details of Jesus' instructions and warnings. "I am sending you out as sheep among wolves," He said (*10:16*). **The cost of being an ambassador for Christ is high;** it demands personal sacrifice. One's commitment to Him will invite rejection, division (even in one's family), insults and other forms of persecution, even death. Jesus said, "If you refuse to take up your cross and follow Me, then you are not worthy of being Mine" (*10:38*).

Daily Reflection

I love the contrast between those who are **too familiar** with Jesus (people of Nazareth) and those who believe in and follow Christ to the degree that they will **suffer anything** for Him. What does being too familiar with Jesus look like today? Is that you? Why or why not?

The harvest is so great, but **the workers are few**. What personal challenge do you find here?

You may not be an apostle, but you have been commissioned as an ambassador, to represent Christ to others, to speak on His behalf, and to share what He has done for them (*2 Corinthians 5:20*). If you were called home, to heaven, to give a report of your work "in the field," what would you say? **Have you been on the sidelines watching or have you been in the field working?**

Don't fear rejection or persecution. "Be glad; a great reward awaits you in heaven" (*5:11, 12*). Blessed are those who suffer for Christ.

Baskets of Unbelief

Today In Your Reading...

John the Baptist was murdered. He was arrested and killed by King Herod, not for doing anything illegal, but for offending the king by pointing out his affair and adultery. It was obvious that his conscience was bothering him, for when he heard the news of Jesus' teaching and miracles, he feared that John the Baptist had come back from the dead (*Mark 6:16*).

We also read two of Jesus' more well-known miracles, that of feeding the five thousand and walking on water. While these events may seem disconnected, they are not. Both exposed the limits of man, confirmed the unlimited power of God to save, and identified the key to bridge the gap — *faith*. Let's take a closer look.

First, **in his own power, man is unable to save himself**, much less save anyone else. When Jesus told the disciples to feed the crowd that was following them, they exclaimed, "Impossible!" When Peter, who got out of the boat to walk to Jesus, saw the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. Jesus said to him, "You don't have much faith." Though we can be so prideful at times, in our fallen state, *there is only so much we can do*.

On the other hand, **Jesus demonstrated His unlimited resources**, both in the physical and spiritual worlds, **to save us from ourselves**. When Peter began to sink, he shouted, "Save me, Lord!" Then, Jesus reached out and grabbed him. When Jesus fed everyone with five loaves and two fish, He was demonstrating that He alone has the power to "feed men" endlessly. What He did in the physical realm that day, He also does in the spiritual realm. He said as much when He called Himself "the Bread of Life. No one who comes to Me will ever be hungry again" (*John 6:35*). It is interesting that after thousands of people were fed that day, there

were twelve baskets of food left over. Perhaps there was one basket for each of the disciples, a reminder of their unbelief.

Finally, what is it that bridges the gulf between our inability to save ourselves and God's ability to save us for eternity? **Faith**. But, even the faith to believe is not something that we conjure up; it is not of our own doing. Rather, **faith is given to us by God** (*Ephesians 2:8, 9*). In our sinful, hardened hearts, we would never come to God, much less believe in Him. Jesus said, "People cannot come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them to Me" (*John 6:44*).

Daily Reflection

Do you recognize your inadequacy before God? Or are you trying to save yourself? If you are relying on your own strength, I have news for you; *you will come up short and eventually sink*. I am impressed with Peter's courage. I like his ambition to be and do more than he was, but even he had to reach out and grab the hand of Christ. What then does that say about you?

Have you come to the realization that salvation is not something that you achieved in your own power? Do you recognize that the faith you have, to trust Christ with your eternity, is not your own, but that it was given to you by God? If so, what, then, should be your response?

Once Corrupted, Now Clean

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections

October 10 — *John 6:22-71; Mark 7:1-23; Matthew 15:1-20*

Day 283 — 82 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We continued our leading idea from yesterday, that, in our sinfulness, we are incapable of saving ourselves. Only God, through His Son Jesus Christ and the indwelling of His Spirit, can save us from our helpless state. "Spend you energy seeking the eternal life that I, the Son of Man, can give you," Jesus said. "For God the Father has sent Me for that very purpose... I am the true bread from heaven. The true bread of God comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. *I am the bread of life*. No one who comes to Me will be hungry again" (*John 6:27, 32-35*).

Jesus went on to say, "It is the Spirit who gives eternal life. *Human effort accomplishes nothing*; but, the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (*John 6:63*). These things were difficult to accept for some people and they deserted Jesus as a result. They were following Jesus for the wrong reasons; they wanted the temporary benefits — like the manna that Moses gave his people — but they were unwilling to trust Christ with their eternity.

This idea of man's inability to save himself was carried into the next story, when the Pharisees arrived from Jerusalem to confront Jesus (*Mark 7:1-23*). They were looking to catch Him committing an error and, therefore, condemn Him for "breaking the law." They thought they had Him when they noticed that His disciples did not wash their hands before they ate. Washing hands before a meal was an age-old custom, a symbol of man's attempt to prevent defiling or corrupting himself.

Once again, here was man's attempt to save himself by his own means and Jesus quickly pointed it out. "You hypocrites! **You ignore God's laws and substitute your own traditions...** You are not defiled by what you eat; you are defiled by what you say and do. Food

does not come into contact with your heart. It is the thought-life that defiles you; **from within a person's heart comes every evil thing...**"

Daily Reflection

The Pharisees had deceived themselves and the people of God by teaching that these type of traditions could prevent self-corruption and, therefore, make them acceptable to God. However, Jesus made it clear that **people are already corrupted because of their wicked hearts**. "All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you and make you unacceptable to God" (*7:23*).

Have you ever fallen into the trap of believing that you could make yourself acceptable to God by the things you do or don't do? Explain.

Since it is your heart that is corrupt and sinful, then there is nothing you can do to make it clean. **Your external failures are products of your internal fallenness.** Therefore, you need someone, other than yourself, to cleanse your corrupted heart. The only person capable of doing that is Christ. By His blood and through the indwelling of His Spirit, He exchanges your filthiness for His righteousness; He makes you a new creature with right standing before God.

Thank God He has given you a way to be acceptable to Him. **You are no longer defiled! You are clean!**

Cease your attempts to make yourself right before Him. Leave behind your filthy, fallen self-righteousness for His life-giving Spirit!

Beware of the Yeast

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections

October 11 — *Mark 7:24-8:21; Matthew 15:21-16:12*

Day 284 — 81 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Jesus traveled to several locations that were primarily populated with Gentiles (non-Jews) — Tyre, Sidon, and the region of the Decapolis (ten cities). He did among them what He had done among His own people. “A vast crowd brought the lame, blind, crippled, mute, and many others with physical difficulties and laid them before Jesus. He healed them all” (*Matthew 15:29-31*).

After doing this for three days, Jesus felt compassion for the people, for they had nothing to eat. Thus, He performed, for the second time, a miracle in which He fed thousands of people with just a little food. Since this event occurred in a different region, filled with primarily Gentiles, the message that Jesus was sending is clear — *He is the God of both Jews and Gentiles*, and His gift of salvation would bless all nations!

Still, after all that He had done to prove His divinity, a group of Pharisees and Sadducees came to test His claims, by asking Him to show them a miraculous sign from heaven. Jesus knew their motives, that **they were not there to accept His ministry but to attack it**. They were trying to catch Him in a trap and, therefore, discredit His work.

Jesus refused to give them a sign, saying, “You are good at reading the weather signs in the sky, but you can’t read the obvious signs of the times” (*16:3*). In essence, Jesus was condemning their search for evidence of His identity, when there was already plenty of evidence that He was who He said He was. He could have called down fire from heaven, like Elijah did, and dried up the Sea of Galilee, and **it would have not been enough to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah**. Their hearts were hard and their minds were already made up; no amount of proof would convince them otherwise.

Daily Reflection

If the Pharisees and Sadducees were around today, we might call them **skeptics**. A skeptic is someone who doubts, questions, or speculates about a belief system. In some sense, we are all skeptics; there is nothing wrong with questioning someone’s claims or doubting their validity.

However, the Pharisees and Sadducees were beyond common skepticism. They were not simply unsure about Jesus, but **they had already made up their minds about Him and would not allow themselves to be persuaded by the evidence before them**. They would be similar to a naturalist, who holds to evolution as the origin of all things, even though there is no evidence for his view and there is overwhelming evidence for creationism. While he may claim to have “science on his side,” he only deceives himself and simply refuses to follow where the evidence leads; he does not want to admit the alternative, that he is wrong or that there is a God to whom he must answer.

Likewise, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day would never admit their misconceptions. That would have been humiliating. Therefore, they held their ground and remained entrenched in their unbelief, no matter what they heard or saw. Jesus warned of this type of attitude and condemned their false teaching. He compared it to yeast, an evil that would infiltrate and compromise the positive effects of the gospel.

Beware of the nay-sayers. Satan, the great deceiver, loves to discredit truth and distract truth-seekers with his tricks. Jesus more than proved Himself, and there is overwhelming evidence that He was the Messiah. While it is okay to doubt or question aspects of your faith, do not allow your doubt to linger; rather find answers to your questions or you too will be corrupted by the yeast!

Getting Out of the Way

Today In Your Reading...

We witnessed a highlight in Jesus' ministry, the most clear affirmation, so far, that He was, indeed, the Chosen One of God. This affirmation came with three events — Peter's declaration of Jesus' identity and the introduction of the Church, the prediction of His death and resurrection, and His glorification at the Mount of Transfiguration. Let's take a closer look at each of these events.

First, when Peter answered Jesus' question, "Who do you say I am?" with "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God," Jesus unveiled His plan to establish the Church. The word "church" is *ekklesia*, meaning "called out ones." It refers to a body of Christ-followers who make a declaration similar to Peter's, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior sent from God. Each person, when faced with the reality of Jesus' life, ministry, and claims must answer the same question, **"Who do you say that I am?"**

After it was clear that Jesus was the Messiah, He began to tell His disciples what would happen to Him, that He would suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the religious leaders, that He would be killed, but that within three days, He would rise again. Peter, who had just been praised by the Lord for his declaration of Jesus' identity, even given the "keys to the Kingdom of Heaven," rebuked Jesus, telling Him that He shouldn't say such things (*Mark 8:31, 32*).

What Peter could not reconcile in His mind was how Jesus could establish and reign in His earthly kingdom if He were to allow Himself to suffer and die at the hands of men. Here again we see the confusion of the double fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus immediately recognized Peter's words as the Devil's distraction, an attempt to keep Him from fulfilling His primary purpose, that of saving men from their sins (v.33).

The third event affirming Jesus' Messiahship came at the Mount of Transfiguration, where Peter, James, and John got to see Jesus in His glorified state. As He stood there with Moses and Elijah, who represented the Old Testament Law and prophets, He explained to them how He would fulfill all things at the cross.

Again, Peter was confused. He believed that Jesus was about to usher in His kingdom and he wanted to build three shrines to remember the moment; but, the voice of the Lord interrupted his thoughtless words by saying, "This is My Son, the Chosen one. Listen to Him!" What the disciples witnessed would not happen until much later. Jesus first had to complete His mission.

Daily Reflection

Jesus' statement to Peter resonated with me today, **"You are seeing things from a human point of view, not from God's."** If you are like me, you want to see things from God's perspective. You want to know His will, and you want to make decisions that honor Him. However, these things are easier said than done. How exactly do you accomplish these tasks?

What typically gets in the way of these goals?

Are you **getting out of the way** and **getting on board** with what God wants to accomplish?

Three Marks

Today In Your Reading...

Jesus continued to stress with His disciples the importance of faith. "I assure you, even if you have faith as a mustard seed," He said, "you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible" (*Matthew 17:20, 21*). However, most of our passage today involved Jesus addressing the question, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" His answer sparked a time of teaching, in which He expanded on several key characteristics that His followers should exhibit.

First, **Christ-followers do not concern themselves with greatness but with humility.**

"Anyone who wants to be the first must take the last place and be the servant of everyone else. Anyone who becomes as humble as a child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven" (*Mark 9:35; Matthew 18:3*). Pride has no place in the presence of God, for we have nothing of our own doing to boast. If we boast, let it be of what the Lord has done for us. Let us never view ourselves as greater than anyone else; let us view ourselves as a servant. That is greatness.

Second, **Christ-followers are marked by self-discipline,**

controlling their fleshly impulses. "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off. If eye causes you to sin, gouge it out" (*Mark 9:43-47*). Giving into our natural, sinful tendencies can lead us to ruin. Therefore, we must become adept at "cutting them off" or nipping them in the bud, to avoid personal consequences and the likelihood of causing others to stumble.

Third, **Christ-followers forgive others as the Lord has forgiven them.**

We do not hold grudges, play manipulative games, or treat others differently because of an offense, rather we pursue peace and reconciliation. "Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?" (*Matthew 18:33*).

Daily Reflection

Evaluate yourself in these three areas. With which do you concern yourself more, being great in the eyes of God or man? Explain. In what ways can you improve in this area?

How would you describe your self-discipline, your ability to control your selfish, sinful appetites? Have you been willing to lop off bad limbs or are you allowing them to produce bad fruit? How aware have you been to avoid leading others into sin because of your words or actions?

Are you one to seek reconciliation with others or do you seek revenge? Have you been faithful to follow the steps Jesus laid out, in order to protect the feelings and reputation of other people? Have you forgiven those who have offended you or are you holding on to grudges?

A Polarizing Figure

Today In Your Reading...

Most of our passage revolved around Jesus going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Festival of Shelters. For much of His ministry, He avoided Jerusalem because the religious leaders there were plotting to kill Him. However, He decided to go anyway because "His time had not yet come" (*John 7:8, 30; 8:20*). Just as God sent Jesus to be born at the perfect time (*Galatians 4:4*), so also had He providentially prepared the time for Jesus' death and resurrection.

The truth that was glaringly obvious today was that **Jesus was a polarizing figure**. Some people loved Him, while others hated Him. Some gave their lives to follow Him, while others wanted to arrest and kill Him. Some people called Him the Son of God; others said He did miracles by the power of the Devil. Some said that they had never heard anything like Him, while others listened only to catch Him in a trap.

Jesus is still a polarizing figure today. Millions love and follow Him, and millions despise Him and everything He stands for. Some talk of Jesus as a friend, with tender and heart-felt words, while others view Him as an enemy and use His name to curse. Multitudes see Jesus as the only thing that is right in the world; others see Him as what is wrong with the world.

What is it about Jesus that He provokes such anger and hatred? Jesus answered this question Himself, "The world hates Me because I accuse it of sin and evil" (*John 7:7*). For one to admit that Jesus was (and is) real means that one has to respond to His claims. For example, He said that He was the Son of God. Was He? He said that there is a heaven and a hell. Is there? He said that He was the only way to get to heaven. Is He? He said that He has the power to forgive sin. Does He? These claims require a response from us. **Was He right or was He wrong?**

If Jesus was (and is) right, then that means there is a God, which means that God makes the rules and sets the standard. That also means that God will judge us based on that standard and that He gets to determine how we please Him. That means that we are accountable to Him for our words and deeds, that we cannot do whatever we want and get away with it. Finally, it means that there is a heaven and a hell, and that we will spend eternity in one or the other. His perfect moral standard shames us of our sin and leaves us helpless before Him. These are the things that polarize people.

Daily Reflection

For what other reasons is Jesus offensive and polarizing?

How have you seen the polarizing effects of Jesus' name and claims in your life?

If Jesus is polarizing, does that mean that His followers are (or should be) polarizing as well? Explain your answer.
