

Dipping Your Toes

February 19 – Mark 6:14-29; Matthew 14:1-12; Luke 9:7-9

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 50 – 315 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We learned of the grisly fate of John the Baptist. John was the last of the Old Testament prophets and the forerunner of Jesus, the Messiah. His assignment was not only to introduce the Christ when He arrived but also to prepare people's hearts for salvation. He accomplished this preparation by convicting people of their sin and calling them to repentance (*Mk. 1:4-8*).

Word of John's preaching spread throughout the region. News of him was even reported to King Herod Antipas who enjoyed listening to John (*6:20*). However, John pointed out Herod's sins. He had committed adultery by having an affair with his brother's wife, Herodias (*v.17, 18*). She wanted John killed for spotlighting this scandal, but since Herod liked John, the king arrested him so he could protect John in prison (*v.19, 20*). However, Herodias eventually got her way and had John executed (*v.21-28*).

John's unwarranted execution causes us to ask a question — why do bad things happen to good people? There are several answers to this question. Because of the fall of man in *Genesis 3*, we live in a broken world. While we can see some good in it, we can also recognize that it is imperfect. Second, other than Christ, no one is completely good. Though John is described as righteous and holy, he was not perfect. He was a sinner like the rest of us. All have fallen short of God's glory (*Rom. 3:23*), and our sin has penalties or consequences. Third, there are rotten people in the world who pursue evil and often hurt others. Fourth, Satan is the mastermind behind the evil in the world. He and his minions are constantly working against godly people to hinder their impact.

For now, we must endure this broken system. Even Jesus, who is completely good, was killed by this evil world. But God somehow accomplishes His good purposes despite the wicked actions of fallen creatures, and one day He will make all things new.

Daily Reflection

Notice that the account of John's death falls right after Jesus' warnings about the cost of discipleship. Like so many Old Testament prophets, the price for serving the Lord was his life. While we are sad for John, Jesus said those like John, who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, are rewarded (*Matt. 5:10-12*).

But let's focus on Herod. John was killed because of Herod's weakness and his wife's wickedness. Does this sound familiar — a king who killed an innocent man to cover up an affair? That sounds like David (*2 Sam. 11*). While Herod and Herodias tried to hide their sin, God knew it and brought it to light. Because of their ungodly conduct, a godly man was dead, and many others were affected.

Herod did not take his relationship with God seriously. The King was playing a game. He enjoyed listening to John. Perhaps, he agreed with the prophet's words and was inspired by his messages, but these things didn't change Herod's heart or lifestyle. **Herod dipped his toes in the water and tried "the God thing," but he never fully committed to honoring the Lord.** Instead, he chose to please his wife, daughter, and guests. Who is it that you live to please?

There is evidence that God was trying to get Herod's attention. Did you notice that Herod's conscience was bothering him? He was worried that John had risen from the dead (*Mk. 6:16*). He was afraid of John because he spoke for God and exposed his sin (*v.20*); and when he heard John, he was very perplexed (*v.20*).

God has given us a conscience to know right and wrong, to act in ways that please Him. When the Spirit convicts us or provokes our conscience, it is a warning sign that we are in dangerous territory. **It never ends well when we act against conscience or conviction.** Are you listening to your conscience? Are you "all in" with the Lord, or are you just dipping your toes?

We Can't, But You Can

February 20 – Matt. 14:13-21; Mk. 6:30-44; Lk. 9:10-17; Jn. 6:1-15

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 51 – 314 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus miraculously fed a group of five thousand people (at least), which may be His most well-known miracle. In fact, you probably noticed that it is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels. It is important to note that what we read today is only half the story. To understand the importance of this miracle, we must read the rest of the story recorded in *John 6:25-58*, but we will save that part for another day.

The key that unlocks both halves of the story is the setting or context of Passover (*Jn. 6:4*). Passover was an annual Jewish holiday in which the people traveled to the Temple in Jerusalem to commemorate the events of the exodus from Egypt (i.e., leadership of Moses, blood on the doorposts, crossing the Red Sea, and God's provision of water and manna in the desert). This setting explains why there were so many people in the area and what was on their minds at the time. Jesus connected these events to His role as the Savior or Promised Messiah.

For example, did you notice the numbers five and twelve? There were five loaves and 5000 people, and there were twelve baskets left over. These are symbolic of the five books of Moses (Torah or Law) and the twelve tribes of Israel. Like Moses, Jesus performed a miracle on the sea (calming the wind), and He will walk on the water (*v.15-21*). Jesus went up to the mountain as Moses did (*v.3*). When He saw the crowd of people, He said, "Where are we to buy bread so that these may eat?" (*v.5*). Moses asked a similar question in *Numbers 11:13*. The bread will symbolize the manna, and so on.

Furthermore, after the miracle, the people identified Jesus as the Prophet that Moses predicted would come, and they intended to make Jesus their king (*v.14, 15; Deut. 18:15, 18; Jn. 1:21*). They believed the Messiah would free them from their political enemies and set up an earthly kingdom (*Isa. 9:6, 7*). But Jesus was not there to save them from their enemies.

He was there to save them from their sins. They had the right person but the wrong purpose.

The prophecies of Jesus are true. He will deliver His people from their enemies, but that will occur at His second coming. At His first coming, His purpose was to offer forgiveness of sins and eternal life (salvation). The Jews did not realize that the Messiah would have two advents, so they combined these predictions. When Jesus didn't do what they thought He should, they dismissed Him as the Messiah.

Daily Reflection

While this miracle was meant to spotlight Jesus as the Messiah, it was also a test of faith for the disciples. When He asked them to feed the people, they immediately began calculating the possibilities (*v.7-9*). Their answers fell short, and the task was deemed impossible. But that was the point. **There are some things we cannot do, and our only option is to trust the Lord.**

What's interesting is that the disciples had just witnessed Jesus calming the sea and curing two crazy demoniacs. Their Teacher had incredible, off-the-chart power and authority, but in the situation of the hungry crowd, the thought of asking Jesus to feed them didn't cross their minds. Once again, they failed the assignment.

When Jesus asked Philip, "How are we going to feed these people," the right response would've been, **"We can't, but You can."** The same answer applies to salvation. Who can save us from our sins? **We can't, but He can.**

It is often said that God will not give us more than we can handle. While this may be true of temptation (*1 Cor. 10:13*), it is not true of trials. He often gives us more than we can handle so that we will recognize our limits and say to Him, "We can't, but You can." What impossible task are you facing? Have you recognized your limitations and need for the Lord? Say to Him, **"I can't, but You can."**

God of the Wind and Waves

February 21 – Matt. 14:22-36; Mark 6:45-56; John 6:16-21

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 52 – 313 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

The disciples had already witnessed some amazing things, but what they saw today topped them all — Jesus walking on water! They knew water-walking was impossible, so they believed Jesus was a ghost.

While this miracle alone is incredible, there were several other phenomenal events that night. First, even though the boat was three or four miles away, in the middle of the sea (eight miles wide), Jesus could “see the disciples straining at the oars” (*Mk. 6:48*). Second, by walking on the water, Jesus would’ve beaten the disciples to the shore, for “He intended to pass by them” (*v.48*). Third, not only did Jesus walk on the sea that night, but so also did Peter, with the Lord’s help, of course (*Matt. 14:28-31*). Fourth, when Jesus got into the boat, the wind stopped, the second time they had witnessed His command of the storm (*v.32*). Finally, after the wind stopped, John wrote that the boat was immediately at the shore (*6:21*). They passed four miles in the blink of an eye!

What was the point of all these extraordinary events? Of course, they were meant to prove Jesus’ identity, but they were also meant to strengthen the disciples’ faith in Him. To us, walking on water might seem a bit over-the-top, but Jesus needed to do it to get through to these men, for “they had not gained any insight from the incident with the loaves, and their hearts were hardened” (*Mk. 6:52*).

But notice that the disciples were making progress. When He calmed the storm the first time, they were astonished and asked, “Who is this man that even the winds and waves obey Him?” But now, they worshiped Him and said, “You are certainly the Son of God” (*Matt. 14:33*). Peter even exhibited enough faith and courage to go to Jesus on the water. They were beginning to understand not only that Jesus was God in the flesh but also that He could empower them to do great things.

We must not overlook the connection between this miracle and Jesus’ feeding of the 5000. Remember the context of the Passover and the exodus? Like Moses, Jesus performed a water miracle, and when the disciples called out to Him on the water, He said, “Take courage. It is I” (*v.27*). That is the Greek translation of “I Am,” the name God gave for Himself to Moses at Sinai (*Ex. 3:14*). Jesus is the greater Moses!

Daily Reflection

I love the faith exhibited by the sick people in Gennesaret. They believed that if they could just touch the fringe of Jesus’ robe, they would be healed (*Matt. 14:36*). What is impossible for us is possible with Him. **The wind that blows up our lives is under His control. The water that is over our heads is under His feet.** In our God, we can trust without doubt. In our God, we can put our faith without worry.

What encouragement or challenge did you find in your reading today?

I don’t know if this story was meant to be prophetic, but I wanted to encourage you with a picture of our future. Jesus is interceding for us in prayer (*Matt. 14:23; Rom. 8:34*). We are disciples struggling with the wind and waves of this world (*Jn. 16:33*). The Savior will appear one day and call us to come to Him (*1 Thess. 4:13-18*). When we are together with Him, He will take us immediately to the shores of heaven! **Jesus is who He says He is, and one day our faith in Him will be rewarded.** Take courage and walk closely with Him!

The Bread of Life

February 22 – John 6:22-71

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 53 – 312 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus gave what is called His “Bread of Life Discourse,” a thorough explanation of the person and process of salvation. His teaching is best understood in the context of Passover and the feeding of the 5000 (v.1-15). Remember, Jesus was (and is) the better Moses, and He had demonstrated this truth in several ways. In this passage, He compared Himself to the manna the Lord provided during the exodus (v.31-35).

The key to this entire section is found in Jesus’ statement, “Do not work for the food which is perishing but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man (Jesus) will give to you” (v.27). The Jews focused on obtaining physical, perishable food. They followed Jesus because He fed them loaves (v.26), but that bread was perishable. Jesus tried to get the people to focus on bread that was imperishable and everlasting, spiritual bread, referring to salvation, and He was the only one able to provide it.

“Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died,” Jesus said (v.49, 58). He, of course, was (and is) much better than manna. “I am the Bread of Life,” He said, “and he who comes to Me will not hunger...” (v.35, 51, 58).

To provide the Bread of eternal life, Jesus hinted at His crucifixion. “The life of the world is My flesh. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink” (v.51, 55). He would earn our salvation at the cross, where His flesh would be torn, His body would be broken, and His blood would be spilled. Those who “eat His flesh and drink His blood,” meaning believe in Him for the forgiveness of sins, “will live” (v.57).

The people checked out after Jesus mentioned flesh and blood (v.52, 66). He then turned to the twelve and asked if they were going to leave as well, and Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (v.68). Finally, someone got it. In Jesus is life eternal!

Daily Reflection

Of course, there is much more in this passage, the doctrine of election (v.37-44), the mention of the end times or “last day” (v.39, 40, 44), and the foreshadowing of Judas’ betrayal (v.64, 65, 70, 71). But the bottom line is that **Jesus is the Bread of Life, the imperishable gift of God.** In Him is forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

Unfortunately, our world rarely thinks about anything other than this life. Sadly, Christians are guilty of doing the same. We pursue all that the world has to offer, making for ourselves as good a life here as we can. But do we ever think about the life to come? While our eternity may be secure, we tend to focus only on this world.

Read *1 John 2:15-17*. Why should we think about more than just this world?

The perishable or the imperishable — which one consumes your thoughts, your time, and your energies? If someone observed how you spend your resources, what would he conclude? Would he find that you are no different than the rest of the world, focusing only on what is perishable? Or would he find that you are focused on the imperishable, that which is not of this world?

The Heart of the Matter

February 23 – Mark 7:1-23; Matthew 15:1-20

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 54 – 311 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus had another dispute with the religious leaders. This time the argument centered on the tradition of handwashing. The Pharisees were well-known for adding their own rituals and traditions on top of what was required in the Law of Moses. For example, priests had to wash their hands and feet regularly so that they would not be defiled (*Ex. 30:19; 40:12*). Thus, it was assumed that washing should be required of everyone, to avoid being unclean before God.

However, Jesus described the situation perfectly when He quoted Isaiah, "You honor God with your lips, but your heart is far from Him. You teach as doctrines (truth) the precepts of men" (*Isa. 29:13*). In other words, the logic of the Pharisees sounded good, but it distorted the intent of God's Word. He followed by saying, "You set aside the commandment of God to keep your tradition" (*Mk. 7:8, 9*).

While the intention of the tradition might have been good in the beginning, the ritual led people away from truth. One is not defiled or made unclean before God because of dirty hands or feet. One is defiled or corrupt before God because of his sinful heart, and no amount of external washing could change a person's internal condition. Sin is a spiritual problem that requires a spiritual solution, not a physical one.

Jesus pointed out another way that the Pharisees were distorting the Law. They dishonored their parents by not supporting them financially. Their reason was that they didn't have enough money to give to God and help their parents (*v.10-12*). Again, this sounds good, but it was "invalidating the word of God for tradition" (*v.13*).

The Pharisees were evaluating Jesus' teaching based on their traditions. But they had it backwards. What they should've done was evaluate their traditions based on Jesus' teaching. We should do the same.

Daily Reflection

After the discussion with the Pharisees, Jesus met with His disciples to explain everything. **Our problem, He said, stems from what's on the inside of us, not from what's on the outside.** We were conceived in sin, and our hearts are desperately sick (*Ps. 51:5; Jer. 17:9*). Our evil, ungodly actions and words proceed from our wicked hearts. Therefore, **our hearts must be changed, and only Christ can do that.**

Out of the heart proceed our thoughts, actions, and words (*v.21*). They are like a mirror. They reflect the condition of our heart. What do your thoughts, actions, and words tell you about the condition of your heart?

While we were conceived in sin and our hearts were once desperately sick, Jesus makes all things new. Because of salvation, we are new creatures in Him (*2 Cor. 5:17*). Our hearts have been washed by His blood.

If you have put your faith in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you notice a change of heart. Do your thoughts, actions, and words reflect this change? How so?

Here's the heart of the matter — only Christ can make us clean. Has He changed you?

Some Dogs Go to Heaven

February 24 – Mark 7:24-8:9; Matthew 15:21-39

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 55 – 310 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus traveled to Tyre and Sidon, then back to Galilee and the Decapolis (Ten Cities), healing people everywhere He went. We ended with Jesus miraculously feeding a crowd of 4000 people, similar to His earlier feeding of 5,000.

At first, all of this seems to be just more of the same — teaching, healing, and feeding people. While that may be true, there is a distinction that we must not miss. The clue is hidden in the strange conversation Jesus had with the Syrophenician woman (*Matt. 15:22-28*).

We are told that the woman was a Canaanite, people whom the Israelites destroyed or displaced when they entered the Promised Land after their exodus from Egypt. Somehow, her ancestors survived. So then, not only was this woman a Gentile (non-Jew), but she was a Canaanite, the least of the least in the eyes of the Jews. In fact, the Jewish people referred to Gentiles as dogs.

When this woman approached Jesus and His disciples, she made a scene (v.23). I imagine there were several people in line in front of her, waiting to see Jesus, and she was growing impatient. She began to shout at Jesus from a distance, trying to get His attention. He didn't respond at first. It would've been rude to talk to her when He was speaking to someone else. When He finally did respond, Jesus revealed the clue to understand the passage. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (v.24), meaning that His focus was on the Jews at the moment, not the Gentiles. He went on to say, "It is not good to take the children's bread (Jews) and throw it to the dogs (Gentiles)."

While this comment might sound harsh to us, Jesus was testing her faith. In essence, He was asking, "Do you really believe who you think I am?" The woman responded in faith. She basically said, "All I need are crumbs (leftovers) from you for my daughter to be healed."

Jesus not only rewarded her faith and revealed another truth. While His focus was on God's people, the Jews, He was the Messiah for everyone, even Canaanites. Notice He spent the rest of our passage in the Decapolis (Ten Cities), which is a Gentile region. In fact, His feeding of the 4000 was focused on the Gentiles, while the feeding of the 5000 was focused on the Jews around Galilee.

Daily Reflection

Jesus was a Jew, and He was sent by God to the Jews, to redeem Israel and bring them back to God. However, **praise God that Jesus also had time for the "dogs" of this world**, Gentiles like us. He was, indeed, a blessing to all nations, just as God promised to Abraham hundreds of years earlier (*Gen. 26:4*).

Typically, we surround ourselves with others who are like-minded, who believe the way we do. We do life with people of the faith, our church family, and very rarely interact with the "dogs" (unsaved) of this world. Why is that? Why aren't we instead looking for opportunities to share Christ with the "dogs"?

What are some ways that you can get outside of your Christian pack and look for "dogs" to encourage, to serve, or to lead to Christ?

Remember, you were once a "dog" too.

Time for an Eye Exam

February 25 – Mark 8:11-30; Matthew 16:1-20

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 56 – 309 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus had another clash with the Pharisees who demanded a sign from Him to prove His identity as the Messiah. But Jesus did not perform on command, especially for those who were there to harass Him. Jesus had already performed enough miracles to prove who He was. The only sign He gave them was the prediction of His resurrection, or what He called the “sign of Jonah,” who spent three days “dead” in the fish (*Matt. 16:4; 12:40*).

On the way across the Sea of Galilee, Jesus warned His disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees. As a little bit of leaven can make bread rise, so the negative influence of the Pharisees was poisoning the people against Jesus. But the disciples weren’t listening. Evidently, they had forgotten to bring any of the leftover bread from the feeding of the 4000, and they were hungry.

Jesus couldn’t believe their little faith. Here He was talking about grave spiritual matters, and they were concerned about their stomach pains. Besides, He had just miraculously fed 4000 people! Could He not feed His disciples? It took a while, but they finally began to understand (v.12). The God of the universe was in the boat with them. They didn’t need to worry about such things. He would take care of them. There were much bigger issues at stake.

When they got to the other side of the lake, Jesus healed a blind man in stages, which seems rather odd to us. Jesus had healed all kinds of people just by speaking. Why did He heal this blind man a little bit at a time? We must look at the context of the surrounding passages. A few verses earlier, Jesus asked, “Having eyes, do you not see?” (*Mk. 8:18*). Jesus was the master Teacher. He knew that His disciples were watching, and this was an object lesson. The blind man represented them, and He was helping them learn to see more clearly. He was gradually removing their blindness,

opening their eyes to the fact that He was truly the Son of God on an important mission.

Their next “eye exam” came later when Jesus took His disciples to Caesarea Philippi. He asked, “Who do people say that I am?” Their answers exposed the people’s blindness to Jesus’ real identity. Then, He asked, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the Living God.”

As the representative of the Disciples, Peter’s answer revealed that their spiritual eyes were starting to see. That statement was a turning point in their learning experience. Now Jesus began the next level of lessons, which included the first mention of the Church and His inevitable suffering and death (*Matt.16:18, 21*).

Daily Reflection

As you look back over your spiritual journey as a follower of Christ, you should be able to recognize growth spurts and a gradual opening of your spiritual eyes. You should see Christ, His Gospel, the Church, and the expectations for your life more clearly now than when you were first saved. Is that the case?

Let’s do an “eye exam.” Identify at least three people or events or experiences in your life that have helped to open your eyes to see the bigger picture of your relationship with Christ.

In truth, your spiritual eyesight should never stop improving, and you should be looking for ways to help others to see more clearly.