

NT LESSON #12

“I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE”

Reading: John 5,6; Mark 6:30-44; Matthew 14:22,23

by Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: The Savior has consistently, throughout recorded scriptural history, tried to link himself to the commonalities of our lives so that we will be reminded of him in the daily affairs of living. Thus he calls himself the living water (John 4:10,11); the good shepherd (John 10:11); the stone or rock of Israel (D&C 50:44); the Light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5); the Lamb of God (John 1:29) the Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19,20); and, of course, the Bread of Life and the Bread of Heaven (John 6:35, 51). How often in your life do you see water, rocks or stones, light, and bread? How would your life be blessed if these images reminded you of the ministry and mission of the Redeemer?

The image of bread is particularly appropriate. The need for physical nourishment is an inescapable part of our lives. We cannot go long before our bellies remind us that we need sustenance. And if we allow the teachings of the Savior to touch us and teach us, we may develop that same profound longing for spiritual nourishment. When that happens, we must remember that Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.”

Perhaps one other note about this concept is worth mentioning here. Even if a man was not hungry, and if he partook of (useful) food that he did not particularly like, he would be nourished by it. Our bodies are organized by a divine intelligence and know what to do with vitamins and minerals. Would this not be true also of our spirits? If we immerse ourselves in the words of the scriptures and the prophets, even though we may not have a great joy in the experience, our spirits are no doubt well-organized and prepared to derive therefrom elements that will nourish our souls.

I. JESUS HEALS A MAN ON THE SABBATH AND DECLARES HIMSELF THE SON OF GOD

Jesus has come to Jerusalem for a feast—probably the feast of Passover (See John 6:4)—which all Jewish males were required to attend in Jerusalem. From the multitude scattered on the porches of Bethesda, Jesus selected one man and offered a healing. Bruce R. McConkie wrote of this miracle,

. . . on this particular Passover Sabbath, we see Jesus near the sheep market, at the side of the pool Bethesda, which means "House of Mercy." By this pool—evidently a mineral spring of some sort whose waters bubbled intermittently as escaping gases broke the surface—there stands a large structure with five porches. "In these lay a great many impotent folk," some blind, others halt, paralytic, or withered, all "waiting for the moving of the water." No doubt these waters had—as hot mineral springs do in our day—some curative and healing powers which gave rise to a legend, among the superstitious and spiritually illiterate Jews, that "an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water," and that "whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had."

On a pallet on one of the porches lies an impotent man, lame with paralysis, who has so suffered for thirty-eight years, almost as long as the whole history of Israel from the going through of the Red Sea to the crossing of Jordan. Jesus sees the paralytic sufferer, knows how long he has been thus, and picks him out from all the rest—for reasons best known to himself, but unquestionably involving the man's faith and spiritual stature—as the object of his divine healing power. With a heart full of compassion, our Galilean Friend asks: "Wilt thou be made whole?"

Not knowing the source of the inquiry; unaware that it was the Son of God who spoke; not realizing that the questioning voice came from Him who had cleansed lepers, cast out devils, and healed all manner of diseases, the impotent man answered: "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me."

Without more ado, Jesus says: "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk." "It was spoken in an accent that none could disobey. The manner of the Speaker, His voice, His mandate, thrilled like an electric spark through the withered limbs and the shattered constitution, enfeebled by a lifetime of suffering and sin. After thirty-eight years of prostration, the man instantly rose, lifted up his pallet, and began to walk. In glad

amazement he looked round to see and to thank his unknown benefactor; but the crowd was large, and Jesus, anxious to escape the unspiritual excitement which would fain have regarded him as a thaumaturge alone, had quietly slipped away from observation." (Farrar, p. 286.)

A miracle is thus wrought, such a one as is seldom seen. After thirty-eight years of paralytic impotence, a man known to have spent long hours on a pallet in the porches by the pool of Bethesda—desiring and hoping and praying to be healed—in an instant arises; full strength comes into his whole body; he walks—yea, more: he carries his bed. He is seen by the multitude, many of whom no doubt rejoice with him at the new vigor and vitality exuding from every pore of his once pain-ridden flesh. (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, Vol.2, p.66 - p.67)

The writers of the gospel have given us several illustrations of the healing of those whose afflictions have spanned years, decades, and a lifetime. The woman with the issue of blood had been afflicted for 12 years (Mark 5:25). Another woman had been bowed by an infirmity for eighteen years (Luke 13:11). This sufferer at the pool of Bethesda had been infirm (with some sort of crippling ailment that kept him on a bed or mat) for thirty-eight years. In John 9, Jesus healed a man who was born blind (John 9:6,7).

Do not miss this lesson. Some have been burdened by sins, by spiritual diseases, for so great a time that they begin to lose hope of escape as did the man by the pool. Then, suddenly, without solicitation, the Savior came and he was made clean and whole. Surely the Savior will do the same for all those who build faith and wait patiently for His help and assistance. This must be part of the lesson the Savior taught when he later found the man who was healed. He said to him, "Thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." *There is something worse than being infirm for 38 years, and it has something to do with sin.*

The reaction of the Jewish leaders to this miracle is troubling, although not surprising. When the learned who had performed this Sabbath miracle, they sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath day. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto,

and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God (John 5: 16-18)

In addition to what his enemies had perceived as the iniquity of healing on the Sabbath, Jesus also declared that he was simply doing the word of God, who was his Father. For this they “sought the more to kill him.”

Note Jesus’ response to them in John 5:19-30:

19 Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

20 For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.

21 For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth [them]; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.

22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:

23 That all [men] should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.

26 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;

27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.

28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,

29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

30 I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

“Don’t be too concerned about a healing on the Sabbath,” the Savior tells them. “Greater works than these are coming, that ye may marvel.” (John 5:20) What greater works does the Savior mention in verses 21,22,24, 25, and 29?

Jesus cites four witnesses as proof of his Divinity? (John 5:33; John 5:36; John 5:37; John 5:39).

John the Baptist: “Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth.” (John 5:33).

His Works: “But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.” (John 5:36).

The Father: And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. (John 5:37).

The Scriptures: Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. (John 5:39).

In this matter of witnesses, Jesus mentions in another location the witness of his Father, but in a way that bears eloquent testimony to true doctrine that is often misunderstood by the Christian world:

It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me (John 8:17,18).

The nature of this affirmation shows plainly that Christ knew and taught two great truths about his Father. *First*, he was separate from his son. No court would accept the testimony of one being as though it had come from separate beings, And Jesus would not use his Father’s witness of him as a second witness if he and the Father were the same person. *Second*, Jesus regarded his Father as a man. The law

required the testimony of two men, and Jesus provided testimonies from two men—his Father and himself.

Why does he tell the Jews these things? “but these things I say, that ye might be saved.” (John 5; 34) Even to those who desire to kill him he offers a hope of salvation.

The true problem that these Jewish leaders face is not that the Savior “broke the Sabbath.” Jesus mentions two things that are wrong with them. What are they

And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not (John 5:38).

But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you (John 5:42).

This lack of hunger for the word of God (for the Bread of life) and this lack of the Love of God will lead the Jewish leaders to ruin and remorse.

II. JESUS MIRACULOUSLY FEEDS MORE THAN 5,000 PEOPLE.

As was nearly always the case during this part of the Savior’s ministry, great multitudes followed him. What reason does John 6:2 give for their desire to be with the Savior?

And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.

In Mark 6:31 we are told that

there were many coming and going, and they [Jesus and his disciples] had no leisure so much as to eat.

But those following the Savior often missed meals as well. Jesus and his disciples “went up into a mountain” perhaps traveling by ship to get near their destination (see Mark 6:32), but the multitude followed and found them, and Jesus was moved with compassion toward them (Matthew 14:4; Mark 6:33,34). Jesus spoke to Phillip, perhaps because he was from nearby Bethesda and knew the surrounding

area well, “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” (John 6:5)

The question must have been a test for Phillip. Jesus knew it was an impossibility to buy enough food for 5000 men (John 6:10), along with their women and children (see Matthew 14:21). Phillip responded that eight months wages would not be enough to give each one of them a taste of bread. (Footnote ‘a’ for Mark 6:37 tells us that a “penny” is a Greek denarii, or a workman’s daily wage. Thus, 200 pennyworth is 200 days wages, or about 8 months.) But Jesus had no intention of buying food. He knew that if those present gave all they had, that money would not purchase sufficient food to feed this multitude. An inquiry revealed that a lad (John 6:9) had five barley loaves (this is cheap bread, the food of the poor) and two small fishes. That would be enough. Anytime we give all we can to the Savior and his work, it is enough.

I am intrigued by this boy. Why is it that only he out of thousands had food to offer to the common good? Why had all the others eaten everything when he had not? I would love to know more. Is there a lesson for us in his preparation?

There does seem to be a lesson in the miracle of the loaves. How often in your reading of the scriptures have you come across a chapter of holy writ, scanned it, and concluded that there was not enough there to sustain you or to satisfy your spiritual hunger. But if you will bring those small loaves of spiritual bread before the Lord; if you will carefully break them apart and ask him to bless them (Mark 6:41), then you may eat “as much as [you] would” (John 6:11), and find more left over when you finish that you thought was there when you began.

When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered [them] together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten (John 6:12,13).

This is a miracle of which all true students of the scriptures can bear witness. How often has a phrase, a question, or an insight often overlooked suddenly enlightened your understanding, satisfied your hunger for a day, and left you with baskets of spiritual provisions for days to come? Jeffrey R. Holland taught the principle by

which this can happen more frequently in our study. He was speaking to seminary and institute teachers about assisting students in their study of the scriptures:

Invite them to read more slowly and more carefully and with more questions in mind. Help them to ponder, to examine every word, every scriptural gem. Teach them to hold it up to the light and turn it, look and see what's reflected there. For some student, on a given day with a given need, such an examination may unearth a treasure hidden in a field, or a pearl of great beyond price. (Jeffrey R. Holland: CES Video Conference, 20 June 1982, videocassette)

The reality of these people following Jesus, even in their hunger, has caused me serious reflection. On another occasion, Jesus fed four thousand in the same manner as he fed the five thousand. But these people had been with him for a longer period of time

Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way (Matt. 15:32).

As I read this I wonder how long I would be willing to go without food to be close to the Savior. What kinds of inconveniences am I willing to tolerate if I can be near to him?

The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle other than the resurrection that is recorded in all of the Gospels. But in Mark a wonderful event occurs just after this miracle that we ought to note in these pages. We may not have another opportunity, and the lesson relates directly to the bread of life, and the goodness of the Savior in sustaining us in our times of need. This occurs immediately following the first miracle of the loaves, in Mark 6:45-48.

45 And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people. And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land. And he saw them toiling in

rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea . . .

The night was divided into four watches, each lasting three hours. The first was from about 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm, the second from 9:00 pm to 12:00, and so forth. This little story teaches precious a lesson about mortality and the love of the Savior. The disciples were in the midst of the sea and were forced to row because of a contrary wind. The labor was difficult, for they were toiling. Christ saw them when the evening was come. He knew of their dilemma. He understood that they had a need of his assistance. But when did he come? During the FOURTH WATCH. They were no doubt delighted to have him come, but when did they want him to come? Not during the last watch, of course, but during the first.

When we toil against a contrary wind, when our sails don't hold air and all the forces of earth are arrayed against us and we are driven by the storms of life to cry out in supplication for his help, we always want him to come at once. He sees us. We know he sees us, and of course he hears us. But he rarely comes in the first watch, or even the second.

I remember sitting in the Mission Home in São Paulo, Brazil, calling missionaries with notice of their transfers. It was a duty I fulfilled for several months. Often, I had the opportunity to tell elders that they were being sent to branches where the work was less lively than a tortoise in a coma. The font had been empty so long there were abandoned spider webs in the corners. But all the branches needed the assistance of missionaries, and we had to send someone. On such occasions I would sometimes preface my announcement of a transfer to a less than desirable place by saying, "Elder [or Sister], I'm gonna help you grow! You've been transferred to Whereveritis!"

I think this is perhaps one of the reasons why the Savior waits for the Fourth Watch. "My child," he might be saying, "I'm going to help you grow!"

The scriptures contain a multitude of examples of this principle at work. Take a look in Genesis 16. When Hagar first fled from what the scriptures call Sarai's hardness, she was intercepted near a fountain of water by an angel who told her to go home (Genesis 16:9). He told her she was expecting and that her child was to be named "Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction" (Genesis 16:11). The

name Ishmael means “God hears.” Hagar named the well where this took place Beer-lahai-roi, which means “The well of him who liveth and seeth me.” (See footnote 14*b* in Genesis 16)

In the JST we read,

And she called the name of the angel of the Lord. And he spake unto her, saying, Knowest thou that God seest thee? And she said, I know that God seest me, for I have also here looked after him (Genesis 17:14-16, JST).

Hagar knew that God heard her and saw her. Her testimony would have been like that in Psalm 34:15: “The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.”

But in Genesis 21, when Abraham sent Hagar away in accordance with the Lord’s instructions (see Genesis 21:12-14), he gave her only bread and a bottle of water.

And it came to pass that the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs, and she went and sat her down over against the child, a good way off, as it were a bowshot; for she said, Let me not see the death of the child (JST Genesis 21:13).

The Lord had promised that the child of Hagar would become a nation (Genesis 21:13), Hagar, who had known that God sees and hears, and who had certainly pled with him for help, came to a time when she despaired. The water was gone; the child would die. She departed from her son some distance “and lift up her voice, and wept.” (Genesis 21:16).

“And God heard . . . (Genesis 21:17) and opened her eyes and showed her a well of water” (Genesis 21:19). He heard her during the entire ordeal, but he rescued her when the bottle was empty. He came in the Fourth Watch.

In Genesis 22, Abraham took his son Isaac to Mount Moriah to offer him as a burnt offering. He traveled three days from his home to the specified place for the offering, no doubt praying all the way. But when did the angel come? (Genesis 22:10,11) In the Fourth Watch.

In 1 Kings 17, Elijah visited a widow in Zarephath.

So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die (1 Kings 17:10-12).

The Lord sent Elijah when the oil was all but gone and the cruise all but empty, in the Fourth Watch.

The Lord came to Sarai to give the promised son in her 90th year (Genesis 17:17). He came to the three Hebrew youths after they were in the furnace (Daniel 3:24). He came to Abraham when he was on the altar and the knife was raised (Abraham 1:15,16). Joseph Smith reported that the Father and the son appeared

at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction--not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being--just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me (JS-H 1:16, emphasis added).

Nephi was led to Laban during the third trip into the city (1 Nephi 4:5-7). The night without darkness came to the Nephites after innumerable sunsets had been followed by a darkening sky. (3 Nephi 1) Peter's net was filled after an entire night of fruitless fishing (Luke 5:4-7). There are many other examples. All of them bear witness to the principle of the Fourth Watch.

Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost

assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed.
(D&C 123:17)

III. JESUS WALKS ON THE SEA, INVITES PETER TO COME TO HIM, AND CALMS THE WINDS.

Among the many obvious lessons of this remarkable event is the important message that the Savior is able and willing to set aside natural law in the blessing of his children. When he came walking on the sea toward the vessel in which his disciples toiled against a contrary wind, they were terrified. People don't walk on water. Anyone who has ever been in the water knows that. When they "saw him, walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear" (Matthew 14:26).

But Jesus did walk on the water. Of course there is nothing particularly remarkable about one more miracle from the Son of God. He performed many of them. But the purpose of this miracle and the timing and the aftermath of this miracle must teach us something about our relationship with our Savior.

He knew that his disciples needed him. They were in the midst of the Sea of Galilee. He could have come in other ways, perhaps by angelic conveyance or a quick journey through the air. But he came walking on the water. I wonder how many times in the course of their various ministries, the Twelve remembered this event. When they were confronted by impossible obstacles, when no human hand could accomplish what needed to be accomplished, when no mortal experience could give an outline for a useful course of action, then they might have remembered Jesus walking on the water.

Many of the blessings that come to us from the Savior come in unremarkable ways. He uses the tools and events of mortality to bless us and to teach us, and he does it so well that many times we are unaware that he has had a hand in our success or safety at all. But then those other, less common things occur.

My wife and I had a movie of our wedding day, filmed and spliced and edited by a professional photographer and given to us for a gift. We treasured it. We watched it. We loved it. We lost it. We were in North Carolina in the Army and it disappeared. My wife was certain that it had been mistakenly placed into the

garbage box rather than the storage box when she unpacked.

But many years later, after a simple prayer and a hopeless longing, when I wanted it for a lesson, I found it in the top of a box of my father's old photographic supplies that had not been opened since my father's death, long before I was married. Some are skeptical, thinking that I made a mistake in North Carolina and that the movie was never there. But I was there. I know. As I know that Jesus walked on the water. As Gabriel said to Mary, ". . . with God nothing shall be impossible." (Luke 1:37)

Then Jesus, the one who could suspend natural law, invited us, by inviting Peter, to have the same power.

And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus (Matthew 14:28,29).

He began to sink. The wind had disturbed the water in a manner that overcame his faith, and he began to sink.

But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth [his] hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? (Matthew 14:30,31)

Every time I have heard this event taught, I have been told that the Savior's question, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" was a gentle rebuke to Peter for his failure to believe that he could walk on the water. But I believe that the Savior was in fact saying, "Of course I will save you, how could you doubt that I would?"

Regardless of the meaning behind the query, we ought to remember that Peter was the only one who had the courage to get out of the boat. These miracles are reserved for those who have the faith to reach for them.

IV. JESUS DECLARES THAT HE IS "THE BREAD OF LIFE"

The well-fed multitude preceded Jesus (unknowingly) across the sea to Capernaum. When they found him they asked how he had crossed.

When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus. And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? (John 6:24-25).

Jesus seems not to have answered them. He simply exposed the inconsistencies in their hearts:

Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. (John 6:26)

Why did many of these same people seek the Savior in John 6:2? (“And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.”) Now they have come for the food. Not for the message, not even for the miracles, but for the food. It must have been a terrible disappointment to the Savior to have to contend with this continuing widespread indifference to his teachings. He pled with them: “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you . . .” (John 6:26)

They tried to defend their desire for food by reminding Christ that God had given their fathers bread (manna) in the wilderness. Then he warned them about their misguided longings. “Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.” (John 6:49)

In a poignant attempt to convince them that they should come to him for his message, he said, “. . .my Father hath given you the true bread from heaven.” (John 6:32) “I am the bread of life.” (John 6:35, 48) Finally, he declared

This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the

world. (John 6:50,51)

Whether the message was simply incomprehensible or they were too hungry to care is not clear, but many of his disciples “when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” (John 6:60) And “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. “ (John 6:66)

CONCLUSION

Jesus, watching them walk away, turned to the Twelve, and said, “Will ye also go away?” (John 6:67) And Peter replied,

Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God (John 6:68,69).

There are many places to go to eat food, and many places to go to feed the intellect and the heart and the ego. But when we want to feed our souls, when we want the bread of heaven, when we want the words of life, we must stand with Peter and say with Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”

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