

LESSON 7

*February 7-13

The Sacred *in the* Common



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 6.*

Memory Text: “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life”
(*John 6:63, NIV*).

Key Thought: In Christ all of life, even the common things, can become an act of worship.

Throughout John, chapter 6, the people relate to Jesus on a material level. They are not searching for spiritual food; rather, they want their physical needs satisfied. They want to see more miracles such as the feeding of the 5,000. In spite of that awesome event, when the people looked at Jesus, they saw a common everyday human being like themselves, not Someone who came down from heaven. They were unable to see the sacred shining through the common.

In chapter 6, Jesus tries to direct their eyes away from the common toward spiritual things, the food that endures to eternal life. Life is not found in miracles and in the things of this world. Life is found by accepting the claims Jesus makes about Himself. One of the secrets of the devotional life is to learn how to see the presence and the power of Jesus working in the common things of everyday life, to sense that He is there with us, even though we cannot see, hear, or touch Him.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 14.*

The Miracle of the Fish and Loaves

(John 6:1-13).

Read John 6:1-13, the feeding of the 5,000. What lessons can you see in this account? What does this story say to you personally? What's in it that speaks to your needs? What kind of hope does it offer? What does it tell you about God?

Notice, too, the timing of this account: It took place around the time of Passover (*John 6:4*), when the Lord worked a mighty deliverance for His people. Though the feeding of the 5,000 certainly was not as dramatic as the Exodus from Egypt, it was still a powerful manifestation of God's power in behalf of His people, even in their spiritual ignorance. John makes it clear that many of those who had followed Christ did so only because of the miracles they already had seen (*vs. 2*) and not because of any deep, spiritual conviction that this Man was the Messiah or that He could bring them spiritual freedom.

Nevertheless, the Lord still worked in their behalf. In other words, though He knew their hearts were still not right, He ministered to them anyway. How grateful we can be that our God is like that. What does that tell us about how we should act toward those who aren't where they should be spiritually?

Though Christ multiplies the fish and the loaves (the miracle), He does not miraculously deliver them to the crowd. How was the food distributed and gathered? What lesson is in there for us? *John 6:10-12.*

Though Jesus ministers here to their physical needs, is that an end in itself or a means to an end? After all, a few hours later, all those people would be hungry again. What is Jesus doing with that miracle? In what ways are we called to do the same thing?

MONDAY February 9

Miracle at Sea *(John 6:16-21)*.

Read the story in **John 6:16-21** of Jesus walking on the water. Compare it to the miracle of the fish and the loaves. What are the differences?

It is interesting that Christ would perform such a powerful miracle, especially after what just happened on the mountain with the multitude, who did not respond in a positive manner to the miracle He had performed there. (Read John 6:14, 15: They wanted to make Him a king, by force; Christ did not come to allow Himself to be set up as King. Their reaction caused Him to leave the area.)

What reason, then, would Jesus have for doing this miracle? Hint: Who are the ones who witness it?

In the story of the disciples on the sea (*John 6:16-21*), Jesus accomplishes a deed similar to those done by the God of the Exodus (*see Exod. 14:20-22*). To people schooled in the Old Testament, therefore, Jesus' ability to walk on water and to control wind and wave was a powerful affirmation of His divinity, something the disciples needed after their disappointment with Christ's refusal to be made king.

In *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White writes that the disciples are eager for Christ to be crowned the Davidic King, and when He forbids it, they become upset. "The disciples had long hoped for a popular movement to place Jesus on the throne; they could not endure the thought that all this enthusiasm should come to nothing. . . .

"Unbelief was taking possession of their minds and hearts. Love of honor had blinded them. They knew that Jesus was hated by the Pharisees, and they were eager to see Him exalted as they thought He should be."—Pages 379, 380.

By performing the miracle of walking on the water, Jesus strengthens the faith of His disciples. But do we always need miracles to have our faith strengthened? What are some things that have happened in your life that have helped your faith grow yet would not necessarily be called "miracles"?

TUESDAY February 10

Bread From Heaven (*John 6:22-35*).

After that stormy night (John 6:16-21), the crowd crosses the lake and finds Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum, where all the preaching and the dialogue of the rest of the chapter take place.

How do the ancient Israelites survive in the desert, and what does that have to do with the feeding of the 5,000 earlier in the chapter? *Exod. 16:33-35, John 6:27-31.*

A consistent theme in the background of John 6 is the Exodus from Egypt. The feeding of the 5,000 recalls the original Passover when the Israelites escaped from the immediate grasp of the Egyptians. Then the storm episode (*vss. 16-21*) recalled the perils the Israelites faced at the Red Sea. Now comes a reference to God's guiding of their experience in the desert of Sinai. As with the Israelites in the desert, the hearers of Jesus react to miracles they can see or touch, but their faith remains inadequate. Jesus directs their attention away from the manna the Israelites received in the desert to the spiritual bread He has come to offer them.

Read prayerfully and carefully John 6:32-35. What point is Jesus making here? What is He telling us about Himself? What do these words mean to us? Why does He use the bread analogy?

The clear implication of the sermon is that seeing Jesus and believing in Him is what produces real life in the spiritual sense now and in the fullest sense " 'at the last day' " (*vs. 40; 5:21*). Just as food constantly must be eaten in order to sustain physical life, so it is necessary to invite Jesus into our daily experience in order to sustain spiritual life. "Believing" in the Gospel of John (*see also John 1:12, 6:47*) always has a continuous sense. It must be an ongoing and daily experience.

Read in verse 35 of John 6 where Jesus says that those who come to Him and who believe in Him will never hunger nor thirst. How have these promises been manifested in your life? If they have not, then you need to ask yourself, How can I come to Jesus and believe in Him?

WEDNESDAY *February 11*

Talking to Deaf Ears (*John 6:36-50*).

Why do many people in the following text have a hard time accepting Jesus' claims? *John 6:41, 42*. **How** do the words of the people here reflect the words of Nicodemus in *John 3:4*?

How do many of Jesus' own disciples react to His teachings in this chapter? *John 6:60, 66*. **Why** would they react this way?

Throughout this chapter the crowds relate to Jesus on a material and physical level. They want to see more miracles such as the feeding of the 5,000. When Jesus refuses to accommodate them, they all too quickly conclude that Jesus is a common everyday human being like themselves, not Someone who came down from heaven. The common keeps them from seeing the sacred. The very physical presence of Jesus becomes a stumbling block to them.

Like the second generation of Christians, we think that we would be better off knowing Jesus in the flesh instead of struggling to have a relationship with Someone we can't see, hear, or touch. But the physical presence of Jesus caused the first generation not to take Him as seriously as they certainly should have.

Who really was Jesus? He was much more than just a good man who grew up in Nazareth with Joseph and Mary. But what kind of man would claim to be the Son of God who came down from heaven? To make such a claim, he would have to be either crazy, a deceiver (in neither case would people designate him a "good man"), or exactly what he claims to be. There is no middle ground; we must either accept Him and all that He stands for or reject Him as insane, or even worse, the perpetrator of the greatest scam of all time. The foolishness of the people in this story is that they insist on seeing Jesus as just a good man. This is not really an option as far as Jesus is concerned.

It is crucial, therefore, that people recognize exactly who Jesus is. He brings from heaven a revelation of God and about God that is of life-and-death importance to the human race. To partake of Jesus as bread, flesh, and blood is a graphic way of expressing that only through an intimate relationship with Jesus—as close as food that has been eaten is to the body—can one gain the eternal life that He promises.

In what ways might we be in danger of doing the same thing as the crowds in John 6; that is, not seeing the sacred in the common? For example, do our attitudes toward the church, its leaders, or our message reflect this same spiritual principle?

The Sacred in the Common *(John 6:51-71).*

Read John 6:51-58. What does Jesus mean by saying we must eat His flesh and drink His blood? Summarize in your own words the essence of what you believe He says to us with these startling words.

Time and again in the Gospel of John symbols are drawn from everyday experiences, symbols such as bread, water, and light. These symbols help us to connect Jesus' words with things in the context of our everyday lives. No matter how ordinary our lives may be, our relationship with Jesus will deepen and grow as we learn to remember Him in the course of everything we do. As the Bread of Life, Jesus brings us a foretaste of eternal life, which makes physical food and drink seem insignificant by comparison.

As the body craves food and drink and sunlight, so the soul craves the presence of Jesus (whether or not one is aware of that), and if Jesus is not allowed to be present, human beings will go to all kinds of ridiculous lengths to fill the gap with something else.

What are some of the things people resort to in order to fill their innate spiritual needs?

When we sit down at a table to eat, we can remember that rain, life, and sunshine, and the food production that they make possible, would all have ceased with sin were it not for the Cross of Jesus. When we lift up a glass to drink, we can remember the Water of Life. When we get dressed in the morning, we can think about the robe of Christ's righteousness. One of the keys to a living relationship with Jesus is finding the sacred in the common, to make all the ordinary events of our lives reminders of the words and actions of Jesus.

Read again the text for today. Time and again Jesus talks about life and living. What, ultimately, has Jesus promised those who eat His flesh and drink His blood, and why is this promise so important to us?

Further Study: Carefully compare the accounts in John 6:16-21 with Matthew 14:22-27 and Mark 6:45-52. Note all the parallels and contrasts between John's account and the other two, including omissions. How does this comparison illuminate the point the Holy Spirit was making with the story? In what ways do Matthew and Mark, moved by the Holy Spirit, use the story?

For additional spiritual insights into this marvelous chapter, see Ellen White's comments in *The Desire of Ages*. John 6:1-21 is covered on pages 364–382, and pages 383–394 are devoted almost exclusively to John 6:22-71.

Discussion Questions:

① **Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "It is only because He became like us that we can become like Him" (*The Cost of Discipleship* [New York: Collier Books, 1963], p. 344). What do you think that means? Do you agree or disagree, and why?**

② **Why was Jesus' teaching in John 6 so hard for the listeners to accept? Could it be because they had preconceptions about what they expected from a divine Deliverer? If so, what does that tell us about the danger, as Christians, of having certain ideas about what God should or should not do? What happens when those expectations are not met?**

Summary: In John, chapter 6, Jesus struggles to communicate His mission in the face of continual misunderstanding. He feeds the 5,000 in order to demonstrate that He is the One who can bring them the bread of divine spiritual life. They, instead, see someone worthy to run the national economy (*vs. 14*). In stilling the storm, Jesus sought to show His disciples that He is as capable as the God of the Exodus to supply their needs and free them from fear. But they seem at the same time too fearful and too self-confident to seek His help.

At Capernaum He uses bread, flesh, and blood as analogies to illustrate the need for the spiritual life He offers. Most of those who hear Him there, however, react with disgust and abandon Him. Taken together, the three events chronicled in this chapter teach us the need to discern the sacred in the common, to learn how to have a living relationship with One who makes Himself real to us in the course of everyday life.

The Little Missionary

by ARNIE ROA

The village of Ulo't Langilan is located deep in the mountains of southern Philippines. The people in these mountains are known as fierce warriors.

Recently two students from Mountain View College answered a call to go to this village to open a school. They expected to encounter primitive conditions among a tribe who knew nothing of God. But when they arrived in their target village, they heard singing. They recognized the tune of a familiar Christian chorus.

That evening one of the children announced, "Let's have worship!" In moments the air was filled with the beautiful sound of children's voices. A young girl led the children in song after song as one by one the parents joined the children. The two missionaries were shocked and delighted.

The singing stopped, and the young song leader led the children in reciting several Bible texts. The two student missionaries watched this miracle of light flood a dark corner of God's vineyard.

A young boy stood and offered a beautiful and heartfelt prayer. "Lord God, thank you for sending our long-awaited teachers. Now we can learn how to read and write, sing and pray."

After worship the student missionaries asked the young girl, "Who taught you these songs and memory verses?"

"I attended the mission school in another village," she said. "When we moved back here to my father's village, I missed the worships and the singing, so I taught the children here the songs and Bible verses I had learned. The chief asked me to teach the children to read and write, but I do not know how to teach. I suggested that the village elders request a teacher from Mountain View College. I told them that if they would build a cottage for the teacher, one would come. We built the cottage, and we prayed every day that you would come. It has taken three years, but at last you are here! You are an answer to our prayers!"

The student missionaries were thrilled to learn that before they ever arrived, God used a young child to bring the light of faith to a village that once had been in darkness.

Dozens of villages in the mountains of southern Philippines remain in darkness. Pray that God will provide so that more young people from Mountain View College can be sent out as missionaries to reach these uttermost parts of God's vineyard.

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