

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1515



The Complete Angler – page 3
Tyre – Proof of Bible Prophecy – page 8
Why is Everything Going Wrong? – page 11

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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

124th Year

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1515



A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to mankind; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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The Complete Angler

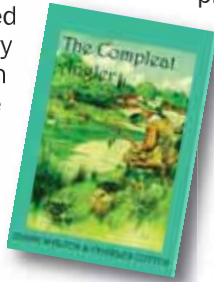
In 1611, the year when the King James Version of the English Bible was being published, Izaak Walton was running an ironmonger's shop in Fleet Street, London and he lived in nearby Chancery Lane. He was born in Stafford, in the English Midlands, and had moved south to become apprenticed to a cloth merchant and it was in drapery that he finally made his fortune. But nobody remembers him because of the fine clothes he sold.

Walton the Writer

Walton is remembered because of his literary works and one of them in particular. During the English Civil War Walton left London and returned to Staffordshire; giving up business, he concentrated on leisure pursuits, fishing in particular. In 1653 he published the first edition of *"The Compleat Angler"*, a guide to the joys of fishing. In all there were 5 editions, the last one including details about fly fishing, and over the years it has been reprinted many times. It is still in print today.

The book is not a fishing manual, for techniques and equipment have changed a lot over the years. It is a manual combined with meditation and here are a few samples:

- ↘ *"I have laid aside business, and gone afishing."*
- ↘ *"Angling may be said to be so like the mathematics that it can never be fully learnt."*



- ↘ *"I might tell you that Almighty God is said to have spoken to a fish, but never to a beast; that he hath made a whale a ship, to carry and set his prophet, Jonah, safe on the appointed shore."*

Fishing for a Living

Izaak Walton was writing about the sport of fishing but for many people it is a livelihood. In times past people who lived on the seashore or the lake-side depended upon good catches to provide for themselves and their families. That was certainly the case in Bible times and Jesus called some of his closest followers to leave their fishing and come with him instead. Peter, Andrew, James and John were working alongside the Sea of Galilee, mending their nets, when the call came and they left everything to follow him.

They had met him before (as recorded in John chapter 1) but now he invited them to join him as disciples and their willing response transformed their lives. We would never have heard of them had they remained fishermen, but their involvement in the work of Jesus has made all the difference.

Fishing for Men

Jesus said to them that if they followed him they would *"become fishers of men"* (Mark 1:17). That meant that instead of casting their nets into the sea in the hope they would be able to catch fish, with Jesus they would be seeking to rescue men and women from cruel and dangerous waters that threaten to destroy them; instead they

were to bring them to safety and salvation. A prophet once described his desperate condition like this:

"The waters flowed over my head; I said, 'I am cut off!' I called on your name, O Lord, from the lowest pit. You have heard my voice: 'Do not hide your ear from my sighing, from my cry for help'" (Lamentations 3:54–56).

In that case, when Jeremiah was in danger of drowning, God sent an Ethiopian to rescue him and bring him to safety. The disciples had a much wider remit. Their work, which would involve some of them writing part of the New Testament, under God's inspiration, would be to save people from sin. But none of their efforts would have counted for anything without the saving work of Jesus. His perfect life, his voluntary death, and his resurrection from the dead were the means whereby people like us can be rescued and redeemed so that we can become members of God's family.

Jesus the Fisherman

When it came to attracting people so they could be caught by the gospel message there was nobody who was better at it than Jesus. Evidently he was a marvellous teacher because people who came to listen to him seemed to lose all track of time – like those he had later to feed with loaves and fishes.

Once his enemies sent a deputation to capture him but they returned empty handed. Asked why, they simply replied: *"No man ever spoke like this man!"* (John 7:46). Time and again we read that the people who heard Jesus

were astonished at his teaching: it was so unlike that of his contemporaries (see, for example, Matthew 7:28,29 – after the teaching of Jesus on the Mount).

Nor was it just the teaching of Jesus. His actions were even more astonishing. He could heal the sick, give sight to the blind, cause the deaf to hear and even the dead were brought back to life. These demonstrations of God's power were designed to attract people by showing them that God cares about His creation and can make things better if we put our trust in Him:

"And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him. Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, 'What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee" (Mark 1:26–28).

This was the complete angler at work – the Lord Jesus attracted people who wanted to be saved and then lifted them to safety by giving them the offer of eternal life. They had to learn from him; understand what he taught them about the purpose of God; trust in his redeeming work and learn to live with him. It was never the case that Jesus had *"laid aside business and gone afishing"*. Fishing was his business so that he could save and rescue people in distress and he is still working to add to that catch and to complete his Father's work of salvation.

Editor



The Sign of the Prophet Jonah

*Volunteers are always preferred to conscripts – people who have to be forced to do something. But Jonah was no volunteer. Asked to go east, he ran away to the west, and had to be brought back in a way that was very traumatic for him. Eventually he did what was asked of him and ended up saving a lot of lives. But even then, as **David Simpson** explains, he wasn't happy about that either!*

Jonah the Prophet

Jonah was the son of Amittai and lived in a hilly region in the north of the land of Israel, about 15 miles west of the Sea of Galilee. He lived about 800 B.C., but we do not know much about his background except that his first mission as a prophet was to take God's Word to Jeroboam II, King of Israel (see 2 Kings 14:25). He was happy enough to be a prophet with good news for his own people.

This was a time when Assyria was a powerful state out to the north east of Israel, busy establishing itself as an Empire. One hundred years later it was the Assyrians who ended the northern kingdom of Israel, taking all the people into captivity. But at the time Jonah prophesied he announced Israel's expansion and enlargement, which duly happened.

A Different Story

Jonah was both unhappy and troubled when God asked him to go and warn Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, and to urge them to repent of their sins. Nineveh was 500 miles away from Israel; the nation was much stronger and more self-important than Israel. You could understand it if Jonah thought they would not even listen to him. Did they know anything about Israel, or anything at all about the God of Israel? He doubted it.



The more Jonah thought about this, the more impossible it seemed. In the end his fears overcame him, and he decided to run. Where could he go to get away from God, from Assyria, and from Nineveh? In a panic he left his home, crossed the mountains, and arrived in the sea port of Joppa, almost 50 miles to the southwest. He found a ship sailing to the West, paid the fare, and settled down to escape from God. Two hundred years earlier David had written this:

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me” (Psalm 139:7–10).

Jonah knew the Psalms. Later he was to quote many of them from

memory. So surely his conscience troubled him – but still he persisted. I must get away from God! I must get away! There’s a huge lesson for us, here. You cannot run away from God. God is present everywhere.

The Big Fish

God intended Jonah to go and preach in Nineveh, and so prevented him going too far in the opposite direction. A huge storm rose up in the sea, and everyone on board prayed to their gods to save them from disaster. Everyone, that is, apart from Jonah, who was fast asleep down below deck. The captain was so alarmed at the storm that he went and woke Jonah up, to get him to pray as well. At last Jonah confessed that he was Jewish, and was running away from the Lord God of Israel.

The sailors worked as hard as they could to save the ship, but in the end they took Jonah at his word and threw him overboard. Immediately the storm abated. It’s then that another wonderful miracle happened. Jonah was swallowed by a huge fish, which three days later swam back to shore and vomited Jonah out onto dry land.

This is one of the major incidents Jesus quoted when he was teaching people about God.

“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40).

This was such an important Old Testament story that Jesus quoted it again

four chapters later, in Matthew 16:4. The point is this – just as Jonah was “buried” for three days and nights, so Jesus would be buried. Despite the most unlikely event that a man could come out of the fish and live, Jonah did. And so did Jesus rise from the grave. Jonah was a “type” of Jesus.

Credible?

In case you doubt the story, it wasn’t an ordinary fish! We are told, “Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah” (Jonah 1:17). It was a very special miracle. But you can be sure that the gastric juices in the fish’s stomach would do horrible things to Jonah’s skin, and probably bleach him white. That would have made him look quite extraordinary.

The second chapter of the book of Jonah gives a fascinating insight into the mind of a God-fearing Jewish man. While he was inside the fish, Jonah prayed to God. And, from memory, he quoted from over 15 different Psalms. In better days he had memorised this wonderful book of hymns and spiritual songs, and was able to put many phrases together to plead with God to bring him out alive.

How useful these passages of Scripture can be!

Of course when Jesus was dead and buried he could not pray to God. When we die our brain ceases to function, and our thoughts are stilled. When King Hezekiah was told that he would recover from his life-threatening illness he wrote these words:



“For Sheol cannot thank you, death cannot praise you; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your truth. The living, the living man, he shall praise you, as I do this day; the father shall make known your truth to the children” (Isaiah 38:18–19).

Here’s another lesson for us! We must make the most of every living moment we have, before death robs us of our consciousness. But, like Jesus, if we read the Bible and try to put ourselves right with God by being baptized, then even if we die we shall be raised again when Jesus comes back (see 1 Corinthians 15:51-58).

Second Chance

Expelled by the whale, Jonah found himself on dry land and heard God’s voice again, telling him to go to Nineveh and tell them to repent from their evil ways. This time he went. He arrived in the city and started his preaching.

His message reached the king of Nineveh who took Jonah very seriously, and ordered everyone, “Let every one of you turn from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands.” And it worked! They repented, and started

Remarkably, the Assyrians repented because of Jonah’s message from God



to lead better lives. So God saved them from the punishment that He had threatened them with. Jonah’s preaching had worked!

The Plant

Jonah went out of the city and sat under a booth to see what would happen to Nineveh. While he was watching and waiting a very special plant grew up quickly, and provided Jonah with some very welcome shade. Then, a sad thing happened. A worm appeared which attacked the plant, and it withered and died. This really upset Jonah, and he even prayed that he might die.

Jonah – get your priorities right, man! You were sorrier about your day-old plant than you were about the whole of the city of Nineveh! And this was indeed the lesson God intended to draw from the whole incident. God had made, or prepared: the great storm, the special fish, the plant, and the worm. He had also kept Jonah alive inside the fish.

That’s five miracles in all! But all Jonah was really concerned about was that his plant had withered, and that he was now facing the hot Middle East sun.

The Lesson

The evil city of Nineveh *did* repent, and listened to the God of Heaven. The lesson is obvious. God can save both Jews and Gentiles. Surely this wonderful story teaches us that everything is possible with God. If we turn to Him, He will also save us.

David Simpson

Tyre – Proof of Bible Prophecy

In ancient times, Phoenician traders navigated the Mediterranean Sea with the products of their advanced civilisation – fine woods, dyed cloth, glass and precious metals.



prophets, Ezekiel. God caused Ezekiel to utter dire predictions against the various neighbours of Israel – Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Egypt – and indeed against Israel itself. The judgements

on Tyre occupy chapters 26 to 28.

God reveals to Ezekiel how the mighty king of Babylon (who was at the time threatening the whole region) would launch an attack on Tyre:

“I will bring against Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon ... he will heap up a siege mound against you ... direct his battering rams against your walls, and ... break down your towers” (26:7-9).

And that is precisely what happened! Not long after the prophet had spoken, Nebuchadnezzar’s army invaded Tyre, and – after a siege lasting apparently 13 years – the proud and beautiful city was turned into rubble, leaving an expanse of bare rock, as the prophet had said.

And if that was all, it would be a remarkable fulfilment of Bible prophecy; but there was more. God had said He would *“cause many nations to come up against you, as the sea causes its waves to come up ... they will plunder your riches and pillage your merchandise” (26:3,12)*. More than two centuries pass, the Babylonian Empire gives way first to the Medes and Persians, and then to the Greeks, and another conqueror sets his sights on Tyre.

At the hub of their trading network was the prosperous port of Tyre, from where merchant ships sailed the length of the Mediterranean, and even as far as Britain. Today Tyre is known by the name Sur, a town in Lebanon, 50 miles south of Beirut.

We come across Tyre in several books of the Old Testament. About 1000 BC, Hiram the king of Tyre supplied materials for the building of Solomon’s Temple. Later on we read of the notorious Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab of Israel: she was the daughter of a king of Tyre.

Around 580 BC, however, Tyre came under attack from Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon who flattened the old city and caused the inhabitants to take refuge on an offshore island. Later, another invader, the Greek empire-builder Alexander the Great, undertook a spectacular siege of the island, bringing to a conclusive end the golden age of Tyre.

Detailed Predictions

The amazing thing about the sieges of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander is that they were foretold in considerable detail by one of the Bible

Alexander the Great

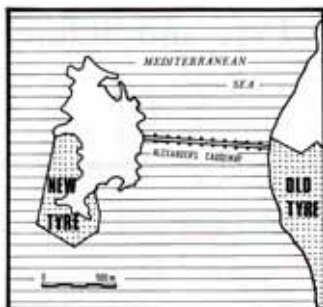
It was the year 332 BC, when the forces of Alexander the Great fulfilled verses 12 to 14 to the letter:

“They will break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses; they will lay your stones, your timber, and your soil in the midst of the water ... I will make you like the top of a rock; you shall be a place for spreading nets, and you shall never be rebuilt, for I the LORD have spoken”.

The mainland city had been left desolate, and the remaining Tyrians had moved to the offshore island. Alexander therefore had a problem: how was he to attack an island city surrounded by high walls? Historians record that he scraped the rubble of the old city into the sea (just as Israel’s prophet had foretold) and built a causeway nearly half a mile long.

As he drew closer to the island, he used enormous stone-throwers and mobile siege towers, 160 ft high, from which his bowmen could shoot over the walls. Finally, in spite of casualties – and sheltering all the time from the projectiles launched by the men of Tyre – he breached the walls with battering rams.

It took only 7 months for the allegedly impregnable island city of Tyre to surrender; thousands were killed and many who survived were sold into slavery. In Ezekiel chapters 27-28 we have a moving lament for Tyre, in which God says: ‘You were clever and prosperous – but you have been



punished for your pride and corruption.’

More Invasions

Sceptics have sometimes raised the objection that Ezekiel’s statement, “you shall never be rebuilt” (26:14), was not fulfilled – in other words, the city

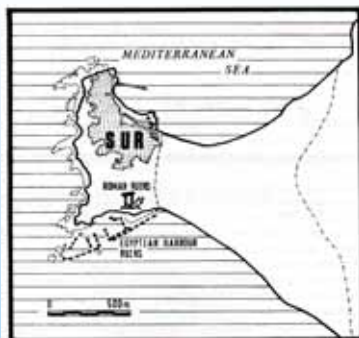
continued. After Nebuchadnezzar’s victory, the city was rebuilt on the island; and even though Alexander’s destruction of Tyre was complete, the place was later repopulated on a smaller scale.

Having said that, however, over the centuries other conquerors came and destroyed Tyre: the Syrians in 315 BC; the Muslim Caliphate in AD 638; Crusaders in AD 1124; and finally the Saracens –who left the ruins we can still see today. Incidentally, Alexander’s causeway was never washed away: it simply silted up and what was once the island of Tyre is now a peninsula joined to the mainland.

Ezekiel’s prophecy was well and truly tested. His words were literally fulfilled and we are left to marvel at the amazing power of God’s word. And this is only one of countless prophecies in the Bible which have come to pass exactly as the Scriptures said: events have been foretold, and later generations have witnessed the predicted outcome.

A Warning for Today!

And what about prophecies in the Bible which have not yet been fulfilled? In God’s



good time they will come about as predicted: the later prophecies of Ezekiel; the words of Jesus in his Mount Olivet prophecy (Matthew 24), for example. The fact that a prophecy like Ezekiel 26 has been fulfilled gives us total confidence that prophecies relating to our own time – the last days before Christ comes to set up his kingdom – will be accomplished.

“Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

There is one further thought about Tyre, a warning for any who might think that, however interesting all this may be as a matter of history, it cannot possibly be of any importance to us. In a sense, God’s dire predictions about Tyre apply to every city, every civilisation, that prides itself on success and refuses to acknowledge God.

Many cities and countries in our world are like that, and God has given them a warning. The book of Revelation at the end of our Bible records visions of judgements which will come on the earth – and some of the language actually echoes the judgements on Tyre:

“The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air ... there was a great earthquake ... and the cities of the nations fell ... every island fled away and the mountains were not found” (Revelation 16:17-20).

After this, however, God will set up His kingdom which will never be destroyed. That is the good news on which we can base our faith in God and His purpose.

John Morris

TYRE’S TRADE – AND TRADING PARTNERS

(Ezekiel 27:12-24)

❖ **Tarshish**

Silver, iron, tin and lead

❖ **Javan, Tubal and Meshec**

Slaves and vessels of bronze

❖ **Togarmah**

Horses, steeds and mules

❖ **Dedan**

Ivory tusks and ebony

❖ **Syria**

Emeralds, purple, embroidery, fine linen, corals, rubies

❖ **Judah and Israel**

Wheat, millet, honey, oil and balm

❖ **Damascus**

Wine and white wool

❖ **Dan and Javan**

Wrought iron, cassia and cane

❖ **Dedan**

Saddlecloths

❖ **Arabia and Kedah**

Lambs, rams and goats

❖ **Sheba and Raamah**

Spices, precious stones and gold

❖ **Haran, Canneh, Eden, Sheba, Assyria and Chilmad**

Purple clothes, embroidered garments, chests of multi-coloured apparel, strong twined cords

Why is Everything Going Wrong?

No matter where we live, whatever our society, whether we are wealthy or poor, we are likely to know about the enormous problems that threaten our existence.

It seems that most countries are in a real mess and some appear to be set on self destruction, being unable to resolve the problems they have caused or inherited. Common questions being asked are ‘How can it get any better?’ coupled with, ‘What’s going to happen next?’

Surely it isn’t all doom and gloom, there must be answers to man’s problems: but where are they? Listening to world news makes you feel as if you are in a boat with no anchor, no lifebelts and no oars; the world appears to have no power to control its direction, being tossed to and fro at the mercy of the sea.

There is Hope!

I hate negativity, don’t you? Life is full of it, yet there is a real positive message from God in the Bible with positive answers to the world’s problems. It is one we ought to consider with an open mind. To understand the Bible message of salvation it pays to look at the global situation of the world and man’s behaviour from God’s perspective. Once you know God’s viewpoint – which you

can get even with a basic understanding of the Bible – you are better able to understand what’s going on and why the world is in crisis. And the really good news is that God truly cares about us and the world He created.

To see things as they really are you mustn’t just consider your own country’s problems. Look at the international situation and in particular what is developing in the Middle East and the escalating situation concerning Israel. For the nation of Israel contains the key to the future of the world – surprising as that might be to you. Remember we’re looking at things from God’s point of view as outlined in the Bible, and long ago God chose Israel (the Jews) as a special people. Their destiny was to witness to His mighty power in their history.

Israel in God’s purpose

Israel’s early history is contained in the Old Testament which gives a detailed, and ‘no holds barred’ account of how they came into existence as one of the oldest nations on earth and why they survived. God’s friend Abraham was called to leave home and to trust God who then guided him to settle in the land of Canaan – which is now called Israel.

Abraham was the father of both Jewish and Arab nations but the Jews were challenged to be a holy people who were to



dedicate their lives to the service of God. Sometimes they did but more often they failed and at times that failure was so serious that God banished them from the land, first scattering them locally and then dispersing them worldwide.

In AD70 they were driven out of their land in fulfilment of Bible prophecy. Nearly 1500 years previously their great leader Moses had laid it on the line: they were to choose between obedience to God which would bring them a blessing and disobedience



The Arch of Titus in Rome commemorates the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and has depictions of the captured trophies

which would result in the very opposite. Read Deuteronomy chapter 28 and you will see how carefully the options were presented and the consequences described. There are clear predictions there about what was to happen during the Jewish dispersion, the Second World War and even the Holocaust:

“...The Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known – wood and stone. And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the

Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life...” (Deuteronomy 28:64–66).

Scattered and Regathered

But Moses said encouraging things as well, promising that when the time was right God would regather His scattered people. After many years, when they were all but destroyed, God would hear their prayers for forgiveness and help. He would restore His people back to the land promised to Abraham. They were to become a nation once again and God further promises them that He will never leave them nor forsake them again:

“Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deuteronomy 30:5,6).

In May 1948, in fulfilment of Bible Prophecy, the nation of Israel was restored as a nation after nearly two millennia of dispersion. This was a fulfilment of promises that God made to Abraham another 2000 years before that (see Genesis 12:1-3 and 13:14-17).

Right up to our present day, Jews are returning to the land from all over the world. Israel is a powerful nation as God promised they would be but she is also vulnerable and surrounded by bitter enemies, again as predicted. Everything is working out on the international stage just as the Bible said it



In May 1948 the State of Israel was declared to be an independent nation once again

would. Everything turns on the attitude that nations have towards God and His way of looking at things.

Moral Dimension

God will not look on anything evil and hates all sin. Many centuries ago, He hid Himself from Israel because they had turned their back on the only true God to worship false gods (idols) made of wood and stone. As a result they became a people without direction in their lives and quickly fell into a troubled and evil mess.

There is a parallel there with the way the world is now – godless and evil, and in a real mess. But why hasn't God intervened before now to spare His creation all the grief and upset now being endured?

People sometimes ask "If God is a God of love then why does he allow so much suffering?" but the Bible gives us an answer to that dilemma. Here's God speaking to Moses about Israel's future experiences long after Moses' day:

"Behold, you will rest with your

fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?' And I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they have done, in that they have turned to other gods" (Deuteronomy 31:16–18).

Root Cause

The evil ways of mankind are the root cause to the greatest crisis the world has ever faced. There is no doubt that the world is now in a state of tremendous turmoil and there are not enough pages in this magazine to list all the issues that are affecting planet earth's insurmountable drive towards self-destruction. If only people would realise that God really cares for those who love Him and obey His Holy Laws & Commandments. When God promises that He will care for us, if we will love Him, be assured: God *will* because He always keeps His Word.

Andrew White

Stafford

To be continued

Bible Line



Telephone message
for UK readers
Ring 08457-660668

Loaves and Fishes

More than once Jesus compared preaching the gospel to fishing. Over half of his first followers were fishermen, and for four of them at least this was their livelihood.

His invitation to them was characteristically colourful:

“Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ They immediately left their nets and followed him” (Matthew 4:18–20).

Sea of Galilee

This is one of several names for the largest lake in the land of Israel. It still has some fish but in Bible times it supported as many as 230 fishing boats whose crews supplied dozens of small towns and villages around its shores. The fish was processed and sent all over the country.

From these Galilean towns and from farther afield thousands of men, women and children gathered to listen to Jesus, themselves rather like hungry fish swarm to a source of good food! They were used to dry legal sermons from the rabbis, but the teaching of Jesus was exciting and understandable and it offered real hope, as it still does for us today. The historical account says that:

“His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments ... and he healed

them. Great multitudes followed him – from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan” (Matthew 4:24–25).

Prophecy about Messiah

Jesus did not announce openly that he was the Son of God, the promised Messiah; instead, he got on with doing those things that the Old Testament said Messiah would do when he came. People could then make up their own mind about who he was, just as we have to do. One example was Isaiah 25:6 which said:

“In this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees” (Isaiah 25:6).

The words are full of symbolism, of course, but at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry he had demonstrated his power to provide wine, and it was wine of the very best quality (John 2:1-11). Now the opportunity had come to show that he could provide good food too.

When Jesus was anywhere near, people forgot about eating and listened to him for hours. When he moved on to another village the crowds followed along. Matthew tells us:

“When it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, ‘This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food.’ But Jesus said to them, ‘They do not need to go away. You give

them something to eat.’ And they said to him, ‘We have here only five loaves and two fish.’ He said, ‘Bring them here to me.’ Then he commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And he took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children” (Matthew 14:15–21).



Power from God

Two fish and five loaves were multiplied so they were sufficient to feed about five thousand families. Processes that continue every year in seas, rivers, lakes and fields were done in minutes, in the hands of the Son of God. The supply was so abundant that twelve baskets of leftovers were collected by Christ’s disciples. This miracle is so important that it is recorded in all four of the Gospels, and from each one we can learn different things. The apostle John tells us how Jesus stressed that the power was not his own but that of his Heavenly Father:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do; for whatever he does, the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19).

It was of course a wonderful demon-

stration that the power of God, working through Jesus, can supply all of mankind’s physical needs, and that was intentional. Jesus is the only one who can correct the world’s wrongs, and he will make ‘the desert blossom as the rose’ when he returns to rule as King (Isaiah 35). The crowd realized what he could do and wanted to acclaim him as King there and then (John 6:15).

But physical food is not the be-all and end-all of human existence. Jesus had come to call people to be citizens of a future Kingdom, not to create it instantly. Early in their history God taught this to the Jewish people when Moses said:

“He (God) humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Our Greatest Need

These spiritual truths are not obvious to men and women whose minds are focused on the daily grind. Overnight there had been a big storm but Christ and his apostles had crossed to the other side of the Lake. His audience however managed to track him down and assembled near him again on the next day. Many of them were more interested in another free lunch than in taking seriously what he wanted them to learn about the ways and purpose of God. Jesus knew it, and in a way that

would surprise many people whose ideas about Jesus come only from listening to superficial snippets about him, he deliberately sifted out the truth-seekers from the mere self-seekers.

“Jesus answered them and said, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set his seal on him’” (John 6:26–27).

Important as the miracle was in easing the pangs of immediate hunger, and also providing a foretaste of Kingdom blessings in the future, it was even more important as a parable. Jesus went on to say difficult things, not bending over backwards to make his meaning easy, because he wanted his listeners to seriously think about spiritual things.

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst ... I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.’” The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at



the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (John 6:35–56).

Challenging Words

The result of that teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum was that many of the would-be disciples – those who were just after loaves and fishes – left Jesus. Those who took his words unthinkingly went away shaking their heads. Just a few were willing to understand that by his ‘blood’ and his ‘flesh’, he meant his life, his true self, all that he lived for – and that if we take him into our lives in that way and allow ourselves to be nourished spiritually by him, we shall be granted eternal life when he returns.

Jesus once told a parable about the time when he will return from heaven to judge the world. Again he will sort things out and separate his true followers from those who are really indifferent to his teaching. He uses a fisherman’s experience to describe the process that will then take place:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just” (Matthew 13:47–49).

If we want to be with Jesus through the ages of eternity, we need to follow him now for all the right reasons. It is not just what he can do for us, but also what we can do for him.

John Woodall

A Huge Catch!

A Beach in England, 1994 – 3:00pm



Some years ago as a young boy, I went fishing with my father. We'd normally go to rivers and lakes but this time we went to a beach and fished in the sea. As the day wore on my father moved away down the beach to fetch more bait from the tackle box. As I watched the sea, waiting for him to return, a voice suddenly spoke:

"Have you caught anything?"

I turned and a tall man was standing there on the beach a few feet away.

"No", I answered nervously.

"Are you a good fisherman?"

"I could be", I replied after a moment's thought.

"But how can you be a good fisherman if you haven't caught anything?" the man grinned.

I opened my mouth to retort but the words wouldn't come.

"How long have you been fishing today young man?"

"A few hours", I said, glancing down the beach to where Dad stood baiting his line.

"Do you expect to catch anything?" he asked

I looked back at the man and said, *"Probably not"*

The man paused and looked out to the sea before asking:

"Well, have you tried using different bait?"

A Beach in Israel nearly 2000 years ago

Seven men pushed a boat down a beach into the Sea of Galilee. They started to fish with nets. Over the hours of the night they grew tired and disheartened as time and again they cast their nets but pulled up nothing but sodden weeds. As the sun began to rise, they headed back to the shore empty-handed and low-spirited.

"Children, have you any food?" called a voice.

A man was standing on the beach. The men in the boat were still over 300ft away but shouted back, their voices carrying over the water a single disgruntled word, "No!"

"Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some" called the man on the shore.

The men threw their net into the water and caught so many fish they couldn't pull the net back into the boat. They struggled to get the net to shore and once there they counted a catch of 153 fish.

This incident is found in John chapter 21. Jesus had been crucified and had been raised to life by God after lying dead in a tomb for three days. Since his resurrection Jesus visited his followers and close friends to show them that he was alive again and that everything he had said would happen had indeed happened. One of these visits was at the Sea of Galilee as Jesus promised to his disciples just before his death (Matthew 26:32).

Who was there?

“Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together ” (John 21:2).

These disciples had followed Jesus for three and a half years, and before that had made a living as fishermen. And this is what they had returned to.

They were experienced fishermen and yet they had failed to catch any fish despite a whole night of labour. Their disappointment was turned to joy when they followed the command of the man on the shore. For at least one of the disciples, however, this miraculous catch of fish felt a little bit familiar. This wasn't the first time such an event had happened for these men.

“It is the Lord!”

At the start of his ministry, Jesus had performed the same miracle for these men to demonstrate that they would soon fish for people in spreading the gospel message. You can read about this in Luke chapter 5.

Three and a half years later, these men were in the same situation. John, remembering the incident that had brought him to following Jesus in the first place, suddenly realises who the stranger on the shore is.

“Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’” (John 21:7).

Jesus used the same symbol he had used years earlier to once again ask them to be fishers of men. Even in his absence, Jesus expects his workers to be active in reaching out to people and giving them a hope of life beyond death.

Call to Action

Focusing on the actions of the disciples is a key way of understanding what Jesus wants from us as well. Firstly Peter decides to go and fish. Even though it's the middle of the night, he is willing to go out and work at any time. In addition to this the other disciples don't let him go fishing alone – they go along to help and ensure Peter is safe, rather than hold him back. We also should show a willingness to respond to God's offer of everlasting life at any time, day or night because it is important.

Waiting for “the right moment” could ultimately be too late. The disciples worked through the whole night. They didn't stop part way through. They persisted and gave all their effort, as we should, in pursuing a place in God's Kingdom. When the stranger on the shore told them to let down the net again, the disciples did so. We must likewise have a willingness to work. The disciples made the effort, despite their disappointment, to lower their nets again. In their joy, they expended even greater effort in bringing this great catch to land.

“But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish” (John 21:8).

It took the disciples a lot of effort to drag the fish in the net through the water as they couldn't pull it up into the boat. It would have been easy to say, "There are so many fish here, let's release some out of the net so we can get this catch on board." But these men persisted in bringing the entire catch to land despite the struggle involved. This is a strong Bible principle Jesus teaches, that we should not give up on one single person. This was something Jesus taught in a parable about a shepherd:

"What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (Matthew 18:12-14).

What about Jesus?

We've seen the actions of the disciples in response to the miracle. So what can we learn from the actions of Jesus when the disciples came to him on the beach?

"Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish which you have just caught.' Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, 'Come and eat breakfast.' Yet none of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you? – knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus

then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish" (John 21:9-13).

Jesus had prepared a fire, and already had some fish cooking over the coals. This can be seen to represent the small initial catch that Jesus and his disciples had achieved so far, a catch of those people who had responded to the teachings of Jesus. So by comparison the large catch of fish the disciples made was able to show them just how many more people could be brought to share in God's promises.

On a Beach in England, 1994 – 5:25pm

The man had asked:

"Have you tried using different bait?"

I can't remember the next two hours of that afternoon very well save for one fact – we didn't catch anything. We did use different bait and different lures. We tried fishing from different parts of the beach and yet we didn't catch any fish. But then weeks later, my father and I went fishing again. That time we caught several fish. So if the lesson isn't to try something different, what is it exactly?

Jesus told the disciples to cast the net on the right side of the boat, and yet over the whole night of fishing these seven men had probably tried many different methods to make a catch. Which side of the boat they used isn't important. The key thing is that they demonstrated a willingness and persistence to try again and again.

It is that willingness and persistence we need if we are to become successful followers of Jesus who will be ready and waiting for him when he returns from heaven.

Jonathan White

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