

16. What does the action of John's disciples after John's death indicate about the relations between John and Jesus, especially after John had sent Him the great question about Jesus' Messiahship?
17. According to the Synoptics, where were Jesus and His Apostles when word came of John's murder? What were they doing? How did Jesus react publicly to the news?
18. Much intimate detail of Herod's private life is reported in this section. Where could the Apostles and Jesus have learned this information, without making use of special inspiration that would reveal these otherwise unknown facts?
19. Luke (9:9) reports Herod's desire to see Jesus. When and where was this desire fulfilled?

Section 34

JESUS FEEDS THE 5000 AND WALKS UPON THE WAVES

(Parallels: Mark 6:30-52; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-21)

TEXT: 14:13-33

13 Now when Jesus heard *it*, he withdrew from thence in a boat, to a desert place apart: and when the multitudes heard *thereof*, they followed him on foot from the cities. 14 And he came forth, and saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick. 15 And when even was come, the disciples came to him, saying, The place is desert, and the time is already past; send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves food. 16 But Jesus said unto them, They have no need to go away; give ye them to eat. 17 And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. 18 And he said, Bring them hither to me. 19 And he commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass; and he took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes. 20 And they all ate, and were filled: and they took up that which remained over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. 21 And they that did eat were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

22 And straightway he constrained the disciples to enter into the boat, and to go before him unto the other side, till he should send

the multitudes away. 23 And after he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into the mountain apart to pray: and when even was come, he was there alone. 24 But the boat was now in the midst of the sea, distressed by the waves; for the wind was contrary. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night he came unto them, walking upon the sea. 26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a ghost; and they cried out with fear. 27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. 28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the waters. 29 And he said, Come. And Peter went down from the boat, and he walked upon the waters to come to Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord, save me. 31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and took hold of him, and saith unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? 32 And when they were gone up into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And they that were in the boat worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. If Jesus loved people as much as you say, why would He want to get away from them, as He obviously intended to do on this occasion?
- b. Why would so many people follow Jesus such a long distance from home without bringing any food along? Is it reasonable that they forget this item essential to existence?
- c. How do you harmonize the apparently contradictory reports of the Synoptic writers who say that the crowds ran on foot to where Jesus was going and actually got there ahead of His debarkation at the place (Mk. 6:33), whereas John (6:5) clearly states that when Jesus had already gone up into the hills and sat down with His disciples, then He looked up and saw the crowds coming to Him?
- d. Matthew (14:13) says that Jesus took His disciples "to a desert place," whereas John (6:10) affirms that there was "much grass" there and Mark (6:39) notes that it was even "green." Make up your mind: how can it be "a desert place" and there still be much green grass?
- e. Jesus' deep need for privacy as well as the Apostles' need for rest

caused Him to leave the Capernaum area abruptly. Many would probably have been angered at the selfish persistence of the people. But what effect did this persistence have upon Jesus? In what likeness did He see them?

- f. How much food did the Apostles think to be needed to feed such a crowd? What is the relative value today of what they considered necessary to purchase that quantity of food?
- g. Can you suggest an explanation why only one lad had food when no one else did?
- h. Why did Jesus command that the multitudes sit down in orderly groups of fifties and hundreds?
- i. Are the Apostles to be condemned for their lack of vision when they faced the prospect of having to feed thousands of people with little or no provisions? If so, on what basis? If not, why not?
- j. Where did the power to meet the need really lie? Was a miracle absolutely necessary? Some feel that the real miracle was the change in human hearts as Jesus called the unselfish lad with the lunch forward as an example of the unselfish sharing that the multitudes could imitate. Everyone then took out his own lunch and shared with those who had none, so that everybody ate all he needed to get back home. Do you agree with this solution? If not, why do you feel it inadequate to explain the phenomena reported in the Gospels? If so, how do you answer those who affirm that a miracle has indeed taken place?
- k. If you believe that the people had not brought along their own lunches, then kindly explain where the twelve baskets came from, into which the Apostles gathered the broken left-overs. Where there were twelve such kosher-food baskets, there could have been more, no?
- l. Why would Jesus be so interested in gathering up the left-over fragments? He who has limitless power to provide such miraculous meals would certainly not need to be so frugal, would he? Could it be that Jesus realizes that His power is limited, and so He is here saving up the scraps against a future shortage just in case His power should fail? Why do you answer as you do?
- m. What principles of crowd control do you see displayed in Jesus' tactics in this incident?
- n. What importance would you attribute to this event when considered in context with the circumstances leading up to it and the aftermath that follows it?
- o. Why do you think Jesus refused the popular crown that was offered

Him on this occasion? Could He not have kept this movement under control and led these blindly enthusiastic followers to understand His real purpose? If Jesus could not have kept such a movement under control, then what does this say about Him? Does this not make the damning admission that, after all, Jesus is not like God—omnipotent? Examine the alternatives that lay open to Jesus, forcing Him to make the choice He did.

- p. If Jesus is God, why did He have to go pray most of the night? What did He hope to gain from prayer? If He is God, to whom was He praying?
- q. What do you envision as the reason why the multitudes were planning to take Him by force to make Him their king? How could they have done this?
- r. After the feeding of the 5000, Jesus rushed His twelve Apostles away in a boat: how do you explain this?
- s. After rowing most of the night against the heavy wind and waves, why did the disciples keep rowing instead of turning back? What lesson do you see in this for your own life?
- t. Why did the disciples, when they saw Jesus walking on the water, think that what they saw was a ghost? Are they superstitious?
- u. Why did the disciples cry out in terror? Had they not yet learned not to fear?
- v. Why do you suppose Jesus began to walk past the boat, instead of coming directly up to it? (Mk. 6:48)
- w. What do you think motivated Peter to want to meet Jesus out there on that rolling water?
- x. Do you think Jesus rebuked Peter for wanting to walk on the water? If so, on what basis do you say this? If not, then why did He rebuke him?
- y. Is it psychologically reasonable to accept the idea that this seasoned fishermen who had spent his adult life out on this lake should so completely panic when he began to sink, that he would forget how to swim? (See John 21:7.)
- z. What part did doubt play in causing Peter to sink?
- aa. How do you harmonize the apparent contradiction between the statement of Matthew (14:33) where he reports the disciples' reaction as one of worship and confession, with the declaration of Mark (6:51, 52) where this latter writer declares that "the disciples were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened"?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Upon their return from their evangelistic tours the Apostles met with Jesus to report all that they had done and taught. However there were so many people coming and going that the Apostles and Jesus had no opportunity even for meals. So when Jesus received the news about the death of John the Baptist, He told them, "Come on, let's go off by ourselves to an unfrequented place to rest awhile." Accordingly, He took them and privately withdrew from the area around Capernaum, setting sail in the boat toward the east shore of the Lake of Galilee (which is another name for Lake Tiberias). Once across, they retired to a remote area near a town called Bethsaida Julias. Ashore, Jesus climbed the hillside and sat down there with His disciples. (Incidentally, the Passover festival of the Jews was soon to take place in Jerusalem.)

Meanwhile, many of the people saw them going and recognized them. Consequently, when the rest got word of His departure, they hurried around the lake, coming by foot from all the towns. Some arrived ahead of Jesus and His disciples. They all came because they were impressed by the miracles that He had been doing for the diseased people.

By this time the crowds began to arrive where Jesus was. Looking up as He came out of His retreat, His gaze took in this great throng of people approaching. The sight caused Him to be filled with compassion for them, because He saw them as a flock of sheep without a shepherd. Then He turned to Philip with the question: "How can we buy bread to feed these people?" He said this to test Philip, because He Himself already knew what He would do.

Philip answered, "It would take over six months' wages and it would never be enough for each of them to get even a little piece!"

So the Lord welcomed the people and began to teach them many things about God's Kingdom. He also cured those who needed it.

The day began to draw to a close. So, in the afternoon, the Twelve approached Jesus with the proposal: "This is a deserted spot and the hour is now late. Dismiss the crowds so they can go to the surrounding farms and villages to find themselves lodging and buy food: there is nothing around here."

But Jesus' reaction was: "They do not need to leave: you give them something to eat!"

But they responded, "Shall we spend our two hundred denarii for bread to give them something to eat?"

So Jesus opened a new approach, "How many loaves do you have on hand? Go look!"

When they had found out, one of His disciples, Andrew—that's Simon Peter's brother,—reported, "There's a lad here who has five barley buns and two little fish. But what's the use of that to feed so many?"

"We have no more than those five buns and a couple of fish," the others commented, "that is, unless we are to go and buy food for all these people!"

"Bring them here to me," was Jesus' reply. "Direct the people to sit down for a meal on the grass, grouping themselves in parties of about fifty each."

Now there was plenty of green grass around there, so the disciples organized that vast crowd to sit down in groups of fifties and hundreds. Just a total of the men numbered five thousand!

At this point Jesus took the five buns and the two fish in His hands. Looking up toward heaven, He thanked God for the food, asking His blessing upon the meal. Then He broke the buns and began distributing them to the disciples, who, in turn, served them to the crowds who were reclining there. He then divided the two fish among them all, as much as they wanted. They all ate their fill and were satisfied.

Afterwards, Jesus directed His men, "Go gather up the left-over pieces, so that nothing gets lost or wasted."

So they picked up the leftovers, loading twelve picnic baskets full of the broken pieces of the barley buns and fish over and beyond what had been consumed by the crowd! Now those who ate numbered about five thousand, not counting the women and children! And when the people realized the miracle Jesus had done, they began commenting: "This man is the Prophet, the Coming One!"

For this reason, because He sensed that they were about to come take Him against His will to make Him their king, Jesus immediately ordered His twelve disciples to board the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side of the lake, i.e., over to Bethsaida, while He sent the crowds home. After He had said goodbye to the people, Jesus got away again: He went off up into the hills for private prayer.

When night fell He was there alone, since His disciples had gone down to the lake, boarded the boat and pushed off toward Capernaum on the other shore. Even though it was now dark, Jesus had still not rendezvoused with them. The sea grew rough, because it was blowing up a real gale out of the northwest. The boat by this

time was roughly halfway across, battered by the waves. Jesus was alone on the land, but He was aware that they were straining at the oars against a strong headwind. When they had rowed about three or four miles, sometime between three and six o'clock in the morning, He came to them, walking across the lake. They sighted him approaching the boat. Although He meant to go along beside them, when they caught sight of Him, they were terrified, for they thought Him a phantom. In fact, they cried out, "It's a ghost!," for they all saw Him and were gripped with terror.

But He immediately began talking to them, saying, "Cheer up: it's me! Stop being afraid!"

Peter tested Him, "Lord, if it is really you, call me to come to you on the water!"

Jesus shouted, "Come on!"

At this, Peter climbed out of the boat and walked toward Jesus atop the waves. But when his attention was diverted by the wind-tossed whitecaps, he panicked. Starting to sink, he shouted, "Lord, help me!"

At once Jesus reached over and grabbed Peter, saying as He hauled him out, "O man of such limited confidence in me: why did you doubt?"

Then the other disciples were glad to take Jesus into the boat. When He and Peter climbed into the boat, the wind dropped. The men in the boat were utterly astounded. Although they worshipped Him, confessing, "You really ARE God's Son!," they still did not understand what the feeding of the five thousand meant, for their minds were slow to learn.

In no time at all the boat beached at the land they were making for.

SUMMARY

Just at the moment that Jesus' disciples began reporting back to Him the happy news of their successful ministry in His name, the disciples of John the Baptist brought Him the heart-rending news of John's murder. To gain both rest and solitude for body and soul, Jesus sailed with the Twelve east to the deserted country south of Bethsaida Julias. But the multitudes, electrified by the momentous events then occurring in Galilee, followed them. Jesus' compassion for people would not permit Him to leave them again without helping. After He had spent the day teaching them and curing their illnesses,

the disciples pointed out the shortage of both food and time to procure it unless Jesus dismissed the crowds immediately. Instead, He chose to feed the assemblage miraculously with a lad's lunch. The effect on the already excited throng was the confirming of their conclusion that Jesus was truly the coming Messiah. To head off a run-away attempt to make Him a worldly messianic king, Jesus divided the Apostles from the tempestuous crowds and ordered them to leave by boat. Then He dismissed the enthusiastic multitudes to go home and cool off. Finally, Jesus hiked off alone in another direction, into the hills, to pray.

Meanwhile the Apostles battled the stormy sea, trying to row across the Galilean Lake with but little progress. Noting their distress, the Lord walked out across the lake to them. The specter terrified the men, but He spoke to them, restoring their calm. Peter made bold to meet Jesus on the water, but lost confidence and had to be rescued. Together, Jesus and Peter boarded the boat. The astounded Apostles worshipped Him, still unaware of the full impact of His identity even after the miracle of the multiplication of food.

NOTES

I. JESUS' PROBLEM

To appreciate adequately this crucial moment in Jesus' ministry, we must grasp the factors that made it what it was:

1. Jesus and the Apostles had just finished wide-ranging evangelistic efforts in Galilee. (Mt. 11:1; Mk. 6:12, 13, 30, 31; Lk. 9:6, 10) Hence, they needed privacy for rest and discussion of their work, results, mistakes and successes.
2. Passover crowds started gathering in Galilee, massing around Jesus, not only because of the excitement aroused by the just-finished evangelism in Galilee, and the effect of the miracles (cf. Jn. 6:2), but also because of the shocking news of John's murder. (Jn. 6:4; Mt. 14:13 see note.) Hence the need to escape to rest from the insistence of the ever-present crowds.
3. The need had also arisen to react to Herod Antipas' suspicions, based as they were on his information about Jesus' popular ministry and that of His disciples, rather than that of the murdered John the Baptist. (Mt. 14:1f, 13; Mk. 6:14; Lk. 9:7-9) While

- personal fear of Herod does not motivate Jesus' withdrawal, prudence dictated that He forestall any decisive action by Herod to hinder His mission. Fear is not involved, because after the popularity-bubble burst, He could move more freely throughout Herod's jurisdiction both in some traveling in Galilee as well as His later Perea ministry.
4. Jesus probably sensed a grassroots movement afoot to establish Him as Messianic King over Israel, principally among the Zealots (Jn. 6:15) and augmented by the multitudes generally (Jn. 6:14), a movement that came to a head immediately after the supernatural feeding of the 5000. These suspicions, if relayed to Herod, would have stirred that ruler to fear a popular revolt that must inevitably involve Rome by whose grace he held his throne. (Cf. *Ant.* XVIII, 5, 2) His disciples, however, must be saved from the influence of such wrong-headed thinking.
 5. The need for privacy with God. (Mt. 14:23; Mk. 6:46)

II. JESUS' PLAN

While the Synoptics indicate the above-mentioned variety of motives for Jesus' movements, Foster (*Middle Period*, 151, 160f) is probably correct in laying emphasis on Jn. 6:6 as the key to understanding His tactics, not only with reference to the immediate problem of food for the crowds, but also in dealing with the larger problem of His popularity: ". . . he himself knew what he would do." This comes into sharper focus if we see the deliberate steps Jesus took to bring these unwieldy forces under His control. Each step is a pressure-point intended to concentrate the attention of everyone on Jesus and push each one to some point of decision:

1. **PRESSURE:** Jesus took a leisurely, easy-to-follow boat trip in full view of the crowds, sailing east toward Bethsaida Julias rather than south or southeast, almost suggesting thereby that they follow Him.
 - a. By sailing unexpectedly He drew the crowds into a deserted place where no food was readily available, a fact that would later become another pressure-point.
 - b. So doing, He sifted the most interested followers from the less ambitious who remained at home. If Josephus' figures are even roughly indicative of the total Galilean population which he

- establishes at over three million people (240 villages the smallest of which numbered 15,000 inhabitants), the crowd that actually followed Jesus around the lake would hardly have filled one small Galilean village! (Cf. *Wars*, III, 3, 2; *Life of Josephus*, 45)
- c. By deliberately sailing to a deserted place, He frustrated any efforts of the Zealots to build a revolutionary mob spirit in the more populated areas.
 - d. The large result of the miracle that followed was the building of faith in Jesus in the heart of those who could be saved for His spiritual Kingdom, by being able to withstand the blow He must give to the materialistic designs of the popular, but wrong-headed nationalistic liberation groups and parties. The total effect of the miracle prepared superbly for His discourse on the Bread of Life (Jn. 6:25-66) in which He applied maximum pressure on everyone to leave Him if they were not interested in letting Him be their true nourishment.
2. **PRESSURE:** Taking the initiative, Jesus pushed Philip: "How are we to buy bread so that they may eat?" (Jn. 6:5) This question, connected by John with the arrival of the multitudes at the beginning of Jesus' working day, pressures Philip to begin thinking about the problem and perhaps discuss it with the others in order that, when the need actually arises, they might arrive at the correct solution.
 3. **PRESSURE:** Jesus taught the crowds the rest of that day until evening, healing some, but apparently giving no opportunity to go for food.
 4. **PRESSURE:** When the worried disciples bring the plight of the famished crowds to Jesus with their suggestion that He dismiss them as the only working alternative, Jesus throws the problem back into their laps. "You give them something to eat." (Mt. 14:16)
 5. **PRESSURE:** When they argue their shortage of money for an adequate meal for all, He ordered them to check out their actual resources. (Mk. 6:38)
 6. **PRESSURE:** In seeking any available food, the Apostles drew the attention of the entire crowd both to the need for food and encouraged them to expect Jesus to do something about the need. But the Apostles, too, are under pressure to obey Jesus by going through that crowd calling out, asking if anyone had perhaps a handful of food, to enable Jesus to feed that multitude, because the Twelve themselves probably did not know Jesus' plan.

(Jn. 6:6)

7. **PRESSURE:** When Andrew turned up only five buns and two fish, he was doubtful of the significance of his find (Jn. 6:8, 9), and the others repeated their only apparent alternative: buy bread. (Lk. 9:13) Hereupon, Jesus sent the Apostles to bring the food to Him, a mission that required faith in His wisdom. (Mt. 14:18)
8. **PRESSURE:** In order to draw full attention to what He was about to do, He ordered the Apostles to organize the crowd into orderly groups for a picnic on the grass. (See note on 14:19.) The effect of this command is most fully felt when all that anyone could see was some sandwich ingredients in the hands of the Lord.
9. **PRESSURE:** When the hushed expectancy of the crowd permitted Him to speak again, in a dramatic gesture full of significance, He blessed the food, began breaking the loaves and fishes, and distributed it among the Twelve for redistribution among the multitudes.
10. **SOLUTION, OR RELEASE OF PRESSURE:** They all ate to the full.
11. **PRESSURE:** Jesus ordered the Twelve to gather up the leftovers to avoid waste, but the psychological effect on all pushed each to decide about the magnitude of the miracle, and, hence, of Jesus' power, since even the estimated size of the group, easily figured by tallying the orderly groups, adds to the psychological pressure too. (Jn. 6:12; Mt. 14:21)
12. **REACTION:** Discussion and conclusion of the crowds about Jesus: "He is the coming Prophet: let us make Him our King!" (Jn. 6:14, 15)
13. **PRESSURE:** Jesus then made the disciples embark for the west shore of the lake, although the crowd was growing restless with ignorant messianic enthusiasm. This tested the Apostles' obedience severely, since they must leave when popular excitement was the highest, and the moment to declare the Kingdom the nearest. In fact, John (6:17) suggests that they did not immediately comply, but dallied offshore, waiting for Him to sail with them. When He did not show up, they started across.
14. **PRESSURE:** Jesus dismissed the crowds and walked away from His Galilean popularity forever, leaving them to go their separate ways. He had deliberately rejected their crown, their ideals and their popular support.
15. **PRESSURE:** The next day, Jesus mercilessly pressured the people to decide about Him and His Word as their only hope of Life

and Strength from God. (Jn. 6:25-66) Even the Apostles faced the choice of desertion. (Jn. 6:67ff)

From the foregoing evidence, it becomes clear that the climax and collapse of Jesus' great Galilean ministry was not a crisis in which He became the helpless victim of circumstances. These pressure-points are all His doing; He is the Lord and Master of His circumstances, carefully guiding even the smallest detail so that all the various factors should collaborate to arrive at the result HE desired. (Cf. Notes on Mt. 11:25, 26)

14:13b **Now when Jesus heard** about the murder of John the Baptist, as well as for the other reasons mentioned in the other Gospels, **He withdrew from thence.** *From thence* means from Galilee on the west side of the Lake of Galilee, since the following geographical limitations locate His movements toward the **desert place apart** on the Golan side:

1. **To a desert place apart**, when compared with populous Galilee, clearly points to the less densely populated zone east of the lake. (Cf. *Wars*, III, 3, 3)
2. Although John had recorded a conversation Jesus held with the Jews in Judea west of the Jordan Valley (Jn. 5), here he simply expresses himself like an old inhabitant of the Bethsaida-Caper-naum area: "After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee." (Jn. 6:1) For a non-Galilean, such a reference would be ambiguous: "WHICH other side?" he would have to ask. But for John, "the other side" is the east side, where else?
3. Luke registers their general destination as a town named "Beth-saida." (9:10) Since they embark on the western, or Galilean, side of the lake where another Bethsaida is located near Capernaum to which they would return after the miraculous feeding (Mk. 6:45; Jn. 6:17), the "Bethsaida" on the other side is Bethsaida Julias, developed from a local fishing village into a beautiful city by Philip the Tetrarch. (*Ant.*, XVIII, 2, 1) This Gaulonite city must not be confused with the Galilean fishertown home of the Apostles, Peter, Andrew and Philip. (Jn. 1:44; 12:21) The name "Bethsaida" simply means "House of Fishing," a Semitism for a place where fishing takes place. Since the Galilean lake was famous for its fish (*Wars*, III, 10, 7-8), it is not at all surprising to find several "Bethsaidas," or fishing villages, around the lake, either separate or connected with some larger town or city.

Thomson (*Land and Book*, II, 29-32), on the other hand, argues

not for two Bethsaidas, but for one major settlement by that name, however located on both banks of the Jordan River where it enters the Lake of Galilee. Accordingly, when viewed from the site of the miracle, the disciples could actually have sailed generally toward Bethsaida (both towns), and still be roughly en route toward Capernaum, by hugging the shore while waiting for Jesus to arrive to be taken aboard at some point along the coast.

In answer to Thomson, it might be asked whether it be possible, that, in the same way in which Jericho has occupied several sites not far from each other over the centuries, Bethsaida too was originally located on a site west of the Jordan near Capernaum,—the birthplace of several Apostles,—whereas Philip the Tetrarch moved its location to a site east of the Jordan and dedicated it to Caesar's daughter, Julia, hence establishing it in his realm? History is not ignorant of such city movings for topographical, political or military reasons. (Cf. "Neapolis" or "new city" in the history of that word! Naples is the new Parthenopea in Italy; there is the Neapolis in Macedonia, Ac. 16:11; and Neapolis, or Nablus, is Shechem in Palestine. All refer to the "new city" constructed in the area of an older one.)

Further, Jesus' command to the disciples to cross over "to the other side to Bethsaida" (Mk. 6:45) is understandable only if that town in question is actually on the western shore of the lake. Therefore: two towns of the same name, however located on opposite sides of the point where the Jordan empties into the lake at its north side.

4. The landing point where the disciples with Jesus beached on the day after the miraculous feeding is described as "when they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret" (Mt. 14:34; Mk. 6:53), i.e., on the western side, and "on the other side of the sea" from where those who remained on the site of the miracle. (Jn. 6:22, 25) Gennesaret was opposite the eastern side.

He withdrew from thence in a boat to a desert place apart. McGarvey (*Lands of the Bible*, 327f) describes the area east of the point where the Jordan enters the Sea of Galilee, as follows:

East of the Jordan, at its entrance into the lake, there is a plain called *Buti'ha*, whose shore-line curves around the northeastern part of the lake about four miles, while its width, from the shore

back to the hills, is somewhat more than a mile. The plain is larger than that of Gennesaret, but much like it in shape and surface. . . . On the east bank of the Jordan, and at the foot of the hills which bound the plain in that direction, are the ruins of Bethsaida Julias. . . . At the southeastern end of this plain, the hills which bound it approach within less than half a mile of the lake-shore, where they form an angle with those which extend due south along the eastern side of the lake. At the foot of the high hill at this angle is located the feeding of the five thousand, for here alone all the characteristics of the spot indicated in the sacred text are found. Here is the smooth, grassy plain on which the vast multitude could sit by fifties and hundreds while the disciples served them with the bread and fish. Here is the lake-shore, close at hand, whence Jesus and the twelve had gone forth when the multitude met him, and where the boat lay into which the twelve entered when the feeding was concluded. Here also, rising abruptly from the spot, is the mountain into which Jesus went up after he had dismissed the multitude. A spot farther east or north would not meet these requirements, while one farther south would fail to meet some others. It would not be "a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida"; nor could the people whom Jesus had left on the western shore have gone to it around the head of the lake while he and the twelve were crossing in their boat. Finally, if the place had been farther north, the disciples, in starting for Bethsaida or Capernaum (Mk. 6:45; Jn. 6:17) could not have been said to have gone "to the other side," seeing that they would have been going only from the head of the lake to one side of it, and not from one side to the other.

See also Mt. 14:34 where their return to the west side at Gennesaret is spoken of as their having "crossed over." (Mk. 6:53)

The point of the above is to absolve the Gospel eye-witnesses from critical attacks that would accuse them of confusing names and locations, leading to the insinuation that the "real editors" back of the present Gospels were neither eye-witnesses of the facts nor even remotely familiar with the geography. Further, the traditional location of the supernatural multiplication of the loaves and fishes at a site south of Capernaum on the road to Gennesaret is entirely incompatible with the information given above. (Cf. *Rand-McNally Bible Atlas*, 376, 386)

To a lonely place apart (*kat'idiān*) is the same expression Jesus used to describe the kind of rest needed for which they embarked on this voyage across the lake. (Mt. 6:31, 32) Since the expression means "privately, by oneself" (Arndt-Gingrich, 371), the first impression is that Jesus intended to avoid all multitudes, despite the view of many that He deliberately sailed slowly across the north end of the lake in full view of any interested watchers who could easily follow Him around by land to meet Him on the other side. Which view is correct? Did He change His mind upon seeing the crowds whose arrival He had not desired, hence postpone His sincerely desired retreat? Or did He actually plan to offer some rest to His disciples, while AT THE SAME TIME use a baiting tactic that would draw the crowds away from the Capernaum-Bethsaida area? If so, then "rest awhile" must mean literally "rest a short while." (*oligon*) In fact, the moments of privacy in the boat had to suffice, because, until the problem of the crowds was permanently settled, there could be no real leisure for the task of developing the Twelve.

But when the crowds heard (it), what did they hear? McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 130) thinks that they learned of the death of John the Baptist, not Jesus' departure: "When Jesus heard of John's death, He departed . . . when the people heard of John's death, they followed Jesus." However, Luke, in his parallel expression (Lk. 9:10, 11), connects what the crowds heard, not with a message about John's death—about which Luke tells nothing,—but with Jesus' withdrawal with His Apostles. So it is better to see the crowds as learning of Jesus' movements by word of mouth from those who saw Him sail. (Mk. 6:33) Matthew's descriptive expression, "a great throng," (v. 14) raises the problem: how is it that so many people were free to go traipsing about over the countryside in pursuit of local attractions? This 5000-plus crowd of men is particularly free from normal business pursuits because "the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand." (Jn. 6:4) Shortly thereafter the entire group would be journeying to Jerusalem for that festival. That this was to be no merely local picnic is spelled out in Mark's vigorous language: "They ran there on foot from all the towns . . ." (Mk. 6:33) Even so, to hear Josephus set the population of Galilee at 3,600,000 people (*Wars*, III, 3, 2; *Life*, 45), would lead one to conclude that only a small group from Galilee eventually followed Jesus around the lake, i.e., only 1/600th of the total population.

They followed Him, "because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased." (Jn. 6:2) That they hoped for more of the

same is evidenced by the number of sick they brought with them. (Mt. 14:14; Lk. 9:11) Although there may have been fishing boats tied up at Capernaum and Bethsaida, the entire crowd remained on land, running around the north shore of the lake, fording the Jordan near Bethsaida-Julias, and continuing on around the lake-front plain, Jesus' obvious destination. The five-mile run from Capernaum would be nothing for people planning to walk the 100-mile jaunt to Jerusalem for the Passover!

II. JESUS' PROVISION

14:14 **And he came forth, and saw a great multitude.** Matthew telescopes the information, because . . .

1. He omits the fact that some of the faster runners in the crowds arrived on the scene before Jesus and the Twelve could go ashore. (Mk. 6:33) This would not mean that the entire 5000-plus crowd stood panting on the beach as Jesus disembarked. In fact, Mark only says that "many saw them . . . ran . . . and got there ahead of them." Lenski (*Matthew*, 563) rightly objects that "we have no right to reduce 'a great multitude' to a few fast runners who arrived ahead of the rest of the crowd." These earliest arrivals apparently were also privileged to be with Him during that semi-private period before the excitement of teaching and healing began with the arrival of the main body of people.
2. He omits the fact that, immediately upon disembarking, "Jesus went up into the hills, and there sat down with his disciples" (Jn. 6:3), which suggests that He spent some time up there with them before "lifting up his eyes, He saw a multitude coming to Him." (Jn. 6:5) This impression of time spent alone with His disciples before the bulk of the crowds arrived is further confirmed by Jesus' return to the hills "again" (*pàlin*) by Himself. (Jn. 6:15) Coincidental confirmation of this retreat is the time required to bring the slower-moving sick people into that uninhabited area for Jesus to heal them. (Cf. 14:14; Lk. 9:11)

From the foregoing it becomes clear that Jesus, IMMEDIATELY UPON DISEMBARKING, did not see a great throng, as some translators render it. (Cf. RSV, Jerusalem Bible, NEB, et al.) Others, more sensitive to the above-mentioned problems of harmonization, render the phrase (*kaì exelthòn eîden*) as follows:

1. Either as a temporal participle of nearly contemporaneous action, but in contextual relation to Jesus' successful retreat upon the hill: "And when He came out, He saw a great multitude . . ." (New American Standard) "When Jesus emerged from his retreat he saw a vast crowd." (J.B. Phillips)
2. Or as a circumstantial participle which does not define any time sequence or causal connection or even the means by which the action of the principle verb (*eíden*) occurs, but simply adds an associated fact. Equivalent to a coordinate verb with "and," it may be resolved: *kai exelthòn eíden = kai exélthe kai eíden*: "And Jesus went forth, and saw . . ." (KJV), or "Jesus got out of the boat, and when he saw . . ." (TEV) Cf. Burton, *Moods and Tenses*, p. 174; Robertson-Davis, p. 382; Blass-Debrunner, p. 217f. In this sense, then, Matthew telegraphically states two facts which are not immediately connected, being very loosely related.

So, if we connect *he came forth* with Jesus' disembarking, we must not believe Matthew in contradiction with John who is more complete in recording what occurred between the time of the disembarking and the arrival of "a great throng," and, consistently, we must object to all translations of this verse that, while objectively possible within themselves, ignore the problems of harmonization. On the other hand, if we connect *he came forth* with Jesus' return from His retreat in the hills, then the problem of His seeing "a great throng" precisely "as He went ashore," no longer exists.

Notice the close psychological progression of events:

1. **Jesus saw a great throng** coming to Him. This is the moment of decision: shall He place His disciples' need for emotional rest and physical refreshment and recital of their efforts, ahead of the needs of helpless, leaderless people, or must He continue pouring Himself out for them? If Jn. 6:6 be the key to the understanding of Jesus' plans for this entire day, then perhaps this decision was already forming: "He Himself knew what He would do." But even this decision is but the practical application of a higher commitment: "Christ pleased not Himself." (Ro. 15:3) **He saw the multitude**, because He had eyes to see, a sensitivity to feel, a conscience that would not let Him forget how many eternally precious people out there in that group would be lost. Despite the fact that only He could truly appreciate them for what they were—people who were shepherdless sheep because they would reject His spiritual goals and the means He taught to achieve them—still He saw His

duty clear.

John informs us that it was precisely this moment when "seeing that a multitude was coming to him," that Jesus tested Philip's grasp of the situation by raising the question of food for everyone. (Jn. 6:5-7; see note at Mt. 14:16.)

2. **He had compassion on them**, "because they were like sheep without a shepherd. (Mk. 6:34a; see fuller notes at Mt. 9:35-38; cf. Mt. 15:32.) Rather than treat them as bothersome intruders who had thoughtlessly interrupted His sorely needed rest and retirement with the Twelve, as also His sorrow over John's assassination, "He welcomed them"! (Lk. 9:11) Rather than let their persistence rule Him, He took charge of the situation, took decisive action, and remained in control of both Himself and others. Tragically, they had lost their other great shepherd, John the Baptist, and would soon be on their way to a Jerusalem that sheltered the hirelings and false shepherds, the haughty scribes, Pharisees and corrupt priests who despised the ordinary people and, when attempting to instruct them, only led them further from the truth. How badly they lacked instant help! and that from a true Shepherd who could minister to their hunger of soul! No wonder people flocked around a Leader so sensitive and responsive, who would not avoid helping them, so obvious to Him was their distress! Had not Jesus possessed a warm, shepherd's heart, the story would have ended right there. His eye was neither on the clock nor His attention fixed on His comforts.
3. "He began to teach them many things" (Mk. 6:34), speaking "to them of the kingdom of God." (Lk. 9:11) Although His announced topic is manifestly quite general, its very mention was enough to spark revolution, because it was the hottest topic of discussion in Galilee. However, in light of Jesus' contextual situation, it is quite probable that He used His opportunity well to cool tempers ready to march against Herod for that tyrant's part in the assassination of John the Baptist. He may well have hammered hard on the kind of Kingdom God has in mind for His people. It is, of course, not His fault that His ideas did not get through to the majority of His audience. (Cf. Jn. 6:14, 15) But, in the same way He thought it worth the effort to try to get people to understand His great Sermon in Parables on the Kingdom, but failed to penetrate their prejudices (see on Mt. 13), so also here He thought it definitely worth the effort to try again to salvage the saveable.
4. **He healed their sick**, never forgetting their bodies while ministering

to their spiritual needs. Many had followed Him only for instant cures, and He knew it. But this did not hinder Him from sharing the generous love of God with them, despite their calculating selfishness, their ignorance of His real blessings and their ungratefulness. (Cf. Ro. 5:6-11) We follow Him, not only because of the supernatural evidence of His identity these miracles provide, but also because He kept giving help where most of us would have already driven off that unthinking mob of insensitive, unthankful people! He acted in character as God would.

The fact that the prevailing excitement had not caused some to forget to bring along their sick for healing, while contemporaneously forgetting any food preparations, may indicate something about the time when they left home, i.e., during the morning when it may have been supposed there were plenty of time to procure food when needed.

14:15 **And when even was come**, as an expression, does not define the time of day, because, after what must have been a long process of distributing the miraculously multiplied food to the 5000, Matthew (14:23b) again adopts this same expression (*opsias genoménes*), at which time John (6:17) notes: "darkness had already come." Critics, noting Matthew's repetition in both 14:15 and 14:23b, could accuse him of imprecision. Matthew's idiom, however, intentionally sets the stage for the disciples' dramatically urgent advice, and mirrors precisely the Hebrew distinction between "the two evenings." Inasmuch as agreement is wanting among the Jews themselves about the precise limits of "the two evenings," only approximations may help us here:

1. The first evening began after noon and lasted until about three o'clock.
2. "Then began the period known as 'between the evenings,' which would be longer or shorter according to the season of the year, and which terminated with 'the second evening.'" (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 681)
3. The second evening began at "the time from when the first star appeared to that when the third star was visible." (*ibid.*; cf. Keil-Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, II, 12 on Ex. 12:6; also *PHC*, II, 226)

It is important to repeat that other Jewish authorities think of sunset as the dividing point between the two evenings. However, Josephus (*Wars*, VI, 9, 3) provides us a testimony

contemporary to the time of Jesus that circumstantially corroborates Matthew's language, since the Jewish historian pictures Passover slaying, which according to the Law must be done "between the two evenings" (Ex. 12:6), as beginning at three o'clock and lasting until eleven p.m. (See also Gesenius, *Hebrew-English Lexicon*, 652.)

In light of the above-mentioned data, therefore, it may be supposed that the boat-trip began from Capernaum in the morning. Then the multitudes, in order to hear Jesus, left home hurriedly without food. Now, after a morning of messages and healings, noon came and went without any respite. Thus, the disciples' observation, *The time is already past*, refers to the dinner hour. Evidently, since they themselves had already missed some meals because of the crowds, they knew that, unless something was organized rather soon, not only they, but the people themselves would be facing a trip back home on an empty stomach.

The disciples, i.e., the Twelve (Lk. 9:12) **came to him**. If it be correct to interpret John's organization of the events to mean that very early in this episode Jesus planted in Philip's mind the problem of food to which they all began searching for a solution, then this verse (14:15) represents their frustration and inability to come up with anything short of miraculous. Further, their conclusion is not hasty: if Philip shared Jesus' conversation with them, they would have been thinking about it all morning, and especially so as "the day began to decline." (Lk. 9:12) Their arguments are those of good sense, discretion and consideration, but not of faith:

1. **This is a lonely place:** no grocery stores or restaurants or even homes to offer some simple hospitality. "Desert," as some translate it, means "deserted," not sandy wasteland. See on 14:19.
2. **The hour is already past** to do what? For the noon meal? The Greek expression (*he hóra éde parêlthen* = Mark's *éde hóra pollé*) need not be pushed so far as does the RSV's "the day is now over," since the "hour" involved may be nothing more than the usual dinner hour, so that, from that standpoint, Mark's expression, "It is already a late hour," refers primarily to the time to eat and only secondarily to the conclusion of some period of the day. (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 631, 904) The Apostles' concern is that the people start for home with some hope of arriving in time for the evening meal. Some exaggerate the need of these people who are NOT starving, even though understandably hungry-

In fact, they are accustomed to fasting, many of them twice a week, and traditionally, in connection with the annual feast of atonement. (See notes on 6:16, 17.) They had eaten the day before this day, and would eat on the following day, so would not have been nearly as hungry as the 4000 Jesus fed later. (Cf. Mt. 15:32; Mk. 8:2, 3)

3. Solution: **Send the crowds away:**

- a. "to go into the country" in hopes of buying some food from farmers. (Mk. 6:36; Lk. 9:12) **Buy themselves food;** i.e., so WE will not need to buy them food with our limited means.
- b. **to go into the villages** round about, and **buy food for themselves** from shopkeepers not yet closed for the night by the time they arrive.
- c. "to lodge" in the event they are too far from their own town. (Lk. 9:12)

This solution was not at all unreasonable, because, if we have correctly located the site of the Miracle of the Loaves and Fish on the Plain of Buti'ha, or even nearby, the crowds had only about four or five miles to walk to make it into Bethsaida Julias before the stores closed. Since Peter, Andrew and Philip, as well as James and John, were former residents of the area, they would know how and when food could be purchased and how much time would be required to do so (1) if they themselves were to go and bring it back; and (2) if the crowds merely picked up some groceries on their way home.

Just how much presumption is involved in their advice to Jesus? Their command, "**Send them away,**" may be less imperative in spirit than the verb-form seems to imply. (Cf. Blass-Debrunner, sec. 387, p. 195; Burton, *Moods and Tenses*, sec. 182f; Robertson-Davis, sec. 407, p. 312) Did they suppose that anything were "too hard for the Lord?" The presumption is not in the verb-form but in the attitude. They are probably not ordering Him, but in coming to advise Him, because they feel a need He is apparently ignoring, they are presuming to lead the Lord who "knew what he would do."

14:16 **But Jesus said unto them, They have no need to go away,** even though your arguments for their doing so are quite plausible. **YOU give them something to eat,** is an order that deliberately throws the Apostles upon their own resources. This sudden pressuring them to provide what they seemingly could not, was intended to push them to think: "But it would take a MIRACLE to feed this crowd! Say, that is what you have been empowering us to do during our own evangelistic efforts! Sure, why not? Only a lack of vision and faith

on our part would hinder it, if you desire that the miracle be done." From this standpoint there is a direct comparison between their failure properly to respond here, and their failure to heal the epileptic, demonized boy later. (Cf. Mt. 17:14-21 and parallels.) **You give them something to eat**, makes all the group immediately responsible for the problem, and indicates the moment at which their faithfulness and helplessness begins to reach its climax. In fact, up to this point, apparently only Philip had been specifically under pressure to seek a solution. Now, however, every single Apostle is being tried.

Clearly, then, Jesus' demand is neither unfair nor unreasonable, because it pointed to some overlooked source of supply. After all, they had all just returned from a successful, miracle-working evangelistic tour that had stirred all Galilee to rally around Jesus. (Mt. 14:1; Mk. 6:12-24; Lk. 9:6-9) So, when He turns this practical problem over to them for solution, they should have forgotten neither the implication of everything they had just accomplished in His Name on their personal tours, nor that of the turning water into wine at Cana. (Jn. 2:1-11) So, Jesus' surprising demand was no mere stratagem whereby attention would be drawn solely to Himself. Rather, it was a practical method for them to rise in great faith to multiply the loaves and fish themselves—by His power working in them as before! Or, at least, they could rise out of their blindness and frustration to exclaim in faith, "Lord, if you desire, you can feed them all!" So, He successfully tested their understanding and confidence, and sadly found them staggered at the thought of feeding such a mass of people, because their vision of His power was too limited.

The disciples' response merely repeated Philip's earlier suggestion: "Shall we go and buy 200 denarii-worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" (Mk. 6:37) But not even Philip considered the sum sufficient to "buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." (Jn. 6:7) Does the 200-denarii figure represent the actual state of their common treasury? (Judas Iscariot carried the bag, Jn. 12:6, which contained gifts made for the financial support of Jesus' ministry, Lk. 8:3.) Yes, it would be a reasonable amount for the apostolic group to be carrying at the time, since a denarius represented a day's wage for a working man (cf. Mt. 20:2), and, when divided among the Twelve plus Jesus, the 200 denarii amounted only to the equivalent of just a little over two weeks' wages per man. So it was no great sum. That this figure actually pinpointed their on-the-spot financial condition is suggested also by their report: "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people."

(Lk. 9:13)

On the other hand, their discussion about their financial resources for buying bread significantly reveals another side of the usual mode of life among the Apostles and Jesus: Jesus did not turn stones into bread everyday even to keep His Apostles alive. They lived on the financial support for their ministry that others provided, or on the hospitality offered, or they went without. This regular *modus operandi* used in their own operations may have unduly influenced their thinking, even in a situation where they could have justifiably used God's miraculous power for the definite benefit of others in such a way as to bring Him glory. Mention here of their life-style does not justify their doubts or lack of vision; it only attempts to understand their otherwise inexplicable lack of ideas in the face of the crisis into which Jesus thrust them by ordering them to provide food for the crowds.

They need not go away seems to point to Jesus' loving unwillingness to send them away hungry: "Why I do not send them away will become evident when I show them that I care, not only to bring them sermons, but also to provide them daily bread." However, strictly humanitarian considerations, such as the emergency involved in the urgent need to feed the 4000 (Mk. 8:1-3), may be inadequate to motivate the miracle that follows here. Nor is it only Jesus' generous unwillingness to calculate whether the people are hungry enough to justify exerting some supernatural power to feed them. In fact, He could have dismissed them without losing one iota of public respect for His character. Rather, His planned miracle (see Jn. 6:6) is aimed to start the sifting process which would separate the spurious disciples from the genuine. Bruce (*Training of the Twelve*, 119-121) points this out:

No better method of separating the chaff from the wheat in that large company of professed disciples could have been devised, than first to work a miracle, which would bring to the surface the latent carnality of the great number, and then to preach a sermon which could not fail to be offensive to the carnal mind.

The Twelve were stymied by the problem. The multitudes could not foresee His plan. Therefore, Jesus was willing to submit Himself publicly to a new testing of His power, because His very success in passing the test would, in turn, test the people themselves on what they understood about Him from what they saw.

When the disciples express their financial inadequacy to feed the crowd, Jesus pushed them to investigate their actual food supply:

"How many loaves have you? Go and see." (Mk. 6:38)

14:17 And they say to him, We have here but five loaves and two fish. It was Andrew who turned up the lad with the lunch (Jn. 6:8, 9). But even his attitude reflects the consensus of pessimism among the others: ". . . but what are they among so many?" His observation is fundamentally, though not intentionally, unbelieving. He simply did not take into consideration Jesus' power, even though both he and Philip had experienced it so long. (Cf. Jn. 14:9)

Five loaves: we must not judge these by the size of American loaves of bread and conclude that the boy was making a major bakery delivery! The barley flour loaves (literally "breads") were, rather, more probably the size of hamburger buns, only flatter, more like pancakes. (See Lk. 11:5, 6 where three are considered enough for one late-night guest.) The very attitude toward the use of barley flour for making these flatcakes, however delicious, tended to consider them as "poor folks' food." (Cf. Judg. 7:13; 2 Kg. 7:1; Ezek. 4:12 in context) *The fish* were no whoppers either, because John the fisherman called them "little fish" (Jn. 6:9). In fact, he used a word, *opsària*, which means "tidbits to be eaten with bread," perhaps even the same hors d'oeuvres for which Tarichea ("Pickletown," or a fish salting establishment) was famous over on the west side of the lake.

We have here but five loaves and two fishes: this is the woeful result of a thorough search for food ordered by the Lord. (Mk. 6:38) It is quite possible that He deliberately insisted upon this search in order to foredoom any slander that would discount the miraculous by insinuating that there was actually more food available than just a mere lunch. (Cf. Barclay, *Matthew*, II, 114, who reduces the miracle of multiplication of food to an act of sharing by changed, now unselfish people.) If such were the case, both the search and this dismal report would be utter fiction!

14:18 And he said, Bring them hither to me. Does this mean that the disciples were to buy the food from the lad, or encourage him to loan it to the Lord? At any rate, it must have required some open-handed generosity on the boy's part to turn his entire lunch over to Jesus when he could probably guess that, normally, it would have filled only him up, but would not be near enough for many others. *To me:* how often had Jesus been table guest of others? None the less, here He provides a needed meal at His own expense for thousands, and, incidentally, provided simple proof that, though others provided Him some financial support (Lk. 8:3), He accepted

it not because He was otherwise unable to provide for His needs and those of His companions. Not only did He refuse to work miracles for His own benefit—and, by extension, for His closer followers,—rather, He humbled Himself to the real level of our common human experience, yes, even to the point of becoming dependant upon the financial support of others. But in our text He rises to the full height of His lordly power by supplying the needs of others by the full exercise of the power of God! Little is always a great deal when Jesus gets hold of it.

14:19 **He commanded the multitudes to sit down** by ordering the Twelve to organize the well-nigh unmanageable people into orderly groups of fifties and hundreds. The language Jesus used indicated to people definite preparation for a picnic on the grounds: “Cause them to lie down to eat (*kataklinâte, anaklithênai*) in dinner parties (*sympôsia, sympôsia; klisias*; Mk. 6:39; Lk. 9:14). The number of guests was easily tallied from the orderly arrangement which also facilitated the rapid serving and simplified its completion. It also eliminated the usual selfish thoughtlessness of those who would crowd around those who were distributing food. Jesus first mastered the confusion by organizing the people who would have caused it. Here, too, is thoughtful consideration for the weak.

Sit down on the grass, because “there was much grass in the place.” (See on 14:13b for McGarvey’s argument and description of the area.) Thanks to Mark’s adjective, “green grass” (Mk. 6:39) and John’s “much grass” as well as his note that this incident occurred around Passover (Jn. 6:4), we may date this incident in the spring about two weeks after the full moon. McGarvey (*Evidences of Christianity*, 87) points out that “a few weeks before this, grass is not abundant, and a few weeks later it is dry.”

He took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven . . . Whether or not He had before this moment mentioned His intention to multiply the food miraculously, His pantomime speaks eloquent volumes. **Looking up to heaven** certainly draws everyone’s attention to the Heavenly Father as Provider, giving Him glory before eating at His table as in His presence. (1 Co. 10:31; Ro. 14:6) But it also argues for that openness with which Jesus the Son could communicate with the Father, as if He were just looking right into the Father’s face. (Cf. Jn. 11:41; 17:1) **He blessed:** Matthew used *blessed (eulôgesen)* without an object that would indicate what Jesus blessed, a usage which might be better rendered: “He gave thanks and praise.” (Arndt-Gingrich, 322) However, if the food

be inferred as its object, as in fact Luke states (*eulògesen autoùs*), Jesus' prayer in reference to the food is the typically sacerdotal act of every believer who eats his meals with thanksgiving, and so consecrates it by the word of God and prayer. (Cf. 1 Ti. 4:3, 4) John (6:11) speaks of Jesus' prayer as a remarkable giving of thanks (*eucharistésas*), remarkable because worth mentioning again as having importance in the working of the miracle. (Cf. Jn. 6:23) Jesus' thanksgiving, however, is not faked: He was glad to receive this simple fare from the Father's hand. Certainly He would and could do more with it than any other man, but this does not detract from the sincerity and simplicity with which He depends upon the Father's provision and power. HERE is the power and secret of faith: that open-hearted, confident dependence upon God, that giving God glory before the people. (Contrast Numbers 20:1-12.)

But is it necessary, or even possible, without debasing the Gospel writers, to affirm so confidently, with Cuminetti (*Matteo*, 216) that

it is impossible to deny an allusion to the Eucharist, especially if attention is given to the words *looking up to heaven, He pronounced the blessing and broke the bread and gave it to the disciples*, (v. 19) desumed certainly from ancient liturgical formulae?

Even McMillan's comment (*Mark*, 85) assumes this connection as proved:

The terminology closely approximates the last supper (Mk. 14:22). Either the incident has been retold to bring out its anticipations of the Lord's Supper, or the actions of Jesus were familiar things which he then endowed with new significance in the last supper.

And yet, there is absolutely nothing in this text that could be explained as indicating any direct connection with the Last Supper except the coincidental similarity of Jesus' taking food and praying. The words cited by Cuminetti are completely explicable, not only in terms of habitual actions of Jesus, but especially in terms of the normal way a master of the house acts in two similar situations, by giving a benedictory prayer and beginning to share the food with his guests. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, I, 683)

He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. "And he divided the two fish among them all, as much as they wanted." (Mk. 6:42; Jn. 6:11) Trench's excellent apologetic

Notes on the Miracles (167) bears repeating:

This miracle, even more than that of the water changed into wine, when we endeavor to realize to ourselves *the manner* of it, evermore eludes our grasp, and baffles imagination. Nor is this strange; for indeed, how can it be possible to bring within forms of our conception, or in thought to bridge over the gulf between not-being and being, which yet is bridged over in every creative act? And this being so, there is no force in the objection . . . against the historical truth of this narrative, namely, that "there is no attempt by closer description to make clear in its details the manner and process by which this wonderful bread was formed." It is true wisdom, to leave the indescribable undescribed, and without so much as an attempt at the description.

Indeed, would not the critics pick at the description too?

When Jesus multiplied *the bread and fish*, however superior the quantity, the multiplied food remained *bread and fish*, i.e., the same delicious, however common, food it was. He could have created a feast of the finest delicacies. Is there something to learn here?

1. Contentment with the fare we receive from the Father by whatever means He chooses to provide it?
2. A principle of parsimony in miracles? That is, the miracle involved only what was strictly necessary to achieve the purpose for which it was done. For example, it was not produced in monstrous excess of the actual need: only twelve baskets of left-overs. It was not brought down miraculously from heaven: Jesus broke it Himself. Nor was it miraculously distributed: the Twelve had to do the leg-work.

The disciples gave them to the multitudes: the waiters at this banquet are none other than those reasonably successful miracle-working evangelists who had so stirred Galilee! (See note on 14:16.) Certainly, the food distribution was most easily handled by a few men directed by Jesus as fast as He multiplied the food, but were the mere mechanics of efficient distribution what interested Jesus? Did He not, rather, desire that the implications of their lack of vision and faith, and the implications of His presence and power dawn upon them? But note how He honored His men by making them respected co-laborers with Him, even though their faith was sagging. This notwithstanding, they were generously rescued from embarrassment and despair without a certainly deserved word of

rebuke from Him: what mercy!

Did the Twelve use the baskets, later so useful in collecting the leftovers, to distribute the food in the first place? This is more likely than that each disciple used only his hands to carry what he could to the hungry people in hundreds of trips.

To be able to increase the physical quantity of molecules of bread so as to feed such a multitude to satisfaction is to exercise the power of the Creator Himself. Anyone who could do this could have created a world out of nothing. Even if we could not witness that creation, this one, however, gives us a glimpse at what it means to possess nothing less than full creative power. Who is this Man who enjoys such power?

14:20 **And they all ate, and were filled.** All four Gospel writers lay stress on the abundance of the sandwiches: everyone had all he could eat. (Jn. 6:11; cfr. *echortàsthesan, eneplésthesan*) This means second and third helpings: no miserliness here. What a contrast to Philip's estimate that a large purchase of bread would be insufficient "for each of them to get a little!" (Jn. 6:7) What a contrast to Andrew's pessimism: "But what are they among so many?" (Jn. 6:9) These people had been waiting all day to eat too! What a travesty on truth to suggest, with some, that the miracle consisted merely in making a small amount of food seem enough for them to nourish them sufficiently to arrive clear home! This kind of comment clearly ignores the witnesses and their unequivocal testimony.

At this point Jesus ordered the re-collection of the left-overs (*tà perisseúsanta*). Several motivations for this move suggest themselves:

1. His major purpose is stated: "that nothing be lost." (Jn. 6:12) Merely because He could endlessly multiply miracle-food is absolutely no reason for wastefulness of even the left-overs! Lenski (*Matthew*, 567) reminds that "some people always take too much. So here, some took pieces from the disciples of which they could not take even a bite, being so filled." Plummer (*Luke*, 245) notes that details of this character guarantee against the possibility that the entire story is a deliberate fiction or a myth, because of the incongruity of representing "one who could multiply food at will as giving directions that the fragments should not be wasted (Jn. 6:12). The possessor of an inexhaustible purse is never represented as being watchful against extravagance."
2. Further, be it a result and not a prime motive, it is a fact that *twelve baskets full* of sandwich makings are take-home evidence

that the miracle was real and abundant. After seeing those brimming baskets, no one could sneer that Jesus had made "just enough," but certainly could have made no more!

The *baskets* in question (*kôfinos*) were the picnic variety used by Jews on a journey to carry kosher food to avoid purchasing ritually unclean food from pagans. Such baskets were thought by the latter to be characteristic of Jews, as illustrated by the following quotations collected by Plummer (*Luke*, 245):

Juvenal: ". . . the Jews whose equipment is a basket and some hay." (*Sat.* iii. 14)

Martial: ". . . thou, Gellia, hast married a basket-carrier (=Jew)" (*Epig.* v. 17. 4)

As is clear from these pokes at the Jews, such satire would be impossible if the majority of the audience did not instantly recognize the basis of these jokes, were it not characteristic of the Jews to carry such baskets.

3. Lenski (*Matthew*, 568) suggests that the *twelve baskets full* were intended for the Apostles themselves, because, having fed all the others, they may now finally sit down around Jesus with ample provision for their needs. All they had shared with others had, by Jesus' power, now returned to them with interest, and by that same supernatural might, they could still share this food with thousands more, if need be, and give God thanks.
4. The *twelve baskets full* were probably carried by twelve red-faced men who had earlier balked at the seemingly impossible challenge: "You give them something to eat!" with no more real working materials than their own faith in God's miraculous power and a handful of sandwiches. They finished the evening with more groceries than they started with, and ironically, at the beginning, even with Jesus present, even with their own miracle-working power, they had dared to think that they had nothing! Compare their lack of confidence with the quiet reliance of Elisha. (2 Kg. 4:42-44)

14:21 And they that did eat were about five thousand men, besides women and children. Why bother to take a count even for the record?

1. In order to furnish the reader an adequate conception of the magnitude of this miracle. It is noteworthy that Luke and John mention the massive numbers during the conversation between Jesus and the Twelve at the time of their disturbance over their lack of resources. It would seem that these Gospel writers chose

that moment to indicate the greatness of the crowd to impress the readers with the magnitude of the PROBLEM to be solved. Matthew and Mark, on the other hand, apparently reserved mention of the number until the close, in order to present the greatness of the SOLUTION.

2. The count is perhaps recorded, in order to forestall doubts about the miracle's real occurrence, because Matthew cites how many male witnesses were present and qualified to testify to its reality. The very astronomical nature of the number challenges the dubious reader to begin immediately to seek out some of these men for an on-the-spot verification of the account. That many available witnesses and so precise a figure become powerful psychological stimuli to begin checking into the whole story of Jesus of Nazareth.
3. By counting only the men, the Gospel writers deliberately understate their evidence, and the resultant psychological effect on the reader is far more stunning upon reflection: if the women and children were omitted from the count, then the exact total must be considerably greater than 5000. The result (or was it purpose?) of mentioning only the men as *they that did eat*, is the disarming of any critics who would diminish the magnitude of the miracle by alluding to "the eaters" as a cluster of dainty women and little children who could manage on far less than hungry men.

14:22 **And straightway he constrained the disciples to enter into the boat, and to go before him unto the other side, till he should send the multitudes away.** The reader of only Matthew and Mark would find quite inexplicable this urgency of Jesus that pushes His inner circle of disciples to embark, leaving Him on the land alone with the crowds. John furnishes the precious explanations:

1. "When the people saw the sign which He had done, they said, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'" (Jn. 6:14) "And so the Baptist's last inquiry, 'Art Thou the Coming One?' was fully and publicly answered, and that by the Jews themselves." (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 685) This confession which apparently swept the crowd was formerly the very faith Jesus had sought to establish, yet its content was so badly confused about what the Messiah and His Kingdom should be, that He could not but respond negatively to their eagerness by hurrying them to leave for home.

This popular inference, perhaps even grounded in a tradition that the Messiah would feed Israel with bread from heaven (Cf.

2 Baruch 29:8; Sibylline Fragment 3:49; see Edersheim, *Life*, I, 176) was no surprise to Jesus, because He had deliberately planned for it. Everything had conspired together to lead people to this conclusion. Nevertheless, grounded as it was on good, undeniable evidence, it would prove the damnation of most of those who made it. They did not take the next step: "If He be The Prophet, let Him teach us! Whatever He says, however strange, disagreeable or untraditional, we will submit, because His message is the voice of our God who sent Him!" Their shallowness is measurable in the inconsistency between this confession made in the heat of popular enthusiasm one day, and their rejection of His doctrine on the next. (Cf. Jn. 6:25-66)

While their confession is grand enough for what they think they are saying about Jesus, they probably did not see that in this miracle He acted as the Lord of nature, multiplying its elements to supply the needs of His people.

2. "Perceiving then that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king . . ." (Jn. 6:15) These wrong-headed messianic king-makers not only burned to see the Messianic Kingdom materialize; they were clamoring to make it materialistic! The Passover festival to take place shortly in Jerusalem nicely suited their plans for a triumph in the capital with Jesus as their Messianic King, acclaimed by these paschal pilgrims thoroughly excited and ready to march in His cause at a moment's notice.

Send the multitude away had been the disciples' advice (14:15) based on their ignorance of Jesus' intentions and power. Now, precisely because the Lord knows His own mind, He **MUST** *send the multitudes away*. This literal dismissal has the force of a symbol, because, due to the motives for which He sends them away, He personally marked the climax of the popular enthusiasm for Him. His refusal to accept the Zealot crown is, in their estimation, to commit political suicide, to ruin His image by extinguishing the hopes of all who, in sympathy with the nationalistic liberation party, had been expecting the Messiah to play the role of a God-sent neo-Maccabean to deliver Israel from all oppressors, establish a state that would rule the world and bring unprecedented wealth and glory to Israel. That He actually intended to drive away the unwilling and the unthinking is evident from His handling of a majority of these same people the next day in His Sermon on the Bread of Life in Capernaum, where, almost systematically, He unmasked their crassly materialistic reasons

for following Him, and bared the hard spiritual realities of His real Messiahship. (Jn. 6:25-66; cf. Ro. 16:18) Nevertheless, this attempt to make Jesus a political king will explain many of the unusual attempts to avoid publicity, His trips to foreign areas and deserted zones, and His desire for privacy. (Cf. Mt. 16:20; 17:9; Mk. 7:24, 36) In fact, although Matthew does not affirm it, this incident marks the acme and end of His great popularity with the Galilean crowds.

Jesus' reaction to the turbulent fanaticism was rapid and decisive: He instantly dampened all enthusiasm in three lightning moves:

1. He ordered the sudden sailing of His disciples to separate this precious nucleus from the well-nigh overpoweringly passionate enthusiasm of the crowds.
2. He calmly but decisively dismissed the crowds.
3. He hiked up into the hills alone.

Without violence, in this one unhesitating move He saved His disciples, avoided the wrong crown and made no one particularly angry. After all, the picnic was over and it was time to go home anyway.

Till He should send the multitudes away sounds like the Twelve were to await His arrival at the beach after the dismissal, and as suggested at 14:24, they may have so interpreted it. However, He had not specified HOW or WHEN He would rejoin them, so there is no promise implied here that Jesus did not keep, because He DID rejoin them before they could arrive at their destination anyway.

However, the Apostles sailed because of sheer obedience, not because what He required of them made any sense. After all THIS was the moment for which they had prayed, the moment when He would accept the Messianic Crown and popular acclaim, and proclaim the Kingdom. Instead, if He sends them away in a boat this way, they will miss it all! Yet their obedience is remarkable for its reality, despite their seemingly justifiable reasons to do anything but what He ordered.

IV. JESUS' PRAYERS

14:23 He . . . **sent the multitudes away**, and, in fact, most of them did depart outright. Nonetheless, some lingered around the area overnight, hoping to encounter Him as He returned from His mountain vigil. Next morning, when He did not appear, they boarded some boats from Tiberias to sail for Capernaum in search of Him.

(Jn. 6:22-25)

In the meantime, however, **He went up into the mountain by himself to pray.** (Cf. Lk. 6:12) From the plain at a level nearly equal with the surface of the Sea of Galilee, the hills that form the backdrop for the plain would seem like mountains seen from below. In fact, the Bashan hills rise nearly 3000 feet above the surface of the lake. *To pray* nearly all night, i.e., from the fall of darkness when He sent the crowds away, until sometime after three in the morning. (14:25) McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 132) is so right to rebuke our surprise that the Son of God should spend so much time in prayer, since our astonishment only measures our ignorance of the life of Jesus, and our under-valuation of prayer.

About what Jesus prayed the text does not say, but did He not mention . . .

1. **THE WANTON WICKEDNESS OF THE ENEMY:** Could He have released all His bottled-up emotions about the assassination of John? Who could not grieve when the holiest man in all Israel, the very messenger of Javeh, Jesus' own cousin, had been ruthlessly chopped down in his prime by the wicked?
2. **WRESTLING WITH HIS OWN SOUL:** Would He not also have prayed for more self-discipline to withstand the temptation to accept an earthly crown and plunge personally into campaigns to right earth's wrongs, and vindicate John? John's death for righteousness only brought the cross more vividly before the Lord Himself. How real this was becomes more evident in His somber allusion to Judas Iscariot whose character, Jesus knew, all too well matched Satan's designs and who would betray Him. (Jn. 6:64, 70f) Next day in His scandalous sermon on the Bread of Life, He would exclaim, "The bread which I shall give for the life of the world is MY FLESH! (Jn. 6:51)"
3. **WEAKNESS OF HIS DISCIPLES:** Surely He interceded for His tiny nucleus of disciples who were so exposed to His same temptations. The passionate patriotism of the nationalists could not but touch these disciples too whereinssofar they shared those ideals. If the motives that once moved Simon the Zealot to cast his vote for violent revolution should infect the entire apostolic group, Jesus could see all His efforts to establish a spiritual Kingdom mercilessly wrecked from within.
4. **WORLDLINESS OF THE CROWDS:** And was there no prayer that the mind of people, blind to the spiritualness of His teaching

and Kingdom, should be opened to the realities He had tried so hard to depict? Was He even then rehearsing the thoughts that would burst forth in that career-ending sermon to be preached the next day in one mighty push to drive them, in despair, to request explanations as would real disciples?

5. WAITING UPON THE FATHER: But all these prayers—and more—keep His mind centered on the great God before Whom all human praise, honors, powers and crowns fade into insignificance. Was it only during the Gethsemane experience that He “offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death” or in which “he learned obedience through what he suffered”? (Cf. Heb. 5:7-9)

V. JESUS' POWER

14:24 But the boat was now in the midst of the sea, distressed by the waves; for the wind was contrary. The boat did not arrive *in the midst of the sea* instantly upon the disciples' embarking and setting sail. In fact, John (6:16-18) recounts the disciples' hesitation that caused them to dally offshore, perhaps debating whether they should wait on Jesus' arrival or not. His demand that they sail for Capernaum had been clear enough, but His words had apparently not indicated whether or not they were to wait for Him offshore until He should have dismissed the crowds, in order to be free to come aboard and sail with them. The expression, “It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them” (Jn. 6:17b), suggests that, whereas they had decisively embarked in the general direction of Capernaum, they may have been hugging the eastern shore, scanning the plain for any indication of His arrival. But then it became too dark to see, and there was nothing left to do but obey His specific order to sail—with or without Him. Their expectation was mistaken, because He intended to pray alone. Even if they had been correct, their dallying offshore would have encouraged the crowds to believe that Jesus intended to embark as well, thus encouraging some to hang around Him until He did, thus slowing their eventual dispersing in the dark toward their homes. (Cf. Jn. 6:22)

The expression, *in the midst of the sea*, has been corrected by textual editors to “The boat was already many stadia from the land,” which agrees with John's remark shortly afterward: “When they had rowed about 25-30 stadia,” or roughly three or four miles on a

lake that is but six miles wide. (Cf. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 37) "The sea rose because a strong wind was blowing" (Jn. 6:18), out of the northwest, *for the wind was against them* as they sailed northwest toward Capernaum from the supposed site of the miracle of the loaves on the eastern lake-shore plain. (Jn. 6:17) The next day they disembarked south of their destination, at Gennesaret on the mid-western shore. (Mt. 14:34) Some mistakenly think the wind was out of the east-north-east and that it blew the ship in a south-westerly direction toward Gennesaret, for which explanation they must argue that the disciples were rowing eastward to keep themselves near the eastern shore to meet Jesus, but that the wind eventually nullified their efforts. (Cf. G.A. Frank Knight, *PHC*, XXIII, 245) This view pictures the disciples as never really attempting to go to Capernaum-Bethsaida, hence inexplicably insinuates an insipient disobedience to the Lord's specific orders to do so, excusing them for loving the Lord while disobeying Him. For a description of a storm similar to that faced by the Apostles, see Johnson-DeWelt, *Mark*, 184f, and notes on Matthew 8:24.

Sailing, at this point, against such a wind *and beaten by the waves*, was out of the question, so they turned to the oars. Their best efforts notwithstanding, "the disciples were straining at the oars" (*basanizoménous en tō elaúnein*, Mk. 6:48) or, battered in rowing, because the boat was battered by the waves (Mt. 14:24: *basanizōmenon*).

As Bruce (*Training*, 126) believes, if these men thought this literal storm terrible, they had yet to experience another spiritual hurricane the next day when they were to watch the fickle crowds who had the day before attempted to crown Jesus their Messianic King, turn abruptly away from in shock, disappointment and disgust. This sudden and violent apostasy would require gargantuan effort on the part of the Twelve to maintain their own headway against the waves of unpopularity and unbelief.

14:25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking upon the sea. The Romans divided the night guard-duty into four watches of three hours each, beginning at 6:00 p.m., thus *the fourth watch* ran from 3:00-6:00 a.m. So, calculating that the Twelve had actually started across at just after sunset, and that they had made no more than three or four miles by three o'clock in the morning, we must conclude that they had fought that storm for no less than six or seven hours, and probably more! This is obedience, because these men, accustomed to such storms, could well have turned the boat to run with the wind: their whole trouble was caused

by their insistence (in obedience to Jesus) in continuing against the wind. Their loyalty to Jesus kept them rowing. However, their fatigue was even greater, because of the lack of proper food and rest that had occasioned their escape from Capernaum, and because they had worked steadily with Jesus at least since their arrival at the scene of the multiplication of the food. These factors help to explain their reactions to what follows.

Why did Jesus come to them, *walking upon the sea*? Merely to take a short cut across the sea, rather than walk around the land?

1. Jesus decided to help them in their plight, because, as Mark (6:47, 48) describes the scene: "When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and He was alone on the land. And HE SAW that they were distressed in rowing . . ." The reader must ponder how that could be humanly possible if Jesus did not use superhuman vision.

Two factors must be remembered here:

a. At Passover time the moon is full, lighting the entire lake.

During the period March-April the Tiberias area sees an average of only eight rainy days. Besides, the storm wind does not necessarily presuppose any clouds to obscure the bright moonlight.

b. Further, Jesus stood on an excellent point for observing the entire scene: the hills into which He had retreated after dismissing the crowds are the same hills used as observation points by Arab gun spotters on the Golan Heights in the Arab-Israeli wars.

In the same way that He saw the need of the multitudes and had compassion upon them, now, rather than send an angel to help them or calm the storm from where He was, compassionately He chose to come to them through the tempest Himself.

2. Their very circumstances furnished Him the opportunity to demonstrate even further His essential Deity in a manner, however incomprehensible, that was absolutely undeniable and real. Though the masses think of Him as some great Messenger come from God, His immediate disciples must know Him as the indisputable Lord of Nature. They need to understand that what Jesus can do with the molecules of five buns and two sardines, He can do with the molecules of a roaring sea beyond their control. In the one case He multiplied them; in the other He transformed them into a walkway that supports His weight. This nature miracle, like the transformation of water into wine, must lead them to conclude that He who comes to them, making the water support Him as

would any terrestrial surface, can be only He who created the seas and the dry land in the first place.

He came to them, walking on the sea. The only alternative to accepting this crisp, simple sentence as the expression of a historical miracle that actually occurred is either to deny the total history, because the witnesses are impugned as incredible, or follow those who, like Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 117) profess inability to decide whether a miracle occurred here or not. He argues that, since the Greek expressions *epì tês thalâsses* and *epì tèn thâlassan* CAN mean the same thing, i.e., "upon the sea" or "on the sea," or also "at the sea," "over the sea," or "towards the sea" respectively, and since *peripateîn* means "to walk, walk around," he concludes that Jesus walked around the head of the lake, saw the boat fighting the waves and came down toward the shore to help. Walking through the surf on the shore and the waves toward the boat, He came so suddenly upon them that they were terrified when they saw Him. While admitting that the above-mentioned Greek expressions may also describe a miracle in which Jesus actually walked on the water, he affirms that whatever interpretation of the Greek is chosen, it does not matter. While his own comments on Peter's walking on the water quite ignore the problem, that very incident is described in Scripture in such a way as to remove every ambiguity and reflect back on Jesus' walk on the waters. That disciple requested permission to "come to you upon the waters" (*eltheîn pròs sè epì tà hùdata*). Then he, too, "walked about on the water" (*periepâtesen epì tà hùdata*). Here it is clearly impossible for a disciple sitting in the boat some distance from any shore to "walk around . . . towards the water!" It is dubious translation or interpretation to presume two distinct meanings for the same words in so close a context unless moral or material considerations render identical translation impossible. Worse, such an interpretation as Barclay's ignores the eyewitnesses' location of the boat in the middle of the lake. Further, it ignores Jesus' intention to "pass by them" (Mk. 6:48): why should He do this, if, according to the theory, He was coming to help them? Again, it is everywhere presumed that Peter, in requesting to go meet the Lord, wanted to do precisely what he saw the Lord doing, and that, upon the Savior's invitation, he actually did so until the moment when his fear of the new element in which he found himself broke his confidence in Jesus and down he went. If he were only wading toward a shallow beach, he was in no need, no real trouble and needed no faith at all to do what Jesus

did. Therefore, Jesus' rebuke of his little faith is out of order. Finally, the Apostles' reactions to the whole scene is life entirely without explanation, were there no miracles here. (14:33; Mk. 6:51f)

14:26 How long had these men ardently desired Jesus to be with them as they battled the waves during that interminable night? Suddenly, **the disciples saw him walking on the sea**, and, ironically, their reaction to what they thought they saw was anything but relief. However, for a group of men caught in a potentially disastrous sea-storm at night, struggling at the oars to keep their boat afloat and make any headway against adverse winds, fatigued by their lack of rest for all the hours spent fighting the storm, their reaction to Jesus' appearance is quite natural: **they were troubled, saying, It is a ghost; and they cried out for fear.** Their fear is real, given the state of emergency: they are physically exhausted, unnerved by the persistence of the tempest, hampered by the darkness, when suddenly, unexpectedly someone sights the incredible, but perfectly visible, form of something or someone moving toward them on the water. Our condescending toleration of "their ignorance and superstition" is a comfortable criticism made in the tranquillity of our study, but shows little sensitivity for what real men felt in that careening boat.

The observation made about Jesus' ability to see the disciples' struggles with the storm (at 14:25 regarding Mk. 6:48), also permits us to see how **the disciples saw Him walking on the sea.** In the half-light of the paschal moon they could make out a shadowy figure striding across the waves, perhaps rising with each crest, drawing ever closer (Jn. 6:19). Mark's puzzling remark, "He meant to pass by them," has been variously interpreted:

1. He did it so that in their terror they would not abandon the ship to escape from this unnameable terror, and so drown before He could calm their fears. So, He did not approach the boat directly, but only on a parallel course.
2. Foster (*Middle Period*, 170) sees this tactic as showing Jesus to be perfectly independent of the boat in every sense. He is not saved by them: it is He who must save them.
3. Plummer (*Matthew*, 208) sees it as His desire to cause them to feel their need to cry to Him for help. He does not automatically help until they have identified in Him their only help.

Naturalistic attempts to discount this eyewitness account proceed by various routes:

1. By supposing that Jesus walked merely on the land, but it SEEMED

to the disciples that He walked on the sea itself, because they were closer to the land than they thought. (Cf. Jn. 6:21) However, is it credible to believe that they could make out the dim figure of a man walking along the shore, and yet be unable to distinguish the land itself on which he walks? Could they have been close enough to him to communicate with him and yet be unable to measure their distance to the shore with reasonable accuracy? For the interpretation of Jn. 6:21, see on Mt. 14:33. Further, if by "the fourth watch" we are not to understand its beginning, i.e., around 3:00 a.m., but, rather, its middle or end, i.e., around six o'clock, then predawn light may have permitted even better visibility, hence, more than ever precluding the possibility of honest error.

- To accept the conclusion that a myth about a miraculous walking on the sea could have grown up around so common an experience as walking along the shore is to admit an absurdity greater than the hypothesis of the story's truth. Further, the myth-hypothesis leaves Peter's walk (in, at, near, or toward?) on the water completely without either justification or explanation.
- 2. By supposing mass hallucination: "they all saw him, and were terrified." (Mk. 6:49, 50) Men in this state of mind, it is said, would not have been calm, objective observers of the phenomena, and the excited shout of one could easily suggest to the others the subjective vision of something that, objectively, just was "not there." However, supposing the other details of this account to be true, which is perhaps asking too much of some critics, the detail about Peter's failure to walk all the way to Jesus on the water is left unexplained, as is also their embarking at the conclusion of Peter's walk with Jesus. Do hallucinations become so concrete as an additional Passenger in the same boat, whose very presence could be verified at will?
- 3. By supposing that the disciples, by their cry: *It is a ghost!* reveal an ignorance and superstition that would disqualify them as observers prepared to identify and report this strange phenomenon. (Cf. Lk. 24:37; Ac. 12:15) Several answers may be suggested:
 - a. The Evangelist reports them as shouting, as their first reaction, a hypothesis which was subsequently discredited by the facts. Had they first shouted, "It is the Lord!," we might have had more reason to suspect their psychological reaction, for, in that case, they would not have examined the possibility that they

- were themselves subject to the fear of ghosts. But, because they themselves eliminated the ghost-hypothesis, suggesting it as their most natural explanation, we do not have to suggest it.
- b. Only the determined antisupernaturalist (who is himself biased by that position) could fail to admit that the Apostles had, in their national historico-theological literature, Scriptural antecedents for seizing upon this explanation of that eerie figure moving across the waters now along side them. (Cf. 1 Sam. 28:8-20; Job 4:12-16)
 - c. Nor is it a necessary disqualification of the observer when he experiences terror without explanation when some unearthly figure appears to him. (Cf. Dan. 10:5-11; Rev. 1:17; Lk. 1:11, 12, 26-30; 2:9, 10) Rather, the terrified observer compromises his credibility when he DENIES his fear. Whatever the Twelve thought about the phantasms of others (cf. Wisdom 17:3, 14), their own immediate circumstances offered no direct explanation when they find themselves confronted with the weird figure now before them.
 - d. Finally, were the above-mentioned objection of real weight, is it likely that the early Christians (not to say: Matthew too) bent on glorifying the Apostles by the creation of myth around them, should have left in their tradition what to critical minds must reduce them here to "ignorant, superstitious men," unless this experience were so unquestionably authentic that no amount of Christian whitewash could cover their embarrassment? So; the accusation of disqualification because of the Apostles' cry of "Ghost!" is surprising evidence of the historicity of the account, since, as they recount it, they must objectively and dispassionately include what, to the critics, must appear a defect.

Whereas the expression, *It is a ghost*, implies to the English reader that the Twelve thought they were beholding a disembodied spirit, however, *ghost* translates *fantasma*, a word used by the Greeks to express several ideas. It means "a phantasm, a false appearance, a specter; a vision, a product of phantasy, as in a dream; celestial phenomenon; a prodigy, a portent; a reflection (as in water); a semblance, an apparition; an image, a phantom" (Rocci, 1941) Which of these is nearest to the mentality of the Apostles in this instance?

1. The manner itself in which He approached them explains their bewilderment. They had never seen Him control the normal procedure of natural law in relation to His own body. Since the concept of His walking across the sea had never entered their minds, in the absence of any other rational explanation, they shout the first explanation that comes to mind. They might have meant no more than: "It is a marvel! It is a prodigy!"
2. Apparently everyone in Judaism believed in the reality of the spirit-world, except the Sadducees against whose position Jesus would both warn His disciples and later argue this point. (Cf. Ac. 23:6-9; Mt. 16:12; 22:23-33) It should not surprise anyone, therefore, that these Jewish Apostles should blurt out a perfectly Jewish explanation. It would, rather, be far more perplexing if they did not. In fact, for them, *fāntasma* may be equal to "spirit," *pneûma*. (cf. Lk. 24:37)
3. From the standpoint of the rebuttals previously suggested (under 3a-d) there need be no prejudice against the rendering "ghost," since the facts subsequently verified cleared up any misunderstanding this word might imply.

14:27 **But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.** He humanized even this stupendous miracle by His infectious good humor, greeting His friends, "Cheer up, boys, it's I Myself: no need for nervousness here!" Haggard eyes and worn muscles do not permit the most cheerful responses, but the Lord knew that the relief He brought them was capable of injecting adrenaline vigor into those tired bodies through a new positive excitement. He had not yet promised the end of their struggles, but they can take courage in His encouragement. When they recognized that familiar voice and could shout, not "It is a ghost!," but "It is the Lord!," their fear no longer had a basis, even though the wind continued to blast over the lake and the spray from the waves smashing the boat continued to dampen them.

VI. JESUS' PEOPLE

14:28 **And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the waters.** What a mad mixture of motives

must have pushed Peter to blurt out this impulsive request!

1. Was there none of that boyishness that, without calculating consequences or implications, always wants to try anything someone else is doing?
2. Was there also impatient joy to run meet his Lord after a night of anxiety in the face of death on the sea? (Cf. Jn. 21:7) This impetuous demonstration of affection is really welcome to Jesus. Its only fault is its failure to weigh the consequences of its reaction. His is a psychological rebound from utter despair and fear to the opposite extreme of reckless joy and confidence.
3. There must have been also the conviction that Jesus' power was sufficient to permit him to do exactly what the Lord Himself was then doing. This is real faith, because it awaits an order to overcome this natural impossibility, because it is fully convinced that Jesus' power to make him do it is only limited by His will that he do so.

In the larger picture of Peter, that includes also his doubt and failure, we have that "combination (so strange and yet so natural) of confidence in the Master and confidence in himself. There is the usual impulsiveness (partly good and partly evil) . . ." (Plummer, *Matthew*, 209)

From this standpoint, then, Peter's *If it is you . . .* does not mean to doubt Jesus' identity, but rather state: "Since it is you, Lord . . ."

Since there is no indication in the text that Peter is trying to outdo and outdare his fellow-disciples by leaping to a mightier proof of his faith than the others, it is better to leave this out of the picture. After all, Jesus does not, in His later reproof, make any comparisons, as, in fact, He had to do after Peter's denials. (Cf. Jn. 21:15-19 in contrast with Mt. 26:33-35) It is unfair to Peter to read his later boasts back into this text when in fact they are absent.

Some redactionists just cannot conceive of Matthew's including this story about Peter as an event containing tremendous teaching power, without any intention to glorify Peter also. Cuminetti (*Matteo*, 218) exemplifies this:

To Mark's account, Matthew adds three verses about Peter (vv. 29-31). Precisely because this attention is given to him, one cannot deny the important place Peter had in the primitive church, at least in the Judeo-Christian congregations; this will be confirmed by later passages in which Peter will appear as he

who speaks in the name of all the apostles (16:15-19, 22, 23; 17:24-27). However, another hypothesis cannot be excluded, that could easily be complementary to the one just mentioned: Peter is placed in the foreground because of his attitudes that set him forward as a prototype of the believer, full of enthusiasm and love for Jesus, however with an ever insufficient faith.

Is it not just as easy to interpret these same facts as tending to demythologize Peter the man and disarm any tendency to elevate him to honors belonging only to the Lord? In trying to ascertain any theological motive for this incident registered by Matthew alone, we should not overlook other possible apologetic motives:

1. Did he intend to show Jesus' power, not only to walk on the sea, and so reveal Himself as Lord of creation, but also His power to cause others to do it too? Great is the power to work miracles. Greater still is the power to confer power. (Cf. Notes on Mt. 10:1)
2. Was Matthew's intention for including Peter's walking on the water to show how Jesus' walk on the waves is to be understood, i.e., as a literal miracle, not otherwise? (See the naturalistic objections at 14:26.)

14:29 **And he said, Come!** Here is the gracious invitation given in response to a request for a sign of Jesus' identity based on the disciple's determination to trust Jesus, whereas the unbelieving Pharisees, attempting the same, were drowned! (Cf. Mt. 16:1-4) Admire the generosity of the Lord: He who could have foreseen Peter's failure of confidence in Him, still permitted His friend to share His divine power in this way. Jesus lost nothing of His uniqueness by letting Peter walk on the lake surface too, because He knew that the power to walk on the surface is one thing, while the power to cause others to do so too, is further evidence of His uniqueness and power. But even if these distinctions do not seem apparent, Jesus did not refuse Peter, saying, "No, stay in the boat, because if you walk on the water too, someone might think your power somehow equal to mine, and rob me of my proper glory!"

Further, as Lenski notes (*Matthew*, 573),

The faith which Peter manifests Jesus accepts and justifies. If it had not been true faith, or if wrong and foolish motives had prompted Peter, Jesus would never have given this command. Those who criticize Peter ought to see that their criticism really strikes Jesus who consents to Peter's proposal.

On the other hand, is it not possible that by this experience Jesus wanted Peter to learn his own character and his need for more dependence upon Jesus? If so, Peter's faith was not so well-developed as he supposed. Hence, the Lord consented to Peter's exposing his faith to this testing, to reveal to him the immaturity of his confidence in the Lord.

And Peter went down from the boat, and walked on the waters to come to Jesus. It takes courage to step out on a heavy sea. In fact, who could say, on the basis of Matthew's information whether the lake is not still in turmoil precisely as before Jesus' appearance walking on its surface? Lenski (*Matthew*, 571, 574) unnecessarily creates for Jesus a path level and smooth through the waves so that, whereas the boat is at first being pounded by the waves and roller-coasting, Jesus Himself is walking sedately on a level path through the waves. Then, accordingly, he sees the boat as entirely entering that calm path in front of Jesus, no longer wallowing as Peter calmly disembarked and started down the "path" toward Jesus, the "path" remaining calm while the lake still roared all around. But what is mistaken about seeing Jesus earlier, and now Peter too, as walking on the surface of the cresting waves with deep troughs that make walking difficult, even though Jesus' powerful will makes the surface to support their weight? It is more consistent with the data not to create such "paths":

1. It was when Peter saw the wind that he was afraid and began to sink (14:30), but if there had been a level path in front of him, the wind was not affecting at least this much of the sea.
2. However, the wind ceased only when they got into the boat. (Mt. 14:32; Mk. 6:51)

How and why did Peter *walk upon the waters*?

1. Was it PETER'S FAITH that worked the miracle by that power which Jesus had bestowed upon all the Apostles for their own evangelistic ministry? (Cf. Mt. 10:1, 8; Mk. 6:12f; Lk. 9:6) If so, his failure is perfectly understandable, even as was that of the nine Apostles who could not cast out the demon from the epileptic boy. (Cf. Mt. 17:16-21) The exercise of such power is entirely dependent upon the individual miracle worker's trust in Jesus (God), and where that confidence is weak or fails, for whatever reason, then he is unable to work the desired miracle. The Twelve had worked the same miracles as Jesus before. Here, then, Peter is seen doing the same miracle of walking on the water as does

the Lord, not, as we shall see, by his own independent power, but by faith-sharing what the Lord offers him of His own power. (Cf. Jn. 14:12)

2. Or, on the other hand, did JESUS' POWER instantaneously cause the water to support Peter's weight in direct proportion to Peter's trust in Him? Was it Jesus' will alone that intended to work the miracle of which Peter was only the passive, however confident, participant?

To raise these perhaps inappropriate questions is to begin to grasp the relationship between the power to work miracles of the Apostles and that of Jesus. Between the Apostles' faith and will to do the miracle there had to be a perfect collaboration with the power and will of Jesus. This, in turn, was affected by the Apostles' concentration upon what Jesus is, and what He could do through them. In other words, their confidence in Him predisposed their entire being to become a channel through which He could function, but their will expressed itself in stepping out of the boat onto the water, anointing the sick with oil, casting out the demons, etc. On other occasions, where Jesus was absent, prayer aided this concentration upon God (Jesus) from whom all power comes. (Cf. Mk. 9:29; Jn. 11:41-44; Ac. 9:40ff; however, other miracles do occur where prayer is not specifically mentioned.)

14:30 **But when he saw the wind** whipping the water into mountainous waves, **he was afraid**. Admit it: his experience was absolutely unique among men! It is one thing to brave a storm from the inside of a relatively safe fishing boat one had used all his life. It is quite another to brave the same storm walking right out on those same mountainous waves, exposed to its full fury. Put yourself in his sandals and step out of the boat yourself before criticizing his terror. See yourself too far from the boat to brace yourself and not yet near enough to the Lord to grab His hand. Look around at the next wave towering over you, and try to remember what it was you were going to say about Peter! It was not a mere taking his eyes off Jesus that occasioned his fright and failure, as if all depended upon staring at the Lord. His MIND was taken off the Lord by turning his ATTENTION to the dangers that whirled around him. It was this distraction that fixed his mind on the hazards, that left him dizzy, helpless and fearful. Was he thinking about how deep the sea must be at the very point where he was walking? At this moment, total, unquestioning confidence in Jesus was replaced with dependence upon

upon his own feeble powers. But Jesus' powerful will made the water solid only for Peter's confidence in Him and only in relationship to the reality and strength of that trust. So, when fear took faith's place, the conditions Jesus placed upon the miracle were no longer met, the solid sea surface under Peter's feet melted into its normal state, and down he went. (The foregoing is not an attempt to explain the mechanics or the physical processes involved in this miracle, because, how Jesus did it, the Scripture does not inform us. It is only an attempt to understand the relationship between confidence in God and the power to work miracles.)

Beginning to sink, he did not swim, even though he probably knew how. (Cf. Jn. 21:7) Rather, his instinctive reaction is that of a believer,—desperately afraid, but a believer: **Lord, save me!** His faith becomes clearer to us if we imagine him turning away from Jesus and trying to reach the safety of the boat.

14:31 **And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and took hold of him.** Lenski (*Matthew*, 576) makes the interesting suggestion that Jesus, in taking Peter by the hand, was not merely hauling him bodily out of the water. The fact that Peter was to walk with Jesus back to the boat on the water's surface indicates that he was to do so once again by faith in the power of the Lord. Therefore, says Lenski, Jesus did actually more than save Peter from going to the bottom. By His handgrip on Peter, He focussed Peter's attention entirely upon Himself, thus restoring in Peter that confidence which had been temporarily lost. As his confidence in the Lord's power is once again restored, so also the condition for which Jesus had originally exerted His power to help Peter walk on the waves.

Jesus' gentle rebuke is instructive for what He did not say: **O man of little faith** (not: "O man of no faith"), **why did you doubt?** (not: why did you attempt to come to me on the water?") Peter's mistake was not in boldly stepping out on faith when the Lord bid him do so, but in forgetting that his bold venture depended entirely upon the power and wisdom of Christ and his own unwavering confident dependence upon Him. Jesus sensitively points to the cause of Peter's trouble: "Your courage has already returned: your doubt is in the past; *why did you doubt?* You walked on these waves before doubt and fear of danger crowded out your courage. See, now that your confidence has returned, you are striding on their surface again. Because all things are possible to him who trusts me unreservedly, you, too, see that it was not impossible. In fact, everything depended on the steadiness of your nerve (= endurance and resolution.)

Little faith: cf. Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 16:8; 17:20; 28:17! These amazing references to the "little faith" of the early disciples stimulate us to understand that, though these people were unquestionably believers in Jesus at the intellectual level, their DEPTH OF CONFIDENCE in Him was far too shallow. This expression of faith is not that intellectual assent to evidence for the Messiahship and divine identity of Jesus that confesses Him as "Teacher come from God." (Cf. Nicodemus' attitude: while making this confession, he had not personally sounded the depths of his own conclusion. Jn. 3:1ff) Great faith, rather, is that unlimited confidence in His being able to do everything He leads us to believe He will, a confidence that surpasses our intellectual decision that He could do it, a certainty that permits us to do our part without distraction, regardless of the difficulties to overcome. Great faith, then, overcomes those mental reservations or psychological doubts about Jesus' (God's) care, power or willingness, once He has clarified what He desires. **Little faith**, then, still lives on the plane of the non-disciple in his concern with the worries of human beings unaided, uncared-for, unprotected by God's promises or Jesus' abilities. So doing, they bare their real confidence in their own, or in others' ability, care and wisdom. (See notes on Mt. 6:19-34; 8:10.)

Jesus did not rebuke Peter for daring more than the others, because, from the point of view expressed above, all Twelve Apostles, had they but so dared, could have confidently stepped out of that boat and walked to Jesus without a word of rebuke from Him. Hypothetically, their joining Him out there on the water could only have caused Him to exult in the depth of their reliance upon Him! In this sense, then, their remaining in the boat measures the limits of their vision, their confidence, their boldness, and, contemporaneously, exalts that of Peter. Jesus' rebuke, however, was intended to push Peter to reflect the next time. Bruce's sad comment is so appropriate (*Training*, 130):

But Peter was not to be made wise by one lesson, nor even by several. He would go on blundering and erring, in spite of rebuke and warning, till at length he fell into grievous sin, denying the Master whom he loved so well. The denial at the final crisis was just what might be looked for from one who so behaved at the minor crisis preceding it. The man who said, "Bid me come to Thee," was just the man to say, "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee both to prison and to death." He who was so courageous

on deck, and so timid amid the waves, was the one of all the disciples most likely to talk boldly when danger was not at hand, and then play the coward when the hour of trial actually arrived.

Defense of the account of Peter's walk on the water is the same as that for Jesus'. Either the whole story is to be embraced as historic fact, or it must be wrenched from the narrative as being totally false. It cannot be thought of as "a parable told for the spiritual lessons it contains, constructed entirely by some unknown editor of this Gospel quite unbeknown to the Apostle whose name it bears." Plummer (*Matthew*, 208) decides,

We have no means of knowing how the Evangelist became acquainted with the incident respecting Peter; but it was probably current among the circle of first Christians who had known Peter.

Was Matthew himself not in the very boat from which he personally witnessed the entire episode, and did he not record it in his Gospel? Plummer himself answers (*ibid.*, x):

The answer therefore to the question, Who was the author of the First Gospel? is a negative one. It was not S. Matthew. The writer was an early Jewish Christian, not sufficiently important to give his name to a Gospel, and in no way desiring to do so.

Such a position, based on the false presuppositions of modern critical schools, insinuates the doubtful authenticity of the report, hoping thereby to save the less problematic, or perhaps the more intellectually acceptable in the Gospel narrative for subjective faith, but the effort is vain. Although Plummer himself is assured that this narrative cannot be invention (*ibid.* 209), the seed is sown for doubting it. The position taken here is that of its perfectly tenable authenticity.

14:32 **And when they were gone up into the boat, the wind ceased.** John who omits Peter's walk on the water, adds here: "Then they were glad to take him into the boat" (Jn. 6:21: *éthelon oûn labeîn*, they desired to do so, and so did it. Cf. Jn. 8:44: *thélete poieîn*) Their previous terror of the ghostly figure has been completely replaced by the old familiar confidence in their Friend and Lord. How or why *the wind ceased*, or even its connection with the *time when they were gone up into the boat*, is not clear. Did Jesus rebuke the wind as He did on another occasion? (See on 8:23-27.) What is easily inferable is that the storm stopped because Jesus willed it. One more miracle is certainly not impossible after so many that day!

Even the comment at Jn. 6:21 that "immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going," reports what seems to be another miracle. However, this translation, while perfectly correct within itself, is ambiguous enough to leave the negative critic with a seemingly plausible argument for the conclusion that "the miracle happened near the shore and therefore was confused for a miraculous water crossing by a group of excited folk, or else elaborated by later myth-formation." Unless we are to conclude it as intentional fraud the earlier notice that Jesus approached the boat when it was "in the middle of the sea" (Mk. 6:47) "when they had rowed about three or four miles" (Jn. 6:19), hence many stadia from land in any direction (Mt. 14:24), then we must decide that the expression in question, "the boat was immediately at the land," refers only to a rapid arrival at the destination. Since John does not state nor necessarily imply a miracle, we are not obligated to affirm it. His language only suggests that, in contrast to the night-long fatigue of hard rowing into the wind, they were able to make such easy headway after the wind ceased, that it took practically no time at all to arrive in port. It is as if John were saying, "After our fatigue and fright, we took Jesus on board, and suddenly we were there!" John's telescoping must not be used against him, as if his testimony should be thought to contradict that of other witnesses.

14:33 **And they that were in the boat worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.** This confession by the Twelve, so rich in significance, is not the spontaneous invention of the moment. There had been precedents that must have surprised them, but remained in their minds and surfaced here as the men find in this experience reason to voice their conviction. (Cf. Jn. 1:49; Mt. 8:29) Did their present sea-storm experience remind them of the earlier trip on which Jesus calmed the tempest, after which the demoniacs addressed Him as "Son of God"? The similarity of situations may have evoked the details of the other incident and suggested the majestic reality couched in the demons' mysterious form of address.

The ASV translators are probably right to render the disciples' anarthrous confession (*alethôs theoû huiôs eî*) as they did: "the Son of God." Whereas it appears not to say, "You are THE Son of God" in the unshared sense intended by Peter later (cf. Mt. 16:16), nevertheless, when taken together with their mental attitude of worship when they said it, it leads to the conviction that they consider Him far more than a supremely godly man (= a son of God). However, their faith's foundation was less than it should have been, "for they

did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened." (Mk. 6:52) This is because all foregoing miracles, expressly that of the supernatural multiplication of food, should have prepared their minds to consider nothing Jesus did as utterly incredible, since they would have been emotionally and intellectually prepared to see not only miracles like His bold walking on the water or His masterful calming the sea, but even His majestic ascension into heaven. (Cf. Mk. 6:51; Jn. 6:62) "Their heart was hardened," in this case, is not a symptom of opposition to Jesus, or that obduracy we associate with determined unbelief. Rather, in light of their relative opportunities, they are surprisingly slow to perceive that He possessed all the power He needed to do anything He willed. The very conclusion to which these breath-taking miracles should lead, but unfortunately was not yet part of their understanding, is that in these mighty works He is acting as the Lord of creation, altering and using its elements for His purposes to help His people.

It is important to note that Mark's record of the disciples' slowness to comprehend is not mere theological redaction (*alla Wrede* and disciples!), but a strong guarantee of the narratives' historical truth. A mythical representation would not so quickly admit such damning evidence of the Apostles' slowness, were the editor's intention to glorify those men whose position in the early Christian congregations was almost next to their esteem for Jesus. Rather, their remarkable slowness to understand and grow in confidence is the more psychologically plausible as we consider how painfully parallel it is to our own. We would have been far more skeptical perhaps had we read of ready confessions, easily arrived at with no hesitations or doubts. Their slowness to understand not only encourages us in our toiling to understand too. It also gives us confidence in these records of real people with real problems even in the presence of the Son of God!

Despite the admittedly less-than-perfect understanding of the disciples, several technical details need also to be weighed into the picture before we decide the content of their confession:

1. Nouns that designate persons of which there is only one of a kind, and come very close to being a proper name, do not require the article to make them definite; the article appears when the specific Jewish or Christian God or Lord is meant, but it is sometimes missing, especially after a genitive which depends on an anarthrous noun (especially a predicate noun)

as in our case: *alethôs theôu huiôs eî*. (Cf. Blass-Debrunner, sec. 254, p. 133) From this standpoint, therefore, the disciples no more intended to say, "You are A son of God," than they meant, "You are a son of A God," because, for them, the absence of the article did not indicate a multiplicity of gods of which Jesus were a son.

2. The very addition of the genitive to modify a noun makes that noun definite, especially where a Semitic influence can be traced behind the Greek being used, because in Hebrew the noun governing a genitive would appear in the construction or with a suffix and hence would be without the article. The article is also omitted with the genitive noun in such cases (which was not required by Hebrew, but rather by Greek). (Cf. Blass-Debrunner, sec. 259, p. 135; However, see Robertson-Davis, 388.)
3. Colwell's rule, further, shows that definite predicate nouns which precede the verb usually lack the article. (See Robertson-Davis, 283; Blass-Debrunner, Sec. 273, p. 143.)
4. If "Son of God" would not seem unambiguously definite on the basis of the foregoing, it must be recalled that even the Jewish enemies of Jesus so considered it when applied to Him. (Cf. Mt. 27:40, 43; Jn. 10:36; 19:7) Perhaps they did it on the basis of Psa. 2:7 which is anarthrous too. (cited also in Ac. 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5.)

Therefore, *huiôs theôu* in the minds of these Apostles is as specific and definite as "God's Son" is in ours. (Lanski, *Matthew*, 578)

The very existence of this confession in a Jewish book raises the question whether the Twelve were hereby confessing Him to be "Messiah." Whereas the unique, unshared title "Son of God" speaks of a unique begetting by the Father, one of the concepts that is the stuff of Johannine theology, when found located here in a heavily Jewish apologetic, draws attention to its Jewish expectation as an appellative of the Christ. (Edersheim, *Life*, II, 716, demonstrates that Psa. 2:7 is quoted by the rabbis as Messianic.) But the distinction between "Son of God" and "Christ," as two separate titles for the same person, must be respected, since they refer specifically to two not necessarily connected aspects of His earthly mission: His unique generation and His anointing. Nevertheless, the net result of this confession for Matthew's Jewish readers is the conviction that here is one more convergence of reasons for considering Jesus in the way

His disciples confessed Him, i.e., as "God's Son" and worthy of worship. Later this same day, Peter gave fuller expression to this same confession. (Jn. 6:68, 69)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Why did Jesus go away to a desert place? List carefully all the various independent factors that led to this move.
2. What is a "desert"?
3. Where was this desert located?
4. Where was the city called Bethsaida? Which Bethsaida was this?
5. How did Jesus succeed in going to sit on a mountain to await the coming of the multitudes, if the crowd preceded them to the place? (Mk. 6:33)
6. In what likeness did Jesus see the crowds?
7. What did Jesus teach the crowd?
8. Who first mentioned the crowd's need for food?
9. What did the disciples advise Jesus to do with the hungry crowd?
10. How many people were there to feed?
11. How much food was found and brought to Jesus? Describe it.
12. Who found the food that was given to Jesus?
13. How did Jesus organize and carry out the feeding of so large a crowd?
14. How much bread was thought to be needed for such a crowd?
15. What was the reaction of the crowd to this miracle?
16. Why did Jesus send the disciples away *in a boat*? When did they leave?
17. Where did He tell them to go?
18. At what time of day did they leave?
19. What did Jesus Himself do after they left? Where did He do this?
20. What happened to the disciples on the sea? How far across the lake had the disciples travelled when this occurred?
21. How can we determine which way the wind was blowing that night?
22. What was Jesus doing when they next saw Him?
23. About what time was it when they saw Him?
24. What was their reaction to Him?
25. What did He first say to them?
26. What did Peter answer?
27. What did Jesus tell Peter to do?

28. What did Peter see that frightened him?
29. What uncomplimentary title did Jesus call Peter?
30. What did those in the boat call Jesus?
31. What amazed the disciples after Jesus got in the boat with them?
32. Why was this lake called "the Sea of Tiberias?"
33. What time of year did this event take place and what does this fact contribute to our understanding of specific details in the narrative?
34. Harmonize the variant accounts that describe the arrival of the crowds to the place to which Jesus led them for teaching, and, ultimately, the feeding of the people.
35. Give the evidences, drawn from the eye-witness testimony itself, that answer the purely naturalistic attacks which reduce the narratives of this miracle to common fiction, or legend, or worse.
36. List the facts or declarations made in this section that prove the supernatural identity of Jesus.

SHARING THE BREAD OF LIFE

A Non-expository Sermon

INTRODUCTION: Since Jesus Himself drew upon this event to present His message on the Heavenly Bread, in which He presented Himself as the Bread of Life to a dying world, we cannot be too far from the proper application of His teaching, if we see beyond the original, historical implications of the feeding of the multitude to grasp our part in His work of bringing His Life to a perishing world. The following message is NOT an explanation of the text, but an attempt at recognizing in our own situation our need to react as did He, but with the power He makes available to us.

I. JESUS' PROBLEM—OUR PROBLEM

14:13b **The multitudes . . . followed him:** what a picture of the heterogeneous mobs that compose our society! All of the sanctity, selfishness, sordidness and sadness that He faced comprises our society too.

14:14 **He had compassion on them, and healed their sick.** Until we too can sympathize with the world's pain and weakness among people whose misfortune to be sick or old or weak is held in contempt

by the young, the powerful, the rich, we will not, with Jesus, believe in the usefulness of the rejected refuse of society nor attempt to reclaim for God those individuals sacrificed to the claims and interests of an indifferent society, insensitive to anything but its own pleasures and programs. We will not readily enter into Jesus' ministry until the pathos of life is vivid to us, until we appreciate the multitude of broken, disordered, disappointed and disappointingly wretched lives, until we see how much of childhood gladness crumbles, time-worn with grief, until we understand how much sin ends in misery and death. Nor will we be of much use unless we KNOW and USE the power at our disposal in deeds of real helpfulness and Gospel proclamation that brings joy, light, order, confidence and peace with God and men.

14:15 And when even was come, the disciples came to him, saying, The place is desert, and the time is already past; send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves food. How often we are staggered by the magnitude of our task, the inadequacy of our means and the shortness of the time to act! How often, when looking into such an ocean of faces, we conclude that our wisdom and knowledge is totally inadequate to work all the renovation needed to save them! In our despair we too are tempted to send them away to others seemingly more qualified or reputedly better able to solve their problems.

II. JESUS PLAN—OUR PLAN

14:16 But Jesus said unto them, They have no need to go away; give ye them to eat. The Lord has ordered us to care for the spiritual nourishment of the world, and too often we forget the power at our disposal: the transforming power of divine truth! All the insight, sympathy, delicacy and preaching power we can muster can never be enough to effect the revolution needed. The most needed preparation of Jesus' servants for their world-wide ministry is their discovery that their own scanty resources are totally inadequate. Only thus can we be convinced to distribute from His inexhaustible supply.

14:17 And they say to him, We have here but five loaves and two fish. We too complain how little we possess for our task. Our Bible, for example, is so small in size, that it would seem to many as meager a resource as five barley buns and two sardines to feed thousands. Yet how many thousands upon thousands have been nourished thereby, and how many more it will feed until Jesus comes again, if only

shared with Jesus' blessing!

14:18 **And he said, Bring them hither to me,** With what is brought to Jesus, He works His miracle. In fact, He sets before each of us the tremendous responsibility of communicating His life and His message to men. However, He does not demand from us power, results and deeds that we cannot produce. He invites us, "Come to me as you are, however ill-equipped; bring to me what you have, however little, and I will use it greatly in my service." Little is always much in the hands of Christ. (Barclay, *Matthew*, II, 113) Jesus could save the world by quite other means than by its evangelization, by simply commissioning angelic messengers to speak peace to every last man on earth, or even more astonishingly, He could forcibly change each man's mind for him. But when we examine what God's word in His hands has already done, we cannot but appreciate His wisdom in choosing to do it this way.

III. JESUS' PRAYERS—OUR PRAYERS

14:19 . . . **He took the five loaves, and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed.** The Son of God glorified the Father as the Giver of the food, and, by reflex consequence of the miracle that followed, the Power behind it. Contrast Moses and Aaron's miracle of bringing water from the rock, who without prayer nor mention of God's Name, struck the rock. (Num. 20:1-12) Remember God's rebuke: "Because you did not believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the people of Israel . . ." Consider the disciples' impotence because of their little faith and prayerlessness. (Mt. 17:19, 20; Mk. 9:29) We, too, attempt great things for God, and yet we have not always the good sense nor the genuine confidence in Him to consider even the simplest blessings, as a means of achieving precisely the goal we seek. Nor do we always remember that all our greatest attempts are vain unless we actually glorify God in the minds of the people we attempt to bless by what we do.

IV. JESUS' PROVISION—OUR PROVISION

He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes. Jesus could Himself go into all the world with His saving Gospel, but He has chosen to use men, His disciples, as the channel to bless others. But these disciples must give to others only what they have first received from Him.

14:20 **And they all ate and were filled.** What a mixture of theologies, ideologies and ignorance constituted the mind of that group Jesus so generously helped! No limitations were placed on previous affiliation, no embarrassing questions, no demands were made that those needy people prove themselves worthy of His blessing. They only needed to recognize their desperate need and accept the provision He supplied them. His Word is inexhaustible to bless any one who willingly submits himself to devour its contents to fill the need of his soul.

14:21 **They that did eat were about five thousand men, besides women and children.** Even in the same way that more food was available at the finish than at the beginning of the meal, so also the more people the Gospel is made to feed, the more people can actually be fed, since the more people become disciples to feed thousands of others in an almost infinite multiplication of the power of the Gospel outreach!

CONCLUSION:

1. Rather than retreat behind lines of safety to conserve jealously what little reserves of Gospel power we suppose ourselves to possess,
2. Rather than use violent measures to drive away the unthinking, ignorant masses whose presence and failure to respond rightly to God's message not only embarrasses and frustrates us, but often outright hinders the work we are trying to do,
3. Let us plunge actively into the business of feeding the world with the Gospel means at our disposal.
 - a. We may not possess the same miracle-working potential Jesus shared with His Apostles and the early Christians.
 - b. But we can use every legitimate means at our disposal to make the Bread of Life available to the world. (Printing press, radio, television, conferences, conventions, evangelistic campaigns, personal witness, letters, etc.)
4. Are we praying in faith that God will work through us?
5. Are we exploring the use of every means that can be turned to useful service for God's glory?
6. Are we conscientiously and generously sharing with people what Jesus so unselfishly distributed to us?
 - a. Physical, material food, clothing and shelter, jobs and proper self-respect? God is concerned about men's bodies too!

- b. The problem-solving, soul-transforming victorious Gospel that alone can make men over again.

THE EMBATTLED CHURCH

A Non-expository Sermon

As with the preceding message, the following is NOT an explanation of the text, but a recognition of two parallel situations, one in the life of the Apostles, the other in our own ministry to Jesus. During that sea tempest, these disciples in that frail fisherman's boat constituted the heart of everything Jesus had accomplished on earth at the moment: His Kingdom and its future expansion, its victory or its failure were bound up in that small group straining at the oars, seemingly making no headway toward their ordered goal. Is not this a picture of the Church of Jesus Christ in the world today? Let us see how, out of their problems, come suggestions that help us to solve ours:

I. THE PROBLEM: DIFFICULTY IN OBEDIENCE

14:22 **And straightway he constrained the disciples to enter into the boat, and to go before him unto the other side, till he should send the multitudes away.** Often we, too, find ourselves where we do, because duty and love to Christ puts us there, even though everything is not clear to us. We question: "Why should we HAVE to live and work here without Jesus' personal presence?" Yet He has ordered us to set sail on our voyage to the port He indicated. Although we, too, long to be with Him immediately and forever, we embark and set sail, not because we understand His plans perfectly, but because HE is our Lord and He has given us this duty to perform.

14:23 **And after he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into the mountain apart to pray: and when even was come, he was there alone.** His very absence is part of our problem: Jesus seems to us quite far away, so far, in fact, that not only do we have only the slightest notion where He may be, but also it may seem that His absence itself is evidence of impassive indifference to our needs, our desires, our fears, our dangers and our prayers. But He is our Mediator, interceding on our behalf before the Father. (1 Ti. 2:5; 1 Jn. 2:1, 2; Jn. 14:16) He is busy preparing us a place in our Father's house. (Jn. 14:1-4)

14:24 **But the boat was now in the midst of the sea, distressed by the waves; for the wind was contrary.** Even though we have Christ's own orders under which we sail, we are not therefore exempt from danger and trouble. We too must battle the elements that constitute our life situation. Rather, we should expect such trials, because of the moral opposition that our very existence and preaching must arouse. (Jn. 15:18—16:4) Also, our physical and personal moral weakness will plague us until the final victory, even as those storm-tossed sailors fought their little faith and great fatigue that night.

II. THE SOLUTION: THE COMING OF THE LORD

In this solution to our problems, we see three elements that counsel patience and steadfast hope, despite the continuation of our trials:

A. THE CERTAINTY OF HIS CARE

14:25 **And in the fourth watch of the night he came unto them, walking upon the sea.** For good and sufficient reasons best known to Jesus, He does not always come to our aid when we most desire it, but rather in His own good time. It may be not only that He desires that we learn patience by the things we suffer. He may also see the need for time for certain situations to mature before He can answer our prayers as we prayed them. **BUT HE DOES SEE OUR NEED:** (Cf. Mk. 6:48 He DOES care and He WILL help! He is the Lord of difficulties, coming to us, walking over the very waves and against the same wind that so distressed us!

14:26 **And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a ghost; and they cried out for fear.** Too often we too form a stereotyped conception of the Lord and picture His help to us only in terms of this idea. Should He approach us in some way other than unmixed blessing, we do not recognize Him and become afraid. Should He come multiplying blessings, He is easily recognized and welcome, but somehow we suppose it cannot be the Lord if He arrives on the very waves of our misfortune. And yet it is He!

How often do others reduce Christ Jesus to a phantom, a delusion produced by a lively imagination and projected upon the minds of a gullible, superstitious mob! No longer the Son of God for them, His historical figure is little more than an unprovable, deliberate forgery, barely visible through the shimmering mists of legends, editorial

rewriting and pious misunderstandings. And yet it is He!

Far too often we do not recognize our truest Friend! We mistake Jesus for a jailed prisoner, a hungry, homeless, unhealthy beggar, unkempt and ill-clad, rather than welcome such as we would serve the Master Himself. (Mt. 25:31-46) Instead, we turn from them in disgust and horror, afraid to take them aboard our already battered craft. And yet it is He!

14:27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid. Suddenly the mask of the specter is ripped away, and He who seemed a terror greater than all the dangers of our existence, is no other than the Lord Himself! The earth and sea all around us continue to rage, but at the decisive moment all of this will be overcome by the cheerful, all-powerful word of the Lord of the Church. Everything will turn out quite differently from what we had feared, and certainly quite differently from all unbelievers supposed!

B. THE CONFIDENCE TO DARE

14:28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the waters. When the entire Christian experience is considered from a human standpoint, when the work of the Kingdom of God is evaluated, human judgment must pronounce the whole thing as impossible as walking on the sea. In fact, we labor for results that go beyond human nature and we utilize means that function beyond human reason. Heroic souls, however, have always risen spontaneously to the challenge to enter into Christ's walk and work and dare to do the impossible, just to be with Jesus in His. Peter did not sin by daring great, impossible things for the Lord, nor do we!

14:29 And he said, Come. And Peter went down from the boat, and walked upon the waters to come to Jesus. A caution is in order here against a danger in our boldness. Note that before Peter hazarded stepping out onto the water in faith, he awaited the Lord's specific permission, and yet some bold Christians, without waiting for Jesus' orders, presumptuously and rashly dash into situations, expecting the Lord to support them in their folly. This service is not a willingness, but a wilfulness, because He did not command it. Naturally, we must not expect the Lord to speak from heaven to each of us as He did to Peter on the sea. Rather, we must judge each particular case by the general directives indicated in His Word, using our

common sense to evaluate what He, in His wisdom, provides. Our decisions, contrary to the certainty of Jesus' call to Peter, will be far less certain, and about which we must be far more humble and cautious.

14:30 **But when he saw the wind, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord, save me.** We too, must severely count the cost of our decision to undertake the impossible with Jesus, before bouncing out of our relative security into the arena of His activity. We may not be able to foresee certain dangers and threats before they arrive, but the relative certainty that we **MUST** face them should forearm us to concentrate our attention and fix our dependence upon Jesus as we leap out to join Him. In fact, it was when Peter shifted his confidence from Jesus to his own frail powers that he went down. But risk we must, if we would attempt great projects for the Lord. But we must be assured that we are doing His bidding and not our own. Nevertheless, all our boldness will be to no avail, if after having dared the impossible in the name of Jesus in obedience to His call, our underlying confidence shifts from Him to human means and strength.

14:31 **And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and took hold of him, and saith unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?** The confidence in Jesus to dare great things for God is limited only by our concentration upon Him as the source of our power. All our activities for Him in this present age must be done out of confidence in His wisdom and might. Otherwise, nothing can be dared, or what is dared fails, because the bold ones, no less believers in Jesus than before, like Peter, place their confidence in anything else but Him. But thank God for the mercifulness of a Lord that restores our sagging strength and substitutes our misplaced confidence, and causes us to stand once again as we call upon Him!

C. PEACE AND JOY IN HIS PRESENCE:

14:32 **And when they were gone up into the boat, the wind ceased.** In answers to prayers, even now He comes to calm temporary storms. One day His majestic presence and lordly power will eliminate ALL that curses, He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for these former things have passed away!

14:33 **And they that were in the boat worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.** In the same way that this

deliverance from a raging sea convinced the Twelve even more of Jesus' divine identity than the miraculous multiplication of food for the 5000 in relative calm, sometimes rescue from sure death speaks more convincingly of God's power, divinity and tender care to the menaced person than even His more spectacular works seem to those who think themselves in no immediate danger.

Though now we walk by faith, living on hope, believing that Jesus will come to our rescue, one day He will! Worlds afire, the elements aflame, the whole thing ready to blow . . . , and Jesus will appear to take His own to eternal safety. That will be a glorious moment when we can rejoice and throw ourselves at His feet in willing worship, confessing: "Lord, you really are God's Son!"

CONCLUSION:

Let us even now row against the wind and waves of our lives until we drop, not giving in to any of the temptations to give up and coast with the current!

Let us continue, whether He rescues us personally and miraculously in this life or not!

Let us continue to long for, and look for, His glorious coming when His omnipotent word will guarantee our eternal security, and His personal presence will assure our inexpressable joy and imperturbable peace with Him forever!

Section 35

JESUS HEALS SOME SICK AT GENNESARET

(Parallel: Mark 6:53-56)

TEXT: 14:34-36

34 And when they had crossed over, they came to the land, unto Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place knew him, they sent into all that region round about, and brought unto him all that were sick; 36 and they besought him that they might only touch the border of his garment: and as many as touched were made whole.