

The Just shall live by Faith

Volume 2 - Study 2 **Look out for the leaven of the Pharisees**

C. Ronald Johnson, Christian Wilderness Press: Matthew 16:4-6 **'A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no [sought after] sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.'**

These are brief studies, not
“teachings” or “doctrines”.

Volume 2, Study 2 (8-18-09)

‘O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the [red] signs of the times [i.e. the momentous times in God’s Plan of the Ages]?’

Introduction

This study follows on from Volume 2, Study 1; please read and dwell upon that one first. A week earlier than the above date I was still working on Study 1 while also working outside trying to use August for getting things around our place ready for fall and winter. In my personal studies at that time I had opened my Bible at Mark 8 and was reading when the thought came to me that this passage was an explanation (or perhaps a series of examples) of what I was finishing up in Study 1 under the headings **We do not have Kingdom-Minds, Christians think in Earthly Ways, and Not yet are they Kingdom-thinkers**. Study 1 was long enough and so I now continue with this new passage of Matthew 15:29 through 16:28.

Seldom do I write short Bible studies on “topics”; instead I simply go through a passage verse by verse, which I will do here. However, this passage in the whole (i.e. in its several incidents), among other things, contains an ongoing theme or “topic”. Matthew had witnessed the events and the teaching words of Jesus; therefore, he inserted little things *to set the stage* for what he would write of the next incident(s) and/or teaching(s).

I was reading in Mark 8 when in verse 14 the thought of the above headings in Study 1 came to me (I had not yet cleaned up Study 1). So I turned to Matthew’s passage about the same incident (as in Mark 8) and sure enough in Matthew 16:5 was the same *little stage setting* by Matthew as appeared in Mark, who wrote from what he had heard from the Apostle Peter. Therefore, we see that Peter also remembered clearly the twelve disciples’ mindset on this recorded occasion. They remembered because their thinking and assumptions were completely astray from what Jesus was saying to them and they had received a scolding from the Lord.

A “topic”, then, that Matthew interwove throughout his Gospel of Jesus is that the disciples in those years **Not yet were they Kingdom-thinkers**. Look for this theme throughout Matthew and you will find it to be obvious. If the disciples struggled in walking with Jesus, then how much more do we struggle in our walks? The (mature) Apostle Matthew in observing the early church knew that we Christians need help in realizing our immature condition.

Study 1 mentions some of the mistaken teachings that we can get into in thinking “we are partners with Jesus in God’s work”...when actually Jesus’ is our Shepherd and *we are his (often pitiful) little sheep*. We see in Study 1 how Matthew interwove the theme of how pitifully the disciples often missed the concepts of Jesus’ deeds and words which were of the Father. Albeit, the deeds and thoughts of the disciples were of them...as our deeds and thoughts are of ourselves; and should the Spirit intervene at times and give us ‘light’ then “Thank you Lord!”

Setting the stage for this study

Matthew 15:29-31) And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: Insomuch that the multitude wondered,

when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.

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

Out of ‘**compassion**’, Jesus and the Father decided to feed the people before ending this gleeful three-day-healing-and- teaching-meeting and they would journey home.

15:33) And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?

If the reader has spent time moving around in this website then he or she knows that Barbara and I live surrounded by Wyoming wilderness mountains and that this website’s theme (besides being about Biblical faith) has to do with *Christian wilderness living* (i.e. as Moses’ forty years of preparation-living in the wilderness and similarly the Israelites’ forty years of preparation-living in the wildernesses of Sinai).

We pray (and our hope is that you pray with us) that the Lord use the little things on this website to remind our visitors about the possibilities of *walking by Biblical faith* and *Christian wilderness living*. For according to God’s will, indeed He can raise up springs of living water in wilderness places anywhere in the world.

15:34-38) And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.

15:39) And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.

For the time being, Jesus had finished teaching about the kingdom of God and had taken a boat through the Sea of Galilee to do the same in a place called Magdala.

How men Think and the Leaven of such thinking

On arriving to the coasts of Magdala, the word quickly spread that Jesus had come. In 14:32-36 we see Jesus and his twelve disciples at another time traveling by boat around the Sea of Galilee with the word of the kingdom of God and being received gladly. Yet, such warm welcomes had more to do with miracles than with words of the kingdom of heaven (which had come nigh to God’s people). So the beginning of this occasion was similar to the others, in that the people were excited, for it was their turn to witness wonders at the hand of this man Jesus.

16:1) The Pharisees [who lived nearby] also with the Sadducees came, and tempting [they] desired him that he would shew them [and the people of the region] a sign from heaven.

Consider ‘**tempting**’: it means *test, scrutinize, look into*. The people were excited to see Jesus and, like those of other places, they wished to *observe* the miracles of which they had heard. Also the local Pharisees and Sadducees wanted to *look into and scrutinize* the goings on...to *investigate*. (This ‘**tempting**’, then, was not “to tempt Jesus to sin or do something bad”.)

Also Matthew points to the disciples’ mindset in anticipation again to be Jesus’ *notable attendants* as he works his wonders (being *notable* was important to them). But *healing and casting out demons in front of large crowds* was becoming too carnival-like for the resolute Son of God who was already anticipating entering Jerusalem and the Cross (see verse 21), and so on this occasion he refused to *perform* or be *investigated*.

In this verse, then, Matthew has begun to present *the thinking of men* contrasted against *the thinking of Jesus the Son of God*; and Matthew does not spare the disciples as he tells

of their foolish thinking by telling on them and on him. We see in Study 1 how Matthew did the same; there Jesus was further in his last year of ministry and nearing Jerusalem. Here Jesus was yet compassionately teaching and healing God's people on the coasts of the Sea of Galilee...though already he was anticipating the turning toward Jerusalem.

16:2) He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say [in the normal way of men], It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the [red] signs of the times [i.e. the momentous times in God's Plan of the Ages]?

Jesus addressed the Pharisees and Sadducees, the *organized religious elite* men of this area. Happily and perhaps gleefully they had ventured out to welcome and invite Jesus to do wonders as he had done in the other places of which they had heard. Of the people, they were the knowledgeable, the wise, the spiritual ones. (This would be like the leaders of the best-known, on-fire church of the city going out to meet Jesus to invite him to glorify the heavenly Father before all the people.)

Amidst some self-righteousness and posturing on their part they now had a chance to *scrutinize* the matter. Yet, their basic desire was for the people's good and a testifying for God, because the sick of this place needed healing and the people needed reviving.

Yet...Jesus shocked his disciples, shocked the religious leaders, shocked the people gathering in honor of him! "Jesus what are you thinking!"

16:4) A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no [sought after] sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.

A 'sign' is an important (in this case supernatural) *indication* (i.e. signal, clue, warning) of something (as in verse 3). Jesus had been performing many signs and healings and he would continue with signs...and later so would the apostles...but now with the Time of the Cross approaching, the crowds would be decreasing and there would be no signs at *the bidding of organized religious elite men*. (When Jesus was in captivity, King Herod wanted to see 'signs' performed). Things around Jesus are becoming increasingly tense.

Even now, the disciples are in shock and *silence*. Talk about 'the fear of the Lord'!

16:5) And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.

Here is Matthew's *little stage setting* mentioned earlier. Jesus had stalked off from the growing crowd back to the boat. The little company of Jesus and the twelve disciples on their journeys had to be fed and thus it was the duty of some of the disciples to buy the necessities for their meals. But following Jesus back to the boat, not a single disciple had thought of food. Then arriving at another site along the shore of the sea, in *silence* they were hungry. And right in the midst of their hunger pangs Jesus broke their *silence*.

16:6,7) Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread.

It was not so much the disciples' hunger that caused such reasoning. At the last location Jesus had been angry and left. Yet, at the previous location he had fed four thousand... and now they had arrived back in the general area where the four thousand had been fed...and Jesus was speaking of leaven...which made no sense at all except in regards to bread...so perhaps Jesus was going to do miracles again on this side of the sea. Whatever had made Jesus angry on the other side, perhaps now he was calmed down. And maybe God's people on this side (of the tracks) were more righteous than those on the other side (of the tracks). Most of the disciples, if not all, were born and raised on this side (of the tracks)...i.e. perhaps they thought of Israelites east of the sea as "low class").

Now dear reader I do not know all this, but Matthew has been inviting us to take a look at the disciples' foolish thinking (as compared to Jesus' thinking). Whatever the reason for their reasoning, their reasoning was not Jesus' reasoning.

16:8-10) Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

Have you ever known a thing perfectly well, yet in the great whirling of your thoughts the thought of it never once crossed your mind. Instead, foolish and even stupid thoughts were rattling around in your head seemingly unstoppable?

And then something suddenly brings the proper and significant thought to your mind and your whirling mentality stops. In frustration, then, do you wonder if you are going crazy? Such was this occasion of the disciples, which Matthew has shared with us trying to help us rethink our mental processes when we think “we are partners with Christ”. In retrospect, Matthew knew that he and the others had never been partners with Jesus.

16:11) How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning [the leavening of] bread, [but rather] that ye should beware of [i.e. take note of] the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?

Leaven is “something extra added” to the working of natural bread, causing natural bread to rise unnaturally and thus become tastier and more attractive to the human palate. Those religious leaders in their locality on the other side of the sea were proficient at adding their leaven into *the working of bread* (i.e. *the ministering of the word of God*) so that their modified bread was tastier and more attractive to the minds of their people than would have been basic bread (the plain word of God).

Jesus taught them, “Take note of this kind of leaven. Take note of how it is used among God’s people. As apostles you will meet up with such leaven among the Jews, but also among many leaders in the newly forming churches. This leaven is man-thinking that usually inspires man-adding to the pure plain bread of God. And this kind of leaven will consistently oppose you as you minister in your kingdom-thinking to God’s people.”

16:12) Then understood they how that he bade them not [in regards to] beware of the leaven[ing] of bread, [but rather they should take note] of the [leaven of] doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

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Jesus and the disciples had returned from the east shore and instead of seeking to teach more in the vicinity of the sea they moved on. And in journeying, Jesus continued to teach them.

16:13,14) When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

16:15,16) He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

16:17-18) And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

16:19) And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

In this verse is a high and most wonderful statement and prophetic promise to Peter. The Father in heaven had chosen Peter for it, and Peter shall be great in it (see the latter part of Study 1 for being *chosen* and to be *great*).

16:20) Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

‘Savoring’ the Thinking and Leavening of men

In Study 1 it was stated that Jesus was in the latter time of his ministry in journeying unto Jerusalem and that he had begun telling his disciples of his impending troubles in Jerusalem and of his death, burial, and resurrection. The days of this study were only a couple of months before Study 1 and it was at this time that he began telling of it and would repeat it ongoing.

16:21) From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

This ‘telling of sufferings’ occurred directly after Jesus told Peter and the disciples what he had said in 16:13-19. Another shock to the disciples!

Or was it that much of a shock? I suspect that on the human level the words were a shock, but the significance of the words flew right over their heads. They grasped the low human level of torment and dread...and the fact that Jesus was saying he would therefore be leaving them...but that was all that they grasped.

Peter’s inflated ego was not shocked enough to keep him from doing what in the natural he always did within his wonderful love and affection for the Master. **Not yet were they Kingdom-thinkers.** Therefore, Peter speaks out of his man-thinking.

16:22) Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

Poor **blessed Simon Barjona** receiver of the *keys of the kingdom of heaven*, the one to *bind and loose in heaven and on earth*. He had the earthly audacity to rebuke the Son of God. “Peter what are you thinking?”

Whatever kind of thinking it was, it was not kingdom-thinking. How did he make such a fool of himself (compared to the ways of heaven)? He did it the same way that we make fools of ourselves (compared to the ways of heaven). Using earthly minds in attempts to work in the midst of heavenly things is foolish and dangerous. When we think we know so much we will likely assume too much.

16:23) But he [i.e. Jesus, your and my Lord and Master] turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

It is exactly what Jesus had warned about in 16:11,12. It is the very thing that Matthew has woven into his writings to the Church and to you and to me. For as yet, the disciples after nearly three years with Jesus still ‘**savourest**’ (i.e. find tasty and desirable) man-things and man-ways and man-thinking. **Not yet do they savour the things of God.**

In such an earthy condition (yes, even when sincerely following Jesus the best that a Christian can do), in such moments when we desperately want and strive to be “spiritual” Satan has an opening to shoot at us arrows of fallen-man-thinking. Our worldly-fallen-man-thinking is susceptible to arrows from this world’s prince. The disciples were yet in earthly-thinking. And following Jesus had not removed them from it.

16:24) Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me [i.e. ‘savour’ me], let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

Peter and the disciples were hard ‘**after**’ Jesus and were ‘**following**’ him, but not yet had they been energized from above into *the denial of themselves as Jesus meant it in this verse*. Such a state or condition to ‘**savour**’ Jesus awaited them. In Study 1 we see that it would not come through a set of *requirements*, the kind too often preached today.

When confronted with the Mind of God in Jesus Christ, Peter was unable to ‘deny his own mind’ due to its present condition. His mindset was alien to the things of God. Why? It was because he insisted that *he understood the things of God* when in fact as a loving disciple *he could not possibly understand the things of God*.

His mind and our minds are susceptible to the ‘**leaven**’ of human understanding and

teaching. We must be aware that there is *honest and sincere* human ‘leaven’, and that we are susceptible to it, because we ‘savour’ it.

In this regard, we need more to fear *our own savouring* than *the leaven of others* because we cannot control others. But with God’s help we can seek to become cautious of our own human mindsets and desires.

What should Peter have done? ‘**Deny himself**’ is the answer. When staring into the face of Scripture and it speaks higher to us than human or doctrinal thinking (as Jesus spoke of his suffering to the disciples) then we should ‘deny ourselves’ and admit that we do not know what scripture is saying. This is equivalent to ‘faith in God’ that He knows what He is saying. Though we know not what, we can be thankful that He is still saying something ...and has not forgotten us.

Dear reader, ‘rebuking’ brethren when we “do not agree” or “cannot understand” them is not part of ‘denying oneself’. In Peter’s present condition, then, Jesus said to him -

16:25) For whosoever will [try to] save his life [in his walk with God] shall lose it [i.e. its end result and reward (see verse 27)]: and whosoever will lose [i.e. deny] his life for my sake shall find it [in a higher heavenly way than its present condition].

16:26) For what [reward] is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world [and, even as the rich young ruler offer these things unto God], and lose his own soul [purpose]? or what shall a man give [in the things he can obtain] in exchange for his soul [purpose]?

Please pardon my inserting so many words into the text of scripture. I did it because we are nearly brainwashed to think that this passage has to do with “becoming a child of God”, “being saved”, etc. But it was said to the twelve disciples and to the other disciples that had left home to follow Jesus (yet who eventually returned home) and to the crowds of people attracted to Jesus enough to follow him on from town to town. *All of these* already were believers in Jesus even if not yet realizing that he was the Messiah.

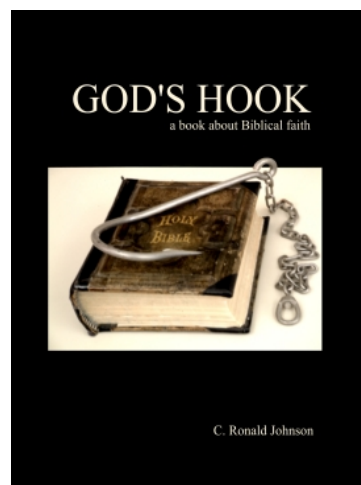
16:27) For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

16:28) Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

What does verse 28 mean? I do not know, but surely it turned out especially important to ‘some standing’ of the people near Jesus when he said it.

(This study is a follow on to Volume 2, Study 1. Please receive it as such.)

These are short Bible studies by C. Ronald Johnson of Christian Wilderness Press.



a book
about
Biblical
Faith

the life of
Moses
and the
Exodus

