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Kingdom Living, Part 3

A God of Encouragement

Personally speaking there are few more encouraging passages in all of Scripture than John 14. There in the upper room, just before Christ was handed over to the Sanhedrin He said this:

John 14:1, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

By itself this passage lifts my spirit. There are many times when the heart is troubled. You know, when one is confronted by difficult days, accusations, illness, tragedy, uncertainty and worry; how many countless saints have clung to this message of encouragement and hope in their dark hour?

You can be sure Peter did!

The immediate context of John 14 is one of travesty. Christ has just informed Peter that in a short while he would betray the Lord.

John 13:38, "Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice."

John 14:1, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye¹ believe in God, believe also in me."

John 14 must be taken NOT in the context of the general estate of sin and misery in which we live BUT in the context of our own personal failure. And that's why I love this passage as much as I do. Christ knew the devastating blow He had just leveled against Peter in telling him of his future betrayal. So, Christ, the infinite God Man said, "Peter don't be troubled. Trust God and trust Me."

This is so typical of the workings of God. Though He had cause to be angry at Peter and spew him out of His mouth, and rather than condemning him, Christ sought to encourage him! Truly "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench" (Isaiah 42:3a).

And this is God's disposition toward all of His children. His intent is not to condemn, crush, wound, or destroy but to encourage us, build us up, and strengthen us that we might serve Him all the more.

This is why when we come to our passage containing three signs given to Saul, the future king of Israel and in fact to ALL servants in the body of Christ, we are not surprised to discover that one of the main purposes in giving the signs was the encouraging of Saul.

Now, we have seen how God gave Saul a sign of encouragement as it pertained to his earthly concerns. And let us pick up the passage where we left off last time considering the encouragement God gave to Saul as it pertained to his earthly NEEDS. Notice the text:

1 Samuel 10:3-4, "Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine: And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread; which thou shalt receive of their hands."

After the more personal sign wherein God communicated to Saul the intimate involvement that the Lord would have in His life (recall verse 2), God here gives another sign which, as we have seen carried with it a twofold message: First, and we must never forget, the purpose of this sign was to validate the message of Samuel. See it is possible for a man to guess when it comes to a future event and get it correct, after all a broken clock is right twice a day. But to preclude that this was the case when it came to Samuel, God here gave Saul a second sign thus when this second sign came true, Saul would know that everything Samuel had spoken to him and done to him (the two days of conversing with Samuel² and the private and personal anointing that Saul had just received³) all was true!

And yet as we have seen, the plan of God when it comes to His signs was to include a specific message of comfort and hope that the recipient might be encouraged in his calling to serve the Lord.

It is the latter element that we are after in our current study. In light of this we ask, "What was the message that Saul would have derived from this second sign?" To answer this let's walk our way through the text.

¹ The word rendered *ye* or *you* references the entire group of disciples. So in the context one must take John 14 first in reference to Peter, but on account of the second person plural pronoun, one can take Christ's exhortation as applicable to all disciples! The KJV uses *ye* here to designate the second person informal or familiar.

² Compare 1 Samu3l 9:18-27

³ Compare 1 Samuel 10:1

1 Samuel 10:3, “**Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine.**”

At the time of Saul, this was a well-known locality in the territory of Benjamin situated on the main road which lead to Bethel. When Saul arrived at this oak or plain of Tabor Saul would meet three men going to worship God at Bethel.

Recall, the city of Bethel was a noted city of worship mentioned more often in the Old Testament than any other city except Jerusalem. Here the ark was brought toward the latter part of the Judges.⁴ Recall that 1 Samuel overlaps the end of Judges making our passage contemporary with Judges 20. And to this city Samuel came yearly on his circuit ride⁵ in order to oversee the worship because there was an altar there.

Secondly, notice that the text says that these men were going up "TO God." This implies that they weren't going to Bethel in order to see family, sell at the market, or vacation, but they were going up to Bethel clearly to worship!

This together with their cargo makes it clear that these men were en route to Bethel in order to participate in the worship of God. Notice the supplies they carried in their hands.

1 Samuel 10:3, “**Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine.**”

The items mentioned here all are associated with worship in the Bible, specifically the burnt offering. Notice, the men had three kids. This has reference to a young, male goat. According to Numbers 15:11ff, young, male goats were animals of sacrifice for the burnt offering. As there were three worshippers, so we read of three "kids."

Next we read of the three loaves of bread. Though a general term for bread, nevertheless this too was used in the context of worship, specifically a cereal offering which was a type of burnt offering.⁶ By prescription, the loaves were a concoction of fine flour, olive oil, and frankincense. According to Biblical instruction⁷ after a portion was offered on the altar, that which remained went to the priest for his consumption.

Thirdly, they had a three jugs of wine. This also was associated with worship. It would have been used as a drink offering in the context of a burnt or peace offering. Unlike the cereal offering (which again was given to God and used for the support of the priest), the entire jug of wine would have been poured on the altar.

Now with these holy items in hand these men were moved by God to do a rather surprising thing:

⁴ Compare Judges 20:26-27

⁵ Compare 1 Samuel 7:16

⁶ Exodus 29:2, 23-25; Leviticus 2:4-16; 7:9; 1 Samuel 10:3-8

⁷ Compare Leviticus 6:16; 7:9

1 Samuel 10:4, “**And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread;** which thou shalt receive of their hands.”

This is rather amazing! These men were en route to worship God, and yet they willingly part with 2/3 of their offering. What's going on here?

Once again bear in mind that every worshipper in the Old Testament understood that in most cases part of his offering was going to the support of the priesthood. When an offering was given to God, the priest was commanded to take for himself certain and prescribed cuts or portions.⁸

Well of the items mentioned in this verse (the kids, the bread, and the wine) only one would have been given to the anointed priest for his support; the bread! As we have seen when a cereal offering was being presented to the Lord the officiating priest took a hand full of grain or a portion of a single loaf of bread and placed it on the altar. The rest of the offering was for his own support.

Thus it was understood that a portion of most offerings was reserved for anointed individuals. And this is the key behind this sign here. Though ordinarily given to a priest, nevertheless as an anointed man, Saul was to receive it from their hands. By this charge God was making this incredible statement: Saul is my anointed.

By having Saul accept an offering prescribed ONLY for anointed individuals, God was implying that Saul was indeed anointed! Robert Bergen put it this way:

“Though 'the two loaves of bread' (verse 4) were originally intended by the pilgrims as a gift for an anointed Aaronic priest, Saul's acceptance of the food would require him to accept the legitimacy of his own anointing.”⁹

Now this was not to imply that kings now would have full access to the priest's offering. In other words, there is no precedent being set here. Rather, as a one time event, God used this to confirm Saul's anointing!

With this we are confronted with THE MESSAGE of comfort and hope that would have been received by Saul here... that would have been received by every Jew reading this text.

What is the significance of this offering?

The offering here presented to Saul was intended to be used, according to God's prescription, for the support of a priest. It wasn't God's share that was presented to Saul. It was the share reserved by God for the support of an anointed man!

Through this, the implication would have been unmistakable. NOT ONLY was God intimately involved in Saul's life, and would continue to be so,¹⁰ Saul was an anointed man! BUT we also learn

⁸ Compare 1 Samuel 4 and the abuse of Eli's sons

⁹ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel, New American Commentary*, B&H Publishing Group (June 1996), ISBN-10: 0805401075, page 128

¹⁰ Compare 1 Samuel 10:2

that God would, as in the case of a priest, provide for Saul's earthly needs as the monarch endeavored to fulfill his calling.¹¹ Ralph Klein put it this way: "This sign answered Saul's second need, his hunger (9:7)..."¹²

From this we see the second message of comfort and hope that God gave to Saul. Though at this moment your life no longer is your own, but belongs to me (by virtue of My anointing) God says, "I always will provide for you!!"

This allowed Saul to

- Take his mind off the cares of this life as it pertains to his food and covering!
- Gird up his loins!
- And be busy about God's Kingdom!

What a wonderful message of comfort and encouragement!

And yet, is this not the message that accompanies every calling in the Kingdom of God!

Feeding the Five Thousand

The background of Matthew 14 shows this to be a most significant miracle in the earthly ministry of Christ. The Lord has here traveled to a remote and lonely place far from civilization.¹³ And yet a large crowd of 5,000 men followed Him. So Christ proceeded to teach them and this is what happened:

Matthew 14:15, "And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals."

The disciples were exasperated here. They were saying that they had enough, and it was time for Christ to send the crowd home! Yet, this was a rather unrealistic request. We just saw that Christ and this multitude were in a desolate place and the likelihood of a gathering of this size dispersing (if you add women and children, the number goes way beyond 5,000) and then finding enough food was quite unlikely. So Christ offered an alternative. He turned to His disciples and said, "You feed them" (verse 16)! Notice the disciple's response:

Matthew 14:17, "And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes."

By virtue of this grocery list we know that the disciples at this point had enough food for themselves and Christ.¹⁴ Yet if others ate of the meal, it was clear that the disciples and Christ would be without! Their needs would not be met!

¹¹ Compare 1 Samuel 10:3-4

¹² Ralph W. Klein, *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 10, 1 Samuel*, Thomas Nelson (December 15, 1983), ISBN-10: 0849902096, page 91.

¹³ Compare Matthew 14:13

¹⁴ They obviously had received the provision from a young boy. (Compare Mark 6:38 and John 6:9).

Yet that didn't stop Christ. No doubt to the chagrin of the disciples, the Lord said:

Matthew 14:18-19, "He said, Bring them hither to me. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude."

As it is clear that the miracle didn't occur until after the disciples distributed the food, you can just imagine the thoughts that were racing through the mind of the disciples as they brought their food to Christ!

- This is our meal! Why does Christ have to be so generous all of the time?!
- Serve the people! Serve the people! Why can't they serve themselves?
- We've done as much as the multitude and more today; yet we don't get to eat. What about our needs?!

There is no question that the charge given to the disciples here would have been a difficult one to carry out. Yet what a learning experience for these men! It would have forever changed their life! Notice how this account ends:

Matthew 14:20, "And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full."

Did you get that?

At the beginning of their service, there hardly was enough food to feed the disciples much less anyone else. Yet after fulfilling their calling, what did the disciples have? They each had a full basket of bread to themselves!

I hope you see the point!

What is it that will be left over after we have fulfilled our ministry? What was it that the disciples received after denying themselves and serving God's people? What was the message that God gave to Saul as his life was claimed by God for service?

As you live for the glory of God and so serve His people, God always will attend to your needs! I love how MacArthur put it:

"Ours is a God of abundant providence, who does not give stingily... Before the disciples knew that food would be left for them, they obediently gave all they had to the multitudes. Just as the food did not begin to multiply until after the disciples started to distribute it, their own needs were not met until they had met the needs of others."¹⁵

This is a very important principle when it comes to ministry! Through the anointing of the Spirit¹⁶

¹⁵ Dr. John MacArthur, *Matthew 8-15: New Testament Commentary (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series, Moody Publishers (February 8, 1987), ISBN-10: 0802407633, page 432*

¹⁶ Compare 1 John 2:20, 27a

God has placed a claim on our life. This means we no longer are our own master, we are subject to His calling and will, plans and providence, and timing. Yet let us ever and always be comforted in knowing that as we give ourselves away, deny ourselves and serve other people, and do not hold our life dear, but strive to bless and build up the body at the end of the day of selfless sacrifice, our needs will be abundantly supplied through Christ!

This is exactly what Jesus Himself taught so long ago.

Matthew 6:31-33, "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

So many have misunderstood this verse and used it to proclaim a "higher life" teaching of wealth and prosperity. And that is wrong. Christ is clearly teaching that as we give ourselves to the Kingdom of God, our needs (not our wants or lusts) will be met! They'll be met with regard to our physical needs.¹⁷

And we can be sure that they'll be met with regard to our spiritual needs as well. For in the words of Christ quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, "man shall not live by bread alone" (Matthew 4:4). And how is that? Because "for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (Matthew 6:32).

On a daily basis we have the opportunity to behold the miracle that Christ performed after He fed the 5,000, and yet because we lack faith, are serving God with a closed fist, are concerned about our own needs we miss the miracle entirely!

Now don't misunderstand. I'm not suggesting that today Christ will multiply a meal if only we have faith. Indeed! The "miracle" I'm referencing here (and I'm using the term loosely) is NOT the multiplying of literal food BUT the nourishing of our souls as we give ourselves away! We will receive the abundant basket-full of joy, grace, and peace which is gathered at the end of a day of service in the Kingdom of God.

This is the "miracle" the church rarely sees today. Most today minister in fear, under constraint, and by compulsion. They never witness the work of grace whereby God fills a soul set on being emptied for the Lord. We're worried that in giving ourselves away, there will be nothing left for us at the end of the day.

Oh brothers and sisters! You can play it safe and ever and always look to yourself and your needs when it comes to the Kingdom of God and in the end you will arrive on the shores of eternity and you will hear those glorious words, "Well done! Thou good and faithful servant!" but you will have missed knowing the pleasure of God in this estate!

OR you can die to self. And you can by faith give yourself away, release all claim to rights, wants, needs, and pleasure, and serve God on His terms. And at the end of the day, do you know what you

¹⁷ It is clear that this is generally spoken. There are saints who have starved to death either on account of their own sin or on account of persecution. In either case, those are counted as exceptions to the rule.

will discover? You will sit back in astonishment as God multiplies the Bread of Life to you!

This truth is found throughout Scripture. Christ taught it.

Matthew 16:25, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

Whatever you give up or lose when it comes to service in the Kingdom will be more than compensated for. After giving up time, rest, provision and your own needs you will discover that God has granted you a fuller taste of that which constitutes real life AND YOU WILL BE FULL!

Paul witnessed this:

2 Corinthians 1:5, "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ."

Paul beheld the miracle of the 5,000 in his own life. As he served the Lord and found himself the object of great suffering, nevertheless he came to know the comfort of Christ more intimately. And this made it all worth it!

2 Corinthians 4:11, "For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."

The more Paul died, the more Christ lived in him. The more Paul was delivered over to service in Christ's name, the fuller was his basket.

I love how the late Jim Elliot put it: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Or again Francis of Assisi:

"For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

Such living requires more than sola bootstrapia- you know, the determination on the part of the believer that they will deny themselves and serve others. Such living can only be found (the "miracle" of enjoying more of Christ after giving yourself away) if and only if you are "believing in God and believing also in Christ."

Isn't that what Christ told Peter and His disciples?

Peter in your service, there is going to be a big fall! Disciples, you too are going to flee! Yet what must you do at the end of an imperfect day of service? "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1).

Family of God with this I walk away from 1 Samuel with a twofold exhortation.

First, with the calling that rests upon our life don't be concerned for your own needs; give yourself entirely to the Lord and His service. God knows your needs, and He will multiply His provisions in

your life.

****But secondly****

In and through all things as we live, serve, pray, suffer... we must do it all in reliance upon Christ. This is what constitutes the heart of Kingdom Living!

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The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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