

FINAL DAYS OF PREPARATION OF DISCIPLES

December 4, 2016 1. The Relevance of the Death of John the Baptist Matthew 14:1-12

Prior to vacating an office, a leader always prepares his subordinates to be ready to carry on with the affairs of the institution when the time comes. Jesus had been teaching His disciples about the nature of the kingdom of God, now He prepares them to be ready to take responsibility for building this kingdom after He leaves them going back to the Father. So for the next few Sunday we shall discuss this process of preparation under the overall theme of “FINAL DAYS OF PREPARATION OF DISCIPLES.

The first discussion in this series will be the relevance of the death of John the Baptist. Recall church that John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus Christ. When John the Baptist came to the scene his main preaching theme was “repent for the kingdom of God is near!” When Jesus arrived on the scene He called on the people to repent for the kingdom of God is here! The message of the kingdom is always the same – about repentance to enter the kingdom of God! However, the description of John the Baptist death at this point of Matthew’s writing is a flashback prompted by Herod’s speculation that Jesus might be John the Baptist raised from the dead.

Thus our text of the day reads: “At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, 2 and he said to his attendants, “This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him.” 3 Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, 4 for John had been saying to him: “It is not lawful for you to have her.” 5 Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet. 6 On Herod’s birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much 7 that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. 8 Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.” 9 The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted 10 and had John beheaded in the prison. 11 His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. 12 John’s disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then, they went and told Jesus” (Matthew 14:1-12).

John the Baptist’s death is reported in all synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), with a briefer version in Luke as he did not provide any of the details described by Matthew or Mark. Mark included the sending of the twelve disciples (Mark 6:7-13), which Matthew provided earlier in his Gospel in Matthew 10. Matthew describes John’s death here in Chapter 14 but chronologically his death actually occurred much earlier on the time line as his imprisonment was mentioned in Matthew 4:12. The details of John’s death given here are in the light of the connection Herod made about the possible return of John the Baptist to life as there was a common perception that some of the prophets would return to introduce the end of the age.

The phrase in the beginning of our text, “At that time” was Matthew’s favorite way of transitioning in his style of writing, and in this case it highlighted Herod’s reaction to Jesus’ miracles and introduced the section on John’s death. As mentioned earlier on, John’s death was a flashback prompted by Herod’s speculation that Jesus could be John the Baptist raised from the dead.

For us to be clear about which Herod is being referred to in this instance, let me provide you a brief summary of the Herodian dynasty. First, was Herod the Great (37 BC – 4 BC) who was the great builder of the Temple, palaces, and fortresses. He had many children through several marriages and three of his sons (Antipas, Philip, and Archelaus) ruled after him. The fourth son was another Philip mentioned here in Matthew 14:3 (also Mark 6:17) who is not well attested in history. Apparently, he was the first husband of Herodias and the father of Salome. Herod Antipas (4 BC –AD 39) was the tetrarch (ruler over a fourth of the kingdom) ruling over Galilee (Jesus' home province) and Perea. He married Herodias, his Brother Philip's wife and was the one who murdered John the Baptist. Herod Philip (4 BC –AD 34) was tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis (Luke 3:1) who was the son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra of Jerusalem. Herod Archelaus (4 BC – AD 39) ruled over the province of Judea and was also titled ethnarch (ruler of the people).

Herod Antipas was identified as tetrarch by Matthew and king by Mark. He divorced his first wife and married Herodias, his Brother Philip's wife. John the Baptist had repeatedly warned him of this sin. He got frustrated with John and in attempt to silence him, imprisoned him in the fortress of Machaerus. Eventually he executed John as a result of the schemes of Herodias and her daughter, Salome. He felt guilty for beheading John, and so when he heard of another prophet (Jesus) he superstitiously wondered whether John had come back from the dead. Matthew mentions this for two reasons: first, to narrate the events of the death of John and secondly, to focus on the importance of the ministry of Jesus and the concerns this raised for Herod Antipas, the ruler of Jesus' home region.

What are the lessons from this narrative? First is that those who are in the kingdom must preach against sin and advocate repentance without fear or favor. Secondly, those who refuse to repent stand guilty of their sin(s) because it is impossible to cover your sin unless you have repented and are covered by the blood of the Lamb of God who died for the sins of the world. Thirdly, who do you so much please with the things you do in life – self, others, or God? This is the word of God for the people of God, and let God's people say amen.

Mt Traveler members, as we conclude remember that “Final Days of Preparation of the Disciples” is reflected in the following:

- The Relevance of the Death of John the Baptist
- And let the church say, “Amen!”

Have you truly believed and received Jesus and the kingdom message of repentance? If not, we invite you to come, repent, and humbly accept Jesus Christ into your heart and life by faith. I hope you will make room in your heart for Him today! Then confess with your mouth your faith in Him that He died and rose again to save you from your sin through the shedding of His blood on Calvary, and you will be saved and become part of God's family and kingdom. Then ask Him in prayers to empower you through the Holy Spirit with wisdom, courage and boldness to be always truthful and faithful to cause the continual growth of God's kingdom as you bear good fruit. May God bless you as you humbly open your heart to provide room for Him as the choir leads us in a song!

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FINAL DAYS OF PREPARATION OF DISCIPLES

December 11, 2016 2. The Significance of the Miracle of Feeding the 5000 Matthew 14:13-21

Jesus ministry was marked with miracles. Miracles authenticated that the minister was truly from God. Also, at that time it was believed that Jesus was a prophet. A prophet was one sent by God to represent Him among the people as His spokesman. Jesus performed miracles as part of His final preparation of His disciples. The miracles were teaching the disciples the necessity of having faith to enable them to continue to build the kingdom of God after He leaves them going back to the Father. After Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist, He withdrew to a solitary place to have effective communication with the Father. However, the crowd followed Him and that would necessitate a miracle to feed such a large crowd. So as we continue with the overall theme of the “FINAL DAYS OF PREPARATION OF DISCIPLES, our next sermon covers the significance of the miracle of feeding over five thousand people.

Thus our text of the day reads: “When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. 15 As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.” 16 Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.” 17 “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered. 18 “Bring them here to me,” he said. 19 And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. 20 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 21 The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children” (Matthew 14:13-21).

This is one of the only miracles of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels. It also begins a series of situations focused on the need for faith and the failure of disciples and others to have adequate faith. The narrative of the miracle of feeding more than five thousand people has more than historical significance. It drives home the point that Jesus, as the Messiah, can take care of His people. It has a connection with God feeding the children of Israel with manna in the wilderness after they left Israel to follow the only one God and worship Him. It also provides insight into the messianic banquet at the end of time when God’s redeemed will sit at God’s banquet table and be sustained.

The miracle itself is simple. It involved taking five loaves and two fish and multiplying them into food enough for more than five thousand people. This is no test to God’s sovereign power for He is omnipotent. In this way Jesus attested that He was no ordinary person but God in the flesh. The power of this miracle lies also in two points:

- a. The disciples’ failure to have faith in Jesus’ kingdom message and His ability to feed them.
- b. This miracle illustrates Jesus’ ability to take care of every need His disciples might have, with more emphasis on the spiritual food symbolized by the Old Testament manna and the New Testament loaves and fish.

To summarize our lesson, what is the spiritual significance of this miracle? The spiritual significance of this miracle was extremely important to Matthew's late first century community which needed to understand that the Messiah can take care of its spiritual needs apart from Jerusalem and the temple (which had been destroyed). It is also significant for our generation to understand that the God we serve through faith in Jesus is able to supply all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). This is the word of God for the people of God, and let God's people say amen.

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- The Relevance of the Death of John the Baptist
- The Significance of the Miracle of Feeding the 5000.
- And let the church say, "Amen!"

Have you truly believed and received Jesus and the kingdom message of repentance? If not, we invite you to come, repent, and humbly accept Jesus Christ into your heart and life by faith. I hope you will make room in your heart for Him today! Then confess with your mouth your faith in Him that He died and rose again to save you from your sin through the shedding of His blood on Calvary, and you will be saved and become part of God's family and kingdom. Then ask Him in prayers to empower you through the Holy Spirit with wisdom, courage and boldness to be always truthful and faithful to cause the continual growth of God's kingdom as you bear good fruit. May God bless you as you humbly open your heart to provide room for Him as the choir leads us in a song!

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Mt. Traveler Missionary Baptist Church, Waverly, Alabama
Synopsis of Sermon Preached by Rev. B. C. Datiri, Pastor

FINAL DAYS OF PREPARATION OF DISCIPLES

December 18, 2016 3. The Importance of Jesus Walking on the Sea Matthew 14:22-36

Miracles were a part of Jesus' ministry. Immediately after the miracle of feeding the five thousand men, women and children not included, he sent the disciples ahead of Him to the other side of the lake while He dismissed the crowd and find a solitary place on the mountain to pray all by Himself. It always takes spending time alone with God to know His perfect will and to draw power from on High to represent God as His spokesman. Miracles authenticated Jesus' ministry as one send by God to represent Him among the people as His spokesman. Also, Jesus performed miracles as part of His final preparation of His disciples to teach them the necessity of having faith to enable them to continue to build the kingdom of God afterwards when He had gone back to the Father. While the disciples were still on the sea Jesus walked on the sea to join them. So as we continue with the overall theme of the "FINAL DAYS OF PREPARATION OF DISCIPLES, our next sermon covers the importance of Jesus walking on the sea.

Thus our text of the day reads: "Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he

went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. 25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" 32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." 34 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him 36 and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed" (Matthew 14:22-36).

This is one of the other miracles of Jesus common to all four Gospels. Four things stand out in this narrative: First, the sea. To the Hebrew mind sea was sinister and a symbol of evil. Secondly, Jesus' power over nature – He had previously calm a tempestuous sea (Matthew 8:23-26). Thirdly is the distress and lack of faith in the disciples. Fourthly is the recognition of those in the boat that Jesus was the Son of God.

The importance of this miracle of Jesus walking on the sea was not so much about the natural elements and Jesus' power over them, but more about Peter and the other disciples' faith. The responsibilities of the disciples require much faith building because the situations surrounding ministry demand such and the minister must find time to spend alone with God in prayers for spiritual strength. Jesus demonstrated this in His ministry for the situation surrounding His ministry demanded Him to have time to Himself for prayer and spiritual strength. So He made His disciples to get into the boat and set out into the sea ahead of Him to have such a quiet time alone with God the Father.

While the disciples were out in the sea, a storm arose in the middle of the night (the fourth watch, between 3:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m.) and they struggled with the waves. They were about a mile (approximately 2000 yards) out at sea and suddenly they saw Jesus walking on the sea and thought it was a ghost. Jesus called out to them not to fear. We find eight similar expressions in the Book of Matthew, indicating that having faith in Jesus drives away fear. Jesus also encouraged them to take heart, for "it is I" (NIV) or "it is me". The Greek phrase that is translated such here may be an allusion to the divine name of God, who is the great "I am" (Exodus 3:14). Definitely, in the context of a Jewish gospel and a Jewish community, this certainly would carry the significance of a symbol of the presence of God in Jesus who is also called Immanuel meaning God with us. The recognition of the disciples that Jesus was the Son of God supports this thought.

The narrative in this section indicated that Peter initially steps out in faith, but his faith wavered when he focused on his surroundings rather than Jesus resulting in his sinking into the sea. His quick action to call on Jesus to save Him is a lesson for us to learn from. And, of course, Jesus reached out immediately and saved him from sinking into the sea. It is easy for us to find fault in Peter for wavering in faith, but where were the other disciples? Still in the boat! What about us? Do we reach out in faith towards Jesus or do we prefer to remain in the "boats" that are our

comfort zones? Without reaching out in faith towards Jesus, we will lack the faith and capacity to continue the work of building the kingdom of God. Because they preferred to remain in their comfort zone in the boat Jesus gently rebuked the disciples for being men with little faith. The striking thing about this event that followed immediately after the feeding of the five thousand is that the disciples still had a lot of learning to do about faith and trusting Jesus. So do us now as faith is something that requires time and experience to develop because we are often get caught up in our fears. And this is the importance of Jesus walking on the sea; so that He can calm our fears and build our faith to be able to continue with the building of the kingdom of God which He established. This is the word of God for the people of God, and let God's people say amen.

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- The Significance of the Miracle of Feeding the 5000
- The Importance of Jesus Walking on the Sea
- And let the church say, "Amen!"

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FINAL DAYS OF PREPARATION OF DISCIPLES

December 25, 2016

4. The Danger of Hypocrisy

Matthew 15:1-20

On this Christmas Day, 2016 I greet you all in the precious Name of Jesus, the Christ, our Lord and Redeemer; and I wish all a Merry Christmas. And you should have a Merry Christmas if hypocrisy is avoided in its celebration. This is because there is grave danger in hypocrisy. In hypocrisy people practice what is not from the heart but what they think will please others. A hypocrite is therefore an actor that is not real to themselves or others but fake and phony. A hypocrite says he is something but his actions say he is something else. Many people say they are Christians but their actions are out of line with the practice of Christianity. The primary foundation or root of hypocrisy is often the tradition of the elders passed us from one generation to next. Some examples of such traditions that have been passed to us and/or have inherited are that Christmas is about Santa, Rudolph the reindeer, the Christmas tree, the lights, the gifts that we give and receive from each other while the Christ of Christmas is left out. Almost every

household practices these traditions every Christmas but many do not recognize the Christ of Christmas to worship Him in their celebrations. Some even do not want to mention the name Jesus Christ during Christmas celebrations as well as throughout the year, but would indulge in the celebrations of those traditions that have been passed from one generation to next and neglect to be faithful in obeying the Word of God. Thus people nullify the word of God for the sake of their traditions. So as we continue with the overall theme of the “FINAL DAYS OF PREPARATION OF DISCIPLES, our sermon today focuses on the Danger of Hypocrisy.

Thus our text of the day reads: “Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, 2 “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!” 3 Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ [Exodus 20:12; Deut. 5:16] and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ [Exodus 21:17; Lev. 20:9] 5 But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’ 6 they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 8 “‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. 9 They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.’ [Isaiah 29:13]” 10 Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. 11 What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth that is what defiles them.” 12 Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?” 13 He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. 14 Leave them; they are blind guides. [Some manuscripts blind guides of the blind]. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” 15 Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.” 16 “Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. 17 “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? 18 But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. 20 These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”” (Matthew 15:1-20).

In this narrative here in Matthew 15:1-20, the Pharisees and Scribes once again accused Jesus of desecrating the Jewish tradition of the elders at that time because His disciples did not wash their hands before eating. The Pharisees were experts in interpreting the traditions of the elders which were not the same as the actual Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). Translating this into contemporary context, human interpretations are opinions, and not the laws or doctrines of the scripture. The traditions in themselves may be good, but when they are put on the same level as God’s law, then mankind’s opinion has been set on the same level as God’s Word. And this is the mistake that contemporary religious leaders have continued to make – failure to emphasize what Christmas is all about. Religious leaders must learn to emphasize Christ as the reason for Christmas celebrations and deemphasize the traditions of the elders that include Santa, Rudolph the reindeer, the Christmas tree, the lights, the gifts for each other, etc.

In this instance of the narrative in our text for the day, the Pharisees had not only placed their interpretation on the level of God’s Torah, but in fact had placed one of their traditions above God’s Law. Jesus had to focus His response on this as the problem was their interpretation of Coban (also referred to as Qorban or Korban), a vow that permitted a righteous Jew to maintain

a sacred offering to fund the temple. Korban was not a command of God; but a practice of the day. In this case, the Pharisees allowed a person to offer this monetary gift to the temple rather than use it to support their parents and fulfill God's command to honor one's parents (Exodus 20:12). In this way, the Pharisees had set their tradition above the direct command of God. There is another sense in which the Pharisees were out of line in accusing and charging the disciples of transgressing the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands before eating. In this case, they were wrongfully applying instructions for the sake of ceremonial purity (in which the priests have to carry out during sacrifices) to the normal household matters of eating. These two washings of hands were not the same (Exodus 30:17-21, Leviticus 15:11). So, Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees was scathing (or sarcastic). He likened them to Jews in Isaiah's day that honored God with their lips whereas their hearts were far away from God (Isaiah 29:13). The Jews in Isaiah's day had taught their own opinion and thoughts on equal level with the sacred scriptures. As such the Pharisees were like blind guides leading blind men, resulting in everyone falling into a pit. Jesus had to remind them with a proverbial saying to be careful of what they practice because "it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles people, but instead it is what proceeds out of their hearts and mouths". This is because it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

The take home message is that understanding the mistake of the religious leaders of Jesus' day offers the modern church an opportunity to examine its heart. Do we honor the traditions of the elders above the greatest commandments - loving God and loving our neighbors? Are we sometimes blinded to what God is doing in the world around us because we are so focused on our religious customs and traditions that have been passed to us by our parents to us even though there are not scriptural and we ourselves are passing it to the next generation? Christmas is here. Are you going to celebrate it scripturally or are you going to follow the traditions that have been passed to you? Christmas is about celebrating Jesus, the one born to be the savior of the world. This celebration involves worshiping Him, rather than emphasizing on Santa and what gifts we can get for ourselves for Christmas. Merry Christmas! This is the word of God for the people of God, and let God's people say amen.

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- The Relevance of the Death of John the Baptist
- The Significance of the Miracle of Feeding the 5000
- The Importance of Jesus Walking on the Sea
- The Danger of Hypocrisy
- And let the church say, "Amen!"

Have you truly believed and received Jesus who made Christmas celebrations possible? And have you received the kingdom message of repentance? If not, we invite you to come, repent, and humbly accept Jesus Christ into your heart and life by faith. I hope you will make room in your heart for Him today! Then confess with your mouth your faith in Him that He died and rose again to save you from your sin through the shedding of His blood on Calvary, and you will be saved and become part of God's family and kingdom. Then ask Him in prayers to empower you through the Holy Spirit with wisdom, courage and boldness to be always truthful and faithful to cause the continual growth of God's kingdom as you exercise your faith and bear good fruit. May God bless you as you humbly open your heart to provide room for Him as the choir leads us in a song!

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