

"USE AS DIRECTED"
MATTHEW 14:13-21
TENTH S. A. PENTECOST
MESSIAH, BOERNE
AUGUST 6, 2023

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT. AMEN.

TEXT: MATTHEW 14:13-21

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS IN LIFE PEOPLE NEED
TO LEARN IS HOW TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS. EVEN YOUNG CHILDREN
CAN LEARN TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS BY PLAYING SUCH GAMES AS
"SIMON SAYS" AND "FOLLOW THE LEADER." BUT SOMETIMES PEOPLE
ACT AS THOUGH THEY DON'T *NEED* TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS.
HOPEFULLY THESE PEOPLE WILL EVENTUALLY REALIZE THE ERROR OF
THEIR WAYS AND BEGIN FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS. AFTER ALL, AS
THE SAYING GOES, "WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, FOLLOW THE
DIRECTIONS."

FOR SOME PEOPLE, HOWEVER, *NOT* FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS HAS
A DEVASTATING EFFECT. FOR EXAMPLE, IF A PERSON FAILS TO
READ AND FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS PRINTED ON A PRESCRIPTION
BOTTLE, THEY COULD ACCIDENTALLY OVERDOSE ON THE MEDICATION
AND SUFFER A SEVERE REACTION, POSSIBLY EVEN DEATH. IF A
PERSON FAILS TO OBEY THE SPEED LIMIT, THEY COULD GET IN AN
ACCIDENT AND SUFFER SEVERE INJURIES OR EVEN DIE. AND IF
SOMEONE FAILS TO READ AND FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS FOR THE

INSTALLATION AND USE OF A SMOKE DETECTOR, THEY COULD BE OVERCOME BY SMOKE AND PERISH IN A FIRE. YOU SEE, IN SOME CASES, FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS IS A MATTER OF *LIFE OR DEATH*.

SUCH IS THE CASE IN OUR TEXT TODAY CONCERNING JESUS' MIRACULOUS FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND. JESUS DIRECTED HIS DISCIPLES TO FEED THE LARGE CROWD OF PEOPLE AND, BY SO DOING, CAUSED THEM TO RECOGNIZE THEIR OWN INADEQUACY TO PROVIDE FOR THE PEOPLE'S NEEDS. THEY DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO FEED ALL THE PEOPLE, AND THE OFFERING OF THE BOY'S LUNCH OF FIVE LOAVES AND TWO SMALL FISH WAS *WAY TOO LITTLE* TO PROVIDE FOR SUCH A LARGE CROWD. YET JESUS TOOK THE LOAVES AND THE FISH THAT HAD BEEN OFFERED, BLESSED THEM FOR GOD'S USE, AND PERFORMED A *MIRACLE*—HE FED 5,000 MEN, BESIDES THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN. SOME PEOPLE SAW THE MIRACULOUS SIGN AND, ON THE BASIS OF GOD'S WORD, RECOGNIZED JESUS AS THE PROMISED MESSIAH OF ISRAEL (DT 18:15, 18), WHILE OTHERS IN THE CROWD SAW JESUS SIMPLY AS A MIRACLE WORKER WHO COULD BENEFIT THEM AS AN EARTHLY KING (JN 6:15). RATHER THAN SETTING OUR SIGHTS ON EARTHLY BENEFITS AND WANTING TO USE JESUS FOR SELFISH PURPOSES, LET'S RECOGNIZE THAT JESUS *IS* THE PROMISED MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD, AND USING HIM AS DIRECTED IN GOD'S WORD, RECEIVE THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE.

OUR TEXT BEGINS WITH JESUS CROSSING THE SEA OF GALILEE IN ORDER TO FIND A PLACE WHERE HE COULD BE ALONE (V 13), BUT A LARGE CROWD OF PEOPLE FOLLOWED HIM BECAUSE OF THE MIRACULOUS SIGNS OF HEALING THEY HAD SEEN HIM DOING (JN 6:1-2). THEY FOLLOWED HIM AS A MAN OF GOD, PERHAPS EVEN THE PROMISED "PROPHET" TO WHOM THEY MUST LISTEN AND THROUGH WHOM THE LORD WOULD BLESS HIS PEOPLE (DEUT 18:15). ACCORDING TO LUKE, JESUS LANDED NEAR BETHSAIDA ON THE NORTHEASTERN SHORE OF THE LAKE, AND JOHN TELLS US HE WENT UP ON THE MOUNTAIN WHERE "HE SAT DOWN WITH HIS DISCIPLES" (JN 6:3). IT WAS SPRINGTIME; THE PASSOVER WAS NEAR (JN 6:4). SEEING THE CROWD OF PEOPLE, JESUS "HAD COMPASSION ON THEM AND HEALED THEIR SICK" (V 14). WHEN IT WAS EVENING, HE BECAME CONCERNED THAT THEY SHOULD HAVE SOMETHING TO EAT, SO HE SAID TO PHILIP, A NATIVE OF BETHSAIDA, "WHERE ARE WE TO BUY BREAD, SO THAT THESE PEOPLE MAY EAT?" (JN 6:5).

YOU SEE, BECAUSE OF THE LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE, A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS AROSE. THE PEOPLE NEEDED FOOD TO EAT, BUT THERE WAS NO PLACE THEY COULD GO TO GET ENOUGH FOOD FOR THE CROWD TO BE SATISFIED. THE DISCIPLES CERTAINLY DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY, AND EVEN IF THEY DID, THE NEARBY TOWNS DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH FOOD PREPARED. A BOY IN THE CROWD HAD ENOUGH FOOD WITH HIM FOR HIS FAMILY, BUT WHAT WERE THEY FOR SO MANY (JN 6:9)? THE DISCIPLES RECOGNIZED THAT THEY WERE

INCAPABLE OF PROVIDING THE PEOPLE WITH WHAT THEY NEEDED AND SAW THE SITUATION AS HOPELESS. THEN JESUS DIRECTED THEM, "HAVE THE PEOPLE SIT DOWN" (JN 6:10).

IN YOUR LIFE AS IN MY LIFE, WE RECEIVE BLESSINGS FROM GOD ALL THE TIME, BUT WE DON'T ALWAYS RECOGNIZE THEM AS GIFTS FROM THE LORD. FOR EXAMPLE, WE MAY WORK HARD ALL WEEK LONG, MAYBE FOR TWO WEEKS, PERHAPS FOR HALF-A-MONTH, IN ORDER TO RECEIVE A PAYCHECK. WE RECEIVE IT AS OUR DUE WAGES BUT OFTEN FORGET WHAT MOSES TOLD THE ISRAELITES BEFORE THEY CROSSED INTO THE PROMISED LAND:

BEWARE LEST YOU SAY IN YOUR HEART, "MY POWER AND THE MIGHT OF MY HAND HAVE GOTTEN ME THIS WEALTH." YOU SHALL REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR GOD, FOR IT IS HE WHO GIVES YOU POWER TO GET WEALTH, THAT HE MAY CONFIRM HIS COVENANT THAT HE SWORE TO YOUR FATHERS, AS IT IS THIS DAY. (DT 8:17-18)

WHEN THE ISRAELITES HUNGERED IN THE DESERT, GOD PROVIDED THEM WITH MANNA, BREAD FROM HEAVEN, "THAT HE MIGHT MAKE THEM KNOW THAT MAN DOES NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT MAN LIVES BY EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF THE LORD" (DEUT 8:3). SO, JESUS, HAVING LED THE DISCIPLES TO RECOGNIZE THEIR HELPLESSNESS, AND KNOWING "WHAT HE WOULD DO" (JN 6:6), "TOOK THE LOAVES, AND WHEN HE HAD GIVEN THANKS, HE DISTRIBUTED THEM TO THOSE WHO WERE SEATED. SO ALSO THE FISH, AS MUCH AS THEY WANTED" (JN 6:11), THAT IS, UNTIL THEY WERE SATISFIED. AND WHEN THEY WERE FINISHED,

JESUS DIRECTED THE DISCIPLES TO "GATHER UP THE LEFTOVER FRAGMENTS, THAT NOTHING MAY BE LOST" (JN 6:12), AND THE DISCIPLES GATHERED UP TWELVE BASKETS FULL OF LEFTOVER BREAD FRAGMENTS (V 20).

JESUS HAD PERFORMED A MIRACULOUS SIGN THAT POINTED TO HIM AS THE PROMISED MESSIAH OF ISRAEL BY FEEDING MORE THAN FIVE THOUSAND PEOPLE WITH JUST FIVE LOAVES OF BARLEY BREAD AND TWO SMALL FISH. THIS WAS SOMETHING HUMANLY IMPOSSIBLE, LIKE GOD FEEDING THE ISRAELITES DAILY WITH MANNA FROM HEAVEN DURING THEIR FORTY-YEAR-LONG EXODUS. JOHN WRITES THAT "WHEN THE PEOPLE SAW THE SIGN THAT [JESUS] HAD DONE, THEY SAID, 'THIS IS INDEED THE PROPHET WHO IS TO COME INTO THE WORLD!'" (6:14). THUS, WE SEE THAT SOME PEOPLE USED JESUS AS DIRECTED IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES. THEY REMEMBERED MOSES' PROPHECY AND BELIEVED IN JESUS AS THE PROMISED MESSIAH (DT 18:15).

ON THE OTHER HAND, SOME PEOPLE IN THE CROWD SAW A DIFFERENT OPPORTUNITY. THEIR MINDS WERE SET ON WORLDLY MATTERS. THEY WERE LOOKING FOR A MESSIANIC LEADER WHO WOULD OVERTHROW THEIR ROMAN OPPRESSORS AND USHER IN AN AGE OF PEACE AND PROSPERITY LIKE THAT OF ANCIENT ISRAEL UNDER KING DAVID. JUST THINK: A RULER WHO COULD MIRACULOUSLY PROVIDE ALL THE FOOD NECESSARY TO SATISFY THE PEOPLE'S HUNGER. IF HE COULD DO THAT, WHAT ELSE COULD HE DO? THESE

PEOPLE WANTED TO "TAKE HIM BY FORCE TO MAKE HIM KING," BUT JESUS, PERCEIVING THEIR EVIL INTENT, "WITHDREW AGAIN TO THE MOUNTAIN BY HIMSELF" (JN 6:15).

WHICH LEAVES US WITH THE QUESTION, HOW WILL WE USE JESUS? WILL WE USE JESUS AS DIRECTED IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, TO BELIEVE IN HIM AND BE SAVED (ACTS 16:31)? WILL WE "LISTEN TO HIM" AND OBEY HIS DIRECTIONS (DT 18:15; MT 17:5), OR WILL WE LISTEN TO OTHER VOICES--VOICES OF THE DEVIL, THE WORLD, AND OUR SINFUL NATURE--THAT LEAD US ASTRAY? FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN WE COME TO CHURCH, DO WE ARRIVE WITH THE EXPECTATION THAT GOD IS GOING TO WORK A MIRACLE IN OUR LIVES? HE ALWAYS DOES, YOU KNOW, GIVING US FORGIVENESS OF SINS, LIFE, AND SALVATION THROUGH HIS WORD AND SACRAMENTS. OR DO YOU COME TO CHURCH, LIKE SO MANY IN OUR WORLD, OUT OF A SENSE OF OBLIGATION, UNDER THE COMPULSION OF THE LAW, OR JUST GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS?

DEAR FRIENDS, GOD CALLS US TO BE *DIFFERENT* FROM SUCH "WORLDLY MINDED" PEOPLE! TO THOSE WHO SOUGHT TO MAKE HIM THEIR EARTHLY KING, JESUS SAID,

TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, YOU ARE SEEKING ME, NOT BECAUSE YOU SAW SIGNS, BUT BECAUSE YOU ATE YOUR FILL OF THE LOAVES. DO NOT WORK FOR THE FOOD THAT PERISHES, BUT FOR THE FOOD THAT ENDURES TO ETERNAL LIFE, WHICH THE SON OF MAN WILL GIVE YOU. FOR ON HIM GOD THE FATHER HAS SET HIS SEAL. (JN 6:26-27)

GOD WANTS US TO USE JESUS AS DIRECTED IN HIS WORD, FIRST OF ALL, BY SEEING, AND THEREFORE BELIEVING, IN HIM AS THE CHRIST, GOD'S PROMISED MESSIAH, OUR SAVIOR. GOD DIRECTS US TO LISTEN TO HIM AS HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON, IN WHOM HE IS WELL PLEASED (MT 3:17; 17:5). WHEN WE BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, WE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE, BUT WHOEVER DOES NOT OBEY GOD'S WORD BY BELIEVING THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD, "SHALL NOT SEE LIFE, BUT THE WRATH OF GOD REMAINS ON HIM" (JN 3:36; 20:31).

SECOND, LET'S TRUST IN JESUS AS OUR PERFECT PROVIDER. LIKE THE DISCIPLES, WE OFTEN LIVE MORE BY SIGHT AND NOT BY FAITH (JN 20:25). WE LOOK AT DIFFICULTIES IN LIFE MORE AS OBSTACLES IN OUR WAY THAN AS CHALLENGES TO BE MET IN CHRIST. THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS' SUFFERING AND DEATH ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SALVATION, GOD HAS ALREADY PROVIDED US WITH VICTORY OVER THE DEVIL, THE WORLD, AND OUR SINFUL FLESH (1 JN 5:4-5). NOW JESUS PROMISES TO PROVIDE FOR OUR EVERY NEED, AS HE SAYS, "SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL THESE THINGS [SUCH AS FOOD, DRINK, AND CLOTHING] WILL BE ADDED TO YOU" (MT 6:33).

AND THIRD, LET'S TELL OTHER PEOPLE TO TRUST IN JESUS AS THEIR SAVIOR, TOO. JESUS SAID,

ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH HAS BEEN GIVE TO ME. GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE

SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. AND BEHOLD, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE END OF THE AGE. (MT 28:18-20)

IT'S AN AWESOME CHALLENGE JESUS HAS GIVEN TO US: TO MAKE DISCIPLES FOR HIM FROM ALL THE PEOPLE GROUPS OF THE WORLD BY BAPTIZING THEM AND TEACHING THEM ACCORDING TO HIS WORD. THIS IS SOMETHING HUMANLY IMPOSSIBLE, LIKE FEEDING THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WITH TWO HUNDRED DENARII OR FIVE LOAVES OF BREAD AND TWO SMALL FISH! BUT JESUS, THE SON OF GOD, PROMISES TO BE WITH US ALWAYS, INCLUDING WHEN WE ARE TELLING OTHER PEOPLE ABOUT HIM, AND HE HAS BEEN GIVEN ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND EARTH. HE PROMISES TO BE WITH US, WITH HIS POWER AND HIS PEACE, AS WE FOLLOW HIS COMMAND TO USE HIS WORD AS DIRECTED.

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, FOLLOWING THE DIRECTIONS THAT COME WITH PRODUCTS IS IMPORTANT SINCE THEY'RE PROVIDED BY THE PRODUCER. AFTER ALL, THE ONE WHO MADE THE PRODUCT SHOULD KNOW BEST *HOW TO USE IT*. THAT'S CERTAINLY TRUE WITH GOD. THE FATHER, OUR CREATOR, KNOWS *BEST* HOW TO REDEEM HIS FALLEN CREATION—THROUGH HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST, OUR LORD. BY *LISTENING* TO JESUS, BY *BELIEVING* IN JESUS, BY *EATING* JESUS' BODY AND *DRINKING* HIS BLOOD (MT 17:5; JN 3:16; MT 26:27-28), THAT IS, BY *USING THE DIRECTIONS* GOD GIVES US IN HIS HOLY WORD, WE HAVE ABUNDANT AND ETERNAL LIFE IN JESUS' NAME (JN 10:10b). AMEN.