

Open Heart, Open Bible

Exodus and John's Gospel

Linking Theme: Redemption

Passage for weekly reading (week 22):

John ch. 's 5 – 8

I AM the bread of life (6 v.35)

Before Abraham was born, I AM (8 v.58)

In Exodus we read of the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses, the name which became the most revered of all the names of God to the Israelites. It is the name of Jahweh, or Jehovah, the name which the people would not dare to speak, translated as the LORD in English versions of the Bible (Ex. 6 v.'s 2&3). Its meaning conveyed something of the eternal self-existence of God in His power and sovereignty. In these chapters from John's Gospel we listen to Jesus speaking of Himself as one with that same LORD in His eternal Being, climaxing in John 8 v.58, quoted above.

The healing at Bethesda is the third of the "signs" recorded by John in his Gospel, taking place as it does in Jerusalem on the occasion of one of the Feasts. Jesus' question to the disabled man is a question He asks all of us at some time or other – "Do you want to get well?" The man obviously does, although he doesn't know what to make of the question! A "yes" answer would have been quite sufficient! Our Lord's warning to him (v.14), having received his healing, is very significant. There is obviously a strong connection between sin and dis-ease in its many forms. The former invalid has not understood that yet!

Opposition to the healing (because it took place on the Sabbath, v.16), gives rise to the second of Jesus' teaching discourses, this time to the Jewish religionists who resisted him passionately. This is another "seven" that characterises the beautifully ordered symmetry of this Gospel – i.e. – seven sections of teaching to a variety of audiences, with whom He shares the truth in an unfolding way, as follows:

Audience	Subject	Occasion
Nicodemus (3 v.'s 1 – 21)	The new birth	First Passover (2 v.13)
Jewish opponents (5 v.'s 17 – 47)	The new life	An unnamed Feast (5 v.1)
The crowds (6 v.'s 25 – 58)	The Bread of life	Second Passover (6 v.4), (although Jesus was in Capernaum at this time).

Audience	Subject	Occasion (cont.'d)
The Pharisees and others (7 v.'s 37 – 39, and 8 v.'s 12 – 58)	The Light of life (- of the world)	The Feast of Tabernacles (7 v.2)
The Jews (10 v.'s 1 – 38)	The Good Shepherd	The Feast of Dedication, (not an O.T. Feast, but instituted later, known as Hanukkah - 10 v.22)
Jews and proselytes (12 v.'s 23 – 50)	The corn of wheat (v.24) The Word of the Father (v.49)	Six days before the Third Passover (12 v.1)
The disciples alone (ch.'s 14 – 16)	The Holy Spirit (another Comforter – 14 v.16)	The Last Supper and Third Passover (13 v.1)

Back to the teaching session following the healing in ch. 5, Jesus takes His hearers beyond a restored quality of life in the here and now to the eternal dimension of life which only He can give. He can give it because He, like the Father, has life in Himself (v.26). Death only invaded the existence of man when he disobeyed God and fell into sin (Gen. 2 v.17). Jesus never sinned (John 8 v.46), therefore He lives eternally, and can give of that life to all who believe on Him. Our Lord cites the witness of John the Baptist, of the works that He is doing, and of the Scriptures themselves, the O.T. Scriptures, as evidence of His divine Sonship.

In ch.6, the walk on the water is the link between the feeding of the 5,000 and the teaching section concerning the Bread of life. In this section, we are given the first of yet another “seven” in John’s Gospel, the seven “I Am’s” of our Lord. These amplify the most Holy name of Jahweh revealed to Moses, and give fuller meaning to Jesus’ assertion that “before Abraham was, I am” (John 8 v.58). The “I Am’s” are these:

- 1) **the Bread of life** (6 v.'s 35, 48)
- 2) **the Light of the world** (8 v.12, 9 v.5)
- 3) **the Gate for the sheep** (10 v.7)
- 4) **the Good Shepherd** (10 v.'s 11,14)
- 5) **the Resurrection and the Life** (11 v.25)
- 6) **the Way, the Truth, the Life** (14 v.6)
- 7) **the True Vine** (15 v.'s 1,5)

Jesus told Nicodemus about the new birth, He told the hostile Jews about the new life, and now He tells the crowd about the only way in which that life can be sustained – by “feeding” on Him (v.'s 51&57). This meant listening to Him, and “feeding” on His words, for those words are of God (v.45). The disciples themselves were also listening to the teaching of Jesus at this time, and for them it

was a preparation for the more visual demonstration He would give them at the Last Supper. The very thought of drinking blood was an anathema to the Jewish culture, and utterly contrary to the law of Moses, so it was understandable that many of those who had gone this far with Jesus could go no farther (v.66). To those Jewish people, it sounded like a form of cannibalism, but they could not grasp that He was speaking of spiritual things – “the flesh counts for nothing but the Spirit gives life”. Peter spoke for the twelve in saying that they still believed. They might not fully understand right now, but they believe and will go on (6 v.68,69). Sometimes we, too, have to go on, even though we’re not understanding too well! Obedience can often lead to revelation!

The next two chapters contain teaching that Jesus gives several months later at the Feast of Tabernacles. The hostility between Him and the religious leaders continues to increase, especially as many of the people who had been listening to Him were now believing (v.31). Attempts to seize and arrest Him were unsuccessful. Our Lord’s words at the end of the Feast are especially memorable (v.’s 37-39), giving clear understanding of the timing of the Holy Spirit’s coming.

Jesus then releases the woman caught in adultery, but not without a strong admonition to change her lifestyle. We can all change wrong lifestyles if we really hear God telling us to! Again, this short account of a woman’s encounter with the Lord leads into a teaching section, this time headed the Light of the world. People continue to believe on Him (v.30), and He encourages them to “continue in His word” (A.V.), or to “hold to his teaching” (N.I.V.), in order to live in “freedom”.

Problem – they thought they were already free! They had not understood the connection between sin and bondage. Wasn’t it enough that they were of Abraham’s line, children of the God of Israel? In a word, no! They are of satan’s dominion. Thus, they are believing lies, for they are his “native language”. Jesus states again that His word is the truth, and that believing the truth breaks the hold of death. They now call Him demon-possessed (v.48). The vision of Abraham was not for one race alone, it was for world-wide blessing. Jesus has come to release that blessing, for “**before Abraham was, I am**”. This is too much for their Jewish mindset. These were people who were “believing” a moment ago! Our Lord never attempted to win converts cheaply!

Food for thought / discussion / prayer

1) In ch. 5 v.’s 45 – 47, Jesus says that, if the people believed Moses, they would believe Him, for Moses wrote about Him. What did Moses write about Jesus? (See Deut. 18 v.15 and John 1 v.21). Anything else?

2) In spite of the “offensive” nature of Jesus’ teaching in ch.6 (v.61), Peter knew that, as far as they, the twelve, were concerned, their options were closed. When were you last “offended” at something Jesus said, or asked of you? Have you come through it, and what was the outcome, if so?

3) There are some outstanding verses in ch.’s 7 and 8. Write some of them down that strike you, and try memorising them. Jesus says that some of His Jewish listeners “have no room for His word” (8 v.37). Let’s pray that we ourselves might make much room for His word in the pressures of our modern lives. Nothing else will set us free!

4) The tension with which this week’s passage ends is caused because Jesus’ Jewish hearers think they are O.K. They are, in other words, self-righteous. This is one of the hardest barriers the Holy Spirit has to break in a person, especially one who feels to be leading quite a decent life. Many people think they are basically O.K. What does God think of this?

Next week’s passage: John ch.’s 9 -12