

Matthew 14; Mark 6; John 5-6 – Ep 196: CFM

John 5.1-47: Jesus heals the man at the Pools of Bethesda, He does the Works of the Father

The Pools of Bethesda

Public baths were standard in Greco-Roman cities, and people congregated there. A Qumran scroll attests the name of this pool, and archaeologists have discovered a pool in this location fitting precisely this description. Although scholars do not agree on the site of Bethesda (or its exact spelling), many favor a site under St. Anne's Monastery in Jerusalem, just north-northeast of the temple. The pools were quite large and roughly twenty feet deep. This site had two twin pools, surrounded by four porches, or porticoes, and one porch (a fifth one) down the middle separating the pools (perhaps separating genders). Although John writes after Jerusalem was destroyed in 70, his recollection of the site is accurate. This site was later used as a pagan healing shrine; given the ancient tendency to reuse older shrines, the Jewish community in Jesus' day may well have viewed this pool as a place of healing. The temple authorities undoubtedly did not approve—after all, sacred pools at healing shrines characterized Greek cults like that of Asclepius—but popular religion often ignores religious contradictions that seem clearer to official religious leaders.¹

Healing shrines were common throughout the ancient world, especially for the worship of Asclepius and other popular deities renowned for healing powers.² Most of these shrines required the supplicants to purify themselves at the adjoining fountain or other source of water. This passage portrays Jesus as greater than such healing sanctuaries of his day, and it also shows Jesus meeting individuals where they are. He meets a man who is doing all he can to be healed, even though he may be “doing it wrong” by the cultural norms of the Jewish people of his day. Like the woman at the well (John 4), Jesus meets people “where they are.”

This event can be seen as an allegory for the doctrine of Baptism for the Dead

“Impotent Folk” (John 5.3)

An infirmity 38 years (John 5.5 – see Deut. 2.14)

The “impotent man” (John 5.7)

“Sir, I have no man... to put me into the pool!” (John 5.7)

“The Father raiseth up the dead!” (John 5.21)

“The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live!” (John 5.25)

¹ Craig Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary](#), IVP Academic, 2014, p. 262.

² This pool [was] evidently a mineral spring of some sort whose waters bubbled intermittently as escaping gases broke the surface...No doubt these waters had-as hot mineral springs do in our day-some curative and healing powers, **which gave rise to a legend, among the superstitious and spiritually illiterate Jews**, that ‘an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water,’ and that ‘whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.’” Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 4 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979-1981], 2: 66, emphasis added.

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice!” (John 5.28)

The Resurrection of “Damnation” (John 5.29)

Greek: καὶ ἐκπορεύσονται οἱ τὰ ἀγαθὰ ποιήσαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν ζωῆς οἱ δὲ τὰ φαῦλα πράξαντες εἰς ἀνάστασιν κρίσεως.

And they will proceed, **those having done good** into the resurrection of **LIFE** but those that have done evil/φαῦλα *will go* into the resurrection of distinction/κρίσις.³ (my translation) This “distinction” is exactly what is going on in D&C 76 and this is the verse that was opened up to the mind of the Prophet Joseph Smith when he received this revelation.

Matt. 14.1-12; Mark 6.21-29: The Death of John the Baptist

Herod’s marriage to his brother’s wife

Herod’s affair with his sister-in-law, whom he had by this time married, was widely known.⁴ Indeed, because Herodias insisted that Antipas divorce his first wife before marrying her, the first wife fled to her father, king of the Nabatean Arabs, who later went to war with Antipas and defeated him. John’s denunciation of the affair as unlawful (besides being adultery, it violated biblical incest prohibitions; see Lev 18:16; 20:21) was an attack against Herod’s adultery, but Herod could have perceived it as a political threat, given the political ramifications that later led to a major military defeat. (Josephus claims that many viewed Herod’s humiliation in the war as divine judgment for his executing John the Baptist; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.116-119.)⁵

Why did Herodias divorce Philip and marry Herod Antipas (her uncle)?

It may be due to the fact that Philip did not have a kingdom, for he was denied a kingdom when his father Herod the Great discovered that his wife Mariamne⁶ was plotting against him and Philip had done nothing to prevent the plot from coming to fruition. This is only a possibility, but it would make sense.⁷

³ Κρίσις = “A decision, determination, judgment.” This word also denotes a trial, sentence, accusation, quarrel, or dispute. See [Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon](#), κρίσις. The ἀνάστασιν κρίσεως can also be translated as “The resurrection of judgment,” or as Matthew 10.15 renders it, ἡμέρα κρίσεως “The Day of Judgment.”

⁴ Not to be too cringey here, but she is also Herod Antipas’ niece, as she is the daughter of his brother. She was the daughter of one of his older brothers Aristobulus IV, who was also the son (as was Herod Antipas) of Herod the Great.

⁵ Keener, p. 143.

⁶ Mariamne, the mother of Herod Philip, was executed circa 29 BC for plotting against Herod the Great. Mariamne was the granddaughter of Hyrcanus II, one of the last Hasmonean kings of Judea, and was seen as a political threat to Herod’s rule. After Mariamne’s execution, Herod Philip was stripped of his royal title and became a private citizen, effectively being denied a kingdom.

⁷ **Why does Philip not rule? Philip was Herod II. He was the fourth son (of Herod and Mariamne II, the daughter of Simon Boethus the High Priest), namesake and briefly heir apparent of Herod the Great.** After Herod I executed his Hasmonean sons, Alexander & Aristobulus IV (7 BCE), he betrothed the latter’s orphaned daughter (Herodias) — who was still a minor — to her half-uncle, **Herod junior, known as “Philip” in Matthew and Mark and known in history as Herod II.** This arranged marriage was more than temporary child custody. For Herodias was descended directly from the dynasty of priest-kings that had ruled Jerusalem for more than a century before Herod, as she was a Hasmonean. Since this liaison bolstered the young Herod’s right of succession to the throne of

Herod's birthday (Matt. 14.6)

Jewish people did not normally celebrate birthdays in this period (Josephus declares celebrating birthdays forbidden). But though most Jews considered birthday celebrations a Gentile custom, culturally prestigious Greek customs influenced the aristocracy. Rejecting invitations to such parties without good excuse would risk enmity. Lewd dancing was common entertainment at drinking parties; normally a princess would never participate, but the Herodian family already had a reputation for its moral extravagances. At Herod's fortress Machaerus, men and women dined in separate halls (a custom known in the eastern Mediterranean), so Herodias would not have directly witnessed Herod's behavior toward her daughter Salome.⁸

The daughter of Herodias danced... it pleased Herod (Matt. 14.6)

"Such feasts as this were not complete without entertainment, without something to feed the lusts and arouse the passions of those now gorged with food and half drunken with wine. Dancers, especially dancing women, were in great demand. Taking into account the sensuous nature of the Herods, the mean and vulgar demeanor of the military men, the adultery-centered proclivities of the chief priests; having in mind the depraved and vulgar displays Herod would have seen at Caesar's banquets; knowing of the perversions and sexual excesses found in all Oriental courts, and the loose and low moral standard of all the Gentiles and many of the Jews; being aware of all this...we have no difficulty envisioning the type of banquet entertainment that was presented at these kingly feasts."⁹

He promised her "whatsoever she would ask" (Matt. 14.7)

Herod's oath is a drunken one; as a vassal of Rome, he had no authority to compromise any of his territory. Hearers could also recoil at Herod's lust (cf. Mt 5:28); to sleep with the daughter of one's wife was incest (Lev 18:17).¹⁰

She was "instructed of her mother" (Matt. 14.8)

The girl has to go "out" to ask her mother. Excavations at Herod's fortress [Machaerus](#) suggest two dining halls, one for women and one for men. Herodias has thus presumably not been present to watch

Judea, the king's oldest son (Antipater III) objected to the arrangement. So, Herod confirmed the latter as his heir & relegated the young Herod to next in line.

When Antipater was executed for planning to poison his father (4 BCE), the younger Herod became his father's oldest surviving son. But, since the elder Herod had discovered that the younger's mother (Mariamne II) had known of the plot against him & done nothing to prevent it, he dropped her son from his will just days before he died. *Although Herod II survived his father's deathbed purges, he was left a private citizen while his remaining half-brothers divided his father's realm. This eventually cost him his marriage. Although he did marry Herodias and had a child by her, she left him for his younger half-brother, Antipas.* After that the younger Herod slipped into anonymity. See: [Herod II Boethus, Virtual Religion](#). Accessed 12.15.22. Other references: Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.14-19, 53, 78; 18.109-110, 136-137. *War* 1.557, 562, 573, 588, 599-600. See also: Mark 6:17-18 and Matt 14:3-4.

⁸ Keener, p. 82.

⁹ Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 2: 333.

¹⁰ Keener, p. 82.

Herod's reaction to the dance. Josephus characterizes Herodias the same way Mark does: a jealous, ambitious schemer.¹¹

Matt. 14.13-15; Mark 6.30-33; Luke 9.10-11; John 6.1-2: The Return of the Twelve Apostles

This seems to be a report of the Twelve, coming back from their missions, at least as it is explained in Mark and Luke:

And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught (Mark 6.30).

And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida (Luke 9.10).

Bethsaida was probably associated with fishing, and was located on the northern shore of the Lake of Galilee; some scholars suggest two sites with this name, but the matter is disputed. In any case, the narrative seems to suggest that Jesus took the crowds beyond Bethsaida itself. The Galilean countryside was full of villages, but Jesus had withdrawn his followers some distance from the nearest villages. Even most larger towns would have under three thousand inhabitants; feeding the crowd in the villages would have been difficult (9:12). The known Bethsaida was ethnically mixed and not far from the region of the Decapolis. If they were further in largely Gentile territory, hospitality would be even harder to find.¹²

Matt. 14.14-23; Mark. 6.34-46; Luke 9.11-17; John 6.3-15: The Feeding of the 5,000

The feeding of the 5,000 is a significant event in the New Testament, recorded in all four Gospels (Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, and John 6:1-15). It is regarded as one of Jesus' miracles and is seen as an important sign of his power and compassion. This event demonstrates Jesus' ability to meet the physical and spiritual needs of people, and it serves as a symbol of his role as the Bread of Life, providing sustenance to those who believe in him. The event also highlights the large following Jesus had and helped increase his popularity among the people.

Ancient kings often fed their people food in various settings, including religious festivals, feasts, and banquets. In times of scarcity, they might also distribute food to the people to alleviate famine and ensure their survival. In some cultures, the king or ruler would provide food as a symbol of their wealth, power, and generosity, and this could be done as part of a religious ceremony or as a political gesture to maintain control over the population. In other cultures, the provision of food by the king was seen as a way to honor the gods or to seek their blessings. Banquets and feasts were also often held to celebrate victories, to mark special events, or to entertain guests and allies. In each of these settings, the provision of food by the king was a way to demonstrate his power, wealth, and concern for the well-being of his people.

One example of a setting where ancient kings fed their people food is recorded in the biblical story of King Solomon. According to the First Book of Kings, King Solomon held a great feast to dedicate the temple he built in Jerusalem. The feast lasted for seven days and included a large sacrifice and offerings to the Lord. In addition to the religious aspects of the feast, King Solomon also provided food and drink

¹¹ Keener, p. 143.

¹² Ibid., p. 203.

for all the people who had gathered for the celebration, demonstrating his wealth and generosity. This event is recorded in 1 Kings 8:62-66.

Baker and Ricks state that the king fed his people on the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles:

The concluding day—the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles temple drama and the twenty-second day of the festival—was a day of celebration, sacrificing, and feasting. It was the day of the great feast when ***the king supplied the nation with all the animals for the sacrifices and all the food for the feast***. Eating together emphasized the covenantal unity between God, the king, and all of Israel. The king's supplying all the food symbolized a return to the Garden with free access to the fruit of the tree of life—for on this day, all things had been restored again to their proper order,¹³ representing the fulfillment of Jehovah's covenants and his millennial reign. It emphasized the covenantal unity between God and Israel with a meal shared by all the nation.¹⁴

Jesus, as the king of the world, coming to the Nephite as described in 3 Nephi, delivered a sermon to his people and also provided food and wine miraculously:

It came to pass that he brake bread again and blessed it, and gave to the disciples to eat. And when they had eaten he commanded them that they should break bread, and give unto the multitude. And when they had given unto the multitude he also gave them wine to drink, and commanded them that they should give unto the multitude. Now, there had been no bread, neither wine, brought by the disciples, neither by the multitude; but he truly gave unto them bread to eat, and also wine to drink. (3 Nephi 20.3-7)¹⁵

The following day was like the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles temple drama. The Savior came to them, and again he did what the ritual of the temple drama said the king would do. On that day there was a great feast, and all the food was provided by the king himself. It represented his power and authority to rule with generosity, equity, justice, and mercy. Symbolically, in the drama this was a return to paradise where the people might eat freely of the fruit of the tree of life.¹⁶

¹³ Geo Widengren, writing of sacred kingship in antiquity, relates in his book [*The King and the Tree of Life*](#), states, "The hero of the epic intends both to eat himself of the plant and to give his people to eat of the Plant of Life. By this process they will regain youth and strength." See page 33.

¹⁴ LeGrand Baker and Stephen Ricks, [*Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?: The Psalms in Israel's Temple Worship In the Old Testament and In the Book of Mormon*](#), Eborn Books, 2010, p. 431, emphasis added.

¹⁵ There are many other accounts of kings feeding their people in antiquity. This practice was common in various cultures throughout the ancient world and was seen as a way for rulers to demonstrate their power and generosity. For example, In ancient Rome, emperors such as Augustus and Trajan held public feasts, where large quantities of food were provided to the people. In ancient China, emperors often held lavish banquets and provided food to the people as a symbol of their rule and as a way to maintain their support. In ancient Persia, rulers such as Xerxes and Darius were known to hold grand feasts and provide food to their subjects, both as a sign of their wealth and as a way to demonstrate their generosity. These are just a few examples of the many instances in which ancient kings fed their subjects throughout history. The practice was widespread and seen as a way for rulers to demonstrate their power and generosity, as well as to maintain their support and authority. Jesus is filling this role as the king of the cosmos here in this setting and in other places such as Exodus 24 and 3 Nephi 20.

¹⁶ Baker and Ricks, p. 642.

The symbolism was unmistakable. The Savior had symbolically—and literally—reintroduced the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve back into the paradisiacal Garden home, where they could be in God’s presence and eat freely of the fruit of the tree of life and drink from the river of the waters of life.¹⁷

This event directly relates to the feeding/feast discussed in D&C 27, Exodus 24, and Revelation 19.7-10. It also ties into this from Isaiah 40:

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young (Isaiah 40.11).¹⁸

His Character Revealed

Elder McConkie relates:

"John tells us that Jesus 'himself knew what he would do' beforehand (John 6:6), and that this foreknowledge applied also to the preparation for the desert feast we cannot doubt. And so, before the miraculous banquet can be served, the table in the desert must be prepared. The question, 'Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?' must be answered anew, as it was in the day of Moses when Jehovah served quail to all Israel. (Ps. 78:13-20.)...It should not be thought a thing unreasonable among them that the Son of God would exercise his creative power to give meat to hungry men. Indeed, their tradition was that when the Messiah came he would—as Moses had done—give them bread from heaven, provide them water to drink, feed them flesh according to their needs. Others before had fed Israel miraculously when their needs were great. Should it not happen again?"¹⁹

The cost of feeding such a crowd

Fish (particularly around the lake) and especially bread were central components of the Palestinian diet; meat was probably rarely available for most people except at feasts, when large numbers of animals were sacrificed. Food was always sold in village markets, and the Galilean countryside was full of villages (6:36); but Jesus had withdrawn his followers some distance from the nearest villages (6:32). Even the largest villages would have under three thousand inhabitants; despite Galilee’s agricultural self-sufficiency, feeding this crowd in the villages would thus have been difficult. ***But it would have taken more than two hundred days of an average person’s wages (around seven months of hard labor) to feed the great multitude that had assembled.*** Compare the analogous instruction, astonished question from a disciple, and following miracle in 2 Kings 4:42-44.²⁰

Bread Remaining

¹⁷ Baker and Ricks, p. 643.

¹⁸ לַיְהוָה יִקְבֹּץ טְלָאִים וּבְחִיקוֹ יֵשֵׂא עֲלוֹת יִנְהַל “Like a shepherd his flock he will feed, in his strength he will gather the lambs and in his embrace he will carefully guide and carry those that nurse.” (my translation) Jesus is filling this role here in this story and in the 3 Nephi narrative. This image of Isaiah is a powerful one, repeated in many texts, such as those cited above.

¹⁹ Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 2: 341.

²⁰ Keener, p. 144, emphasis added.

"Only by persisting in His questioning did Jesus succeed in getting His disciples to remember that there were actually twelve baskets of 'leftovers' after the miracle of the loaves (see Matthew 14:15-21; Matt 16:9-10). *The Bread of Life always gives 'enough and to spare'* (D&C 104:17), *but we're so forgetful.*"²¹

Matt. 14.24-33; Mark 6.47-52; John 6.16-21: Jesus walks on water

In some Near Eastern myths, the chaos dragon is seen as a symbol of the forces of chaos and disorder, and the defeat of the dragon represents the triumph of order and stability. The story of Jesus walking on the water in the New Testament can be seen as a symbol of this same idea, as it represents Jesus' mastery over the chaotic forces of the natural world and his ability to bring order and stability.

In this context, the chaotic sea can be seen as a symbol of the chaos dragon, and Jesus' ability to walk on the water can be seen as a demonstration of his power over the forces of chaos. By walking on the water, Jesus is able to calm the storm and bring peace to the sea, symbolizing the defeat of the chaos dragon and the triumph of order and stability. It is important to note that this is just one interpretation of the story of Jesus walking on the water, and there are many other interpretations that focus on different aspects of the story and its meaning.²²

Other Interpretations of Jesus Walking on the Water

There are many other interpretations of the story of Jesus walking on the water in the New Testament, each emphasizing different aspects of the story and its meaning. Some of the most common interpretations include:

1. A demonstration of Jesus' divinity: In this interpretation, Jesus' ability to walk on the water is seen as a demonstration of his divine power and control over the natural world.²³ We see images of Jesus' divinity stressed in the Greek where he says *Θαρσεῖτε ἐγὼ εἰμι. μὴ φοβεῖσθε* "Be comforted, It is I, be not afraid!" (Mark 6.50). Here Jesus is literally saying "I AM" (see Exodus 3.14).²⁴
2. A test of faith: In this interpretation, the story of Jesus walking on the water can be seen as a test of faith for the disciples, who must trust in Jesus even in the midst of a chaotic and dangerous situation (note that Peter is invited to walk on the water with Jesus- Matt. 14.27-31).²⁵
3. A symbol for spiritual growth: In this interpretation, the story can be seen as a metaphor for the spiritual journey of the disciples and the process of growing closer to God.

²¹ Elder Neal A. Maxwell, [That Ye May Believe](#), Bookcraft, 1992.

²² See: John Day, [God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea](#), Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2020. See also Bernhard F. Batto, [Slaying the Dragon](#), Westminster John Knox Press, 1992.

²³ This can be read as a sign of Jesus' control over creation: This interpretation sees Jesus' ability to walk on water as a demonstration of his control over the natural world and his mastery over the forces of nature. Think of the *tohu waw bohu* of creation coming into an ordered system (Genesis 1.2).

²⁴ This is significant, as this is the expression of the Divine Name that Yahweh communicates to Moses when Moses asks what name he is to report to the elders of the Jews as to the name of the God that he has just spoken to.

²⁵ "What is most to be focused on—the fact that Peter walked briefly on the water or that he did not continue? Has any other mortal so walked, even that briefly?" Neal A. Maxwell, ["A Brother Offended," Conference April 1982](#).

4. A symbol of hope and comfort: In this interpretation, the story is seen as a symbol of hope and comfort for those facing difficult times, reminding them that Jesus is always with them and will help them through even the most difficult challenges.²⁶
5. This walking on the water is interpreted by some as the new Exodus. Just as Israel of old had to cross the Red Sea, so the new Israel, following their king, must choose to cross the waters in their following of the master and taking up their cross.²⁷
6. This account is also interpreted as a moral message portraying the difficulty associated with trusting and obeying the Lord: Some see this as an example in trusting and obeying Jesus, even in difficult and seemingly impossible situations.

These are just a few of the many interpretations of the story of Jesus walking on the water, and there are many others that focus on different aspects of the story and its meaning.²⁸ While I really geek out on the Old Testament motif of God's ability to slay the dragon and defeat the watery chaos of our lives, it is important to stress that ultimately, the interpretation of this event really depends on how *you read the text!*

C.S. Lewis said the following:

I [used to assume] that if the human mind once accepts a thing as true it will automatically go on regarding it as true, until some real reason for reconsidering it turns up. In fact, I was assuming that the human mind is completely ruled by reason. But that is not so. For example, my reason is perfectly convinced by good evidence that anesthetics do not smother me and that properly trained surgeons do not start operating until I am unconscious. But that does not alter the fact that when they have me down on the table and clap their horrible mask over my face, a mere childish panic begins inside me. I start thinking I am going to choke, and I am afraid they will start cutting me up before I am properly under. In other words, I lose my faith in anesthetics. It is not reason that is taking away my faith: on the contrary, my faith is based on reason. It is my imagination and emotions [and fears]. The battle is between faith and reason on one side and emotion and imagination [and fears] on the other...Now just the same thing happens about Christianity. I am not asking anyone to accept Christianity if his best reasoning tells him that the weight of the evidence is against it. That is not the point at which Faith comes in. But supposing a man's reason once decides that the weight of the evidence is for it I can tell that man what is going to happen to him in the next few weeks. There will come a moment when there is bad news, or he is in trouble, or is living among a lot of other people who do not believe it, and all at once his emotions will rise up and carry out a sort of blitz on his belief. Or else there will come a moment when he wants a woman, or wants to tell a lie, or feels very pleased with himself, or sees a chance of making a little money in some way that is not perfectly fair: some moment, in fact, at which it would be very convenient if Christianity were not true. And once again his wishes and desires will carry out a blitz...I am talking about moments where a mere mood rises up against it. Now Faith, in the sense

²⁶ Greek Mark 6.50: Θαρσείτε ἐγὼ εἰμι. μὴ φοβεῖσθε "Be comforted, I AM, be not afraid!" (my translation).

²⁷ Peter Ellis, *The Genius of John: A Composition-Critical Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*, Liturgical Press, 1984.

²⁸ I see this tied to the expression found in D&C 130: "Angels do not reside on a planet like this earth; But they reside in the presence of God, on a globe like a sea of glass and fire, where all things for their glory are manifest, past, present, and future, and are continually before the Lord" ([D&C 130.6-7](#)). This "sea of glass and fire" can be read as a place where the watery chaos has been conquered and is still. This is rich with meaning and multivalent application.

in which I am here using the word, is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods [and fears].²⁹

Matt. 14.34-36; Mark 6.53-56: Jesus heals the people of Gennesaret

And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased; And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole (Matthew 14.34-36).

The “fringe” of Jesus’ garment no doubt refers to the tassels he wore as an observant Jew. Gennesaret was a plain on the northwest shore of the Lake of Galilee.³⁰

John 6.22-71: Jesus is the Bread of Life

Thomas Valletta³¹ shows the importance of this sermon:

The Savior’s sermon on the Bread of Life is one of the most edifying discourses ever given. Grappling with and ultimately accepting the Lord’s message contained in this discourse is essential for all who would follow Him. Yet the sermon is so intimately bound to the other events and literary pattern of the sixth chapter of John that it is clarified only by studying the entire chapter’s setting, pattern, symbols, and types.

Consider this general pattern: a multitude follows a man they regard as a possible prophet to a solitary place; the multitude is miraculously fed; the prophet departs alone into a mountain; a spectacular crossing of the sea occurs wherein Jesus Christ saves His disciples; murmuring and debate among the multitude follows, leading to criticism of Him; and finally a profound discourse is given on the meaning of the preceding events.

Do these events seem familiar? This pattern is a general outline of the Exodus of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. The same pattern also fits the events in chapter 6 of John, which reveal a new exodus. In the Exodus of ancient Israel, as well as in the pattern in John 6, a type emerges of a lost and fallen people who follow a deliverer, receive divine nourishment as a gift from God, and are saved only through and by Jesus Christ. Further, both the new and the old exodus typify an even greater pattern: the eternal plan of redemption.

Parallels between Israel’s Exodus from Egypt and the New Exodus in John 6³²

1. The multitude was led by God through the wilderness and through the Red Sea (see Ex. 12:37–38; Ex. 13:18; Ex. 14:21–22). The multitude followed Jesus across the Sea of Galilee (see John 6:1–2).
2. Moses went to the “mountain of God” (Ex. 3:1). Jesus went up to a mountain (see John 6:3, 15).

²⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book III, Ch. 11, Para. 2-5, p. 122-124.

³⁰ Keener, p. 84.

³¹ Thomas Valletta, [The True Bread of Life, *Ensign*, March 1999.](#)

³² See: Valletta, *The True Bread*. See also: Peter Ellis, [The Genius of John: A Composition-Critical Commentary on the Fourth Gospel](#), Liturgical Press, 1984.

3. Jehovah multiplied signs and wonders (see Ex. 7–11). People followed because of signs (see John 6:2, 26, 30).
4. The Passover was instituted by the Lord (see Ex. 12). It was the time of the Passover (see John 6:4).
5. Israel was fed “bread from heaven,” called manna (Ex. 16; Num. 11; Deut. 8). The great company was miraculously fed from the five loaves and two fishes (see John 6:5–14).
6. Manna was gathered according to the Lord’s instructions (see Ex. 16:16–26). Jesus instructed them to gather fragments “that nothing be lost” (John 6:12).
7. Moses foretold the coming of another prophet, a deliverer (see Deut. 18:13–18). Jesus was called “that prophet that should come into the world” (John 6:14).
8. The power of God saved Israel; they crossed the Red Sea on dry ground (see Ex. 14–15). The darkness and wind were emphasized (see Ex. 14:20–21). The disciples, fighting the stormy sea, were rescued after Jesus walked on the sea to their ship. The darkness and wind were emphasized (see John 6:16–21).
9. Israel murmured against the Lord (see Ex. 15:24; Ex. 16:8; Ex. 17:3). The Jews murmured against the Lord (see John 6:43, 61).
10. Jehovah declared His name “I AM” (Ex. 3:14). Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35).
11. Jehovah taught the meaning and significance of the Exodus experience (see Ex. 12, 19). Jesus taught about the meaning and significance of the Bread of Life (see John 6:32–65).
12. Prophets testified about the meaning and significance of the Exodus experience (see Ex. 15:1–22; Deut. 6; Deut. 26:5–9, 16–19; 1 Ne. 17:23–32; 2 Ne. 25:20). Peter testified that Jesus has the “words of eternal life” (see John 6:66–69).

The crossing to another place: Capernaum or Gennesaret?

Matthew 14:34 and Mark 6:53 portray Jesus as crossing over to Gennesaret instead of Capernaum.

Valletta’s explanation may be useful:

In locating these events in Capernaum, rather than the surrounding region of Gennesaret as the Matthew and Mark accounts do (see Matt. 14:34; Mark 6:53), John’s concern may have been less with geography than with the symbolic message of a city’s doom (Matt. 11:23–24).³³ In Matthew 11 we read of Capernaum’s message of doom:

And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee (Matt. 11:23-24).

John 6.66 The Saddest Verse

“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.”

³³ Valletta, *The True Bread*.

John 6.68 “To whom shall we go?”

C.S. Lewis teaches us this concept with the exchange between Aslan and Jill in his book [The Silver Chair](#). Jill, a little girl from our world, accidentally stumbles into the world of Narnia. She is extremely thirsty and comes upon a stream. But a Lion, Aslan, is sitting by the stream. She is terrified. Aslan says to her, “If you are thirsty, you may drink.” She doesn’t move.

“Are you not thirsty?” said the Lion.

“I’m dying of thirst,” said Jill.

“Then drink,” said the Lion.

“May I, could I, would you mind going away while I do?” said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And, as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked a whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

“Will you promise not to do anything to me, if I do come?” said Jill.

“I make no promise,” said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

“Do you eat girls?” she asked.

“I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the Lion. It didn’t say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

“I dare not come and drink,” said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion.

“Oh dear!” said Jill, coming another step nearer. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.”

“There is no other stream,” said the Lion.

It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion ‘no one who had seen his stern face could do that’ and her mind suddenly made itself up. It was the worst thing she had ever had to do, but she went forward to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping water in her hand. **It was the coldest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted.** You didn’t need to drink much of it, for it quenched your thirst at once. Before she tasted it she had been intending to make a dash away from the Lion the moment she finished. Now she realized that this would be, on the whole, the most dangerous thing of all. She got up and stood there with her lips still wet from drinking.³⁴

Elder Holland taught:

“As the world slouches toward the 21st century, many long for something, sometimes cry out for something, but too often scarcely know for what...In an absolutely terrifying way, we see legions who

³⁴ Day, [John 6.67 “Will ye also go away?” 09.23.2018](#).

say they are bored with their spouses, their children, and any sense of marital or parental responsibility toward them. Still others, roaring full speed down the dead-end road of hedonism, shout that they will indeed live by bread alone, and the more of it the better. We have it on good word, indeed we have it from the Word Himself, that bread alone—even a lot of it—is not enough.

During the Savior's Galilean ministry, He chided those who had heard of Him feeding the 5,000 with only five barley loaves and two fishes, and now flocked to Him expecting a free lunch. That food, important as it was, was incidental to the real nourishment He was trying to give them...But this was not the meal they had come for, and the record says, 'From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.'

In that little story is something of the danger in our day. It is that in our contemporary success and sophistication we too may walk away from the vitally crucial bread of eternal life; we may actually choose to be spiritually malnourished, willfully indulging in a kind of spiritual anorexia. Like those childish Galileans of old, we may turn up our noses when divine sustenance is placed before us. Of course the tragedy then as now is that one day, as the Lord Himself has said, 'In an hour when ye think not the summer shall be past, and the harvest ended,' and we will find that our 'souls [are] not saved.' (DC 45:2)"³⁵

John 6.68 "You have the words of eternal life"

Joseph Smith taught: "The Church of Jesus Christ of latter-day Saints has the words of eternal life."³⁶

³⁵ Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, "[He Hath Filled the Hungry with Good Things](#)," *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 65.

³⁶ Kent P. Jackson, *Joseph Smith's Commentary on the Bible*, 132.