

Connecting the Dots

10/8/23

Matthew 14:13-34

Sunday AM

Who remembers doing **Connect-the-Dots Puzzles**? When I was a kid, I loved solving the mystery of each picture one connected dots at a time. Of course, most of these puzzles are simple and easy to solve, although sometimes, they're complex and difficult to see.

Example – show simple and complex pics

Initially, these puzzles were created around the turn of the 20th century and were published in the children's section of the Sunday paper. What's interesting is that only a few years later, the phrase *connecting the dots* became a household idiom/metaphor to describe pulling various facts/details together to be able to see the whole picture or to understand something globally.

If you've been following along in the *Come and See* devotional reading, this week we've been in week 5 – which happens to be in the beginning stages of the 3rd year in Jesus' ministry/journey w/ the (12) – and up to this point, while they've been following their Rabbi, *not one of them has seen Him for His true identity*.

But this week, Jesus engaged the (12) in a series of events to bring them to the place where they seemingly were able to *connect the dots* to begin seeing that Jesus was more than a Rabbi w/ *shemika*, but actually that He was the Son of God in the flesh.

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he w/drew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. 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." Jesus said, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." "We have here only (5) loaves of bread and (2) fish," they said. "Bring them here to me," he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the (5) loaves and (2) fish, and looking to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, who gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up (12) basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about 5,000 men, besides women and children. 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, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves b/c the wind was against it. Shortly before dawn, Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Peter asked, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. Jesus said, "You of little faith. Why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

In this text, (2) major events occurred that by themselves are incredible, and on their own merit, are worthy of many lessons. But instead of zooming in on the smaller picture, today, I want to zoom out to see the bigger picture of what Jesus was teaching the (12).

I fear that we often miss the underlying message in the Gospels that Jesus was mentoring the (12) for what was going to occur after His departure. In every Gospel *story, encounter, and interaction* – Jesus was intentionally shaping/preparing them for what was next. Yet up to this point, there's no indication that the (12) were yet believers that Jesus was the Messiah.

WTM – let me set up the day. The disciples are just coming back from being sent out in pairs. We have no indication from Scripture how long they were out in pairs, but one has to assume that it was for several days or even weeks. And they went out empty-handed w/ nothing but the promise of Jesus' provision for them.

Of course, while they're out in the highways/byways of life – God was moving in/thru them in miraculous ways so that they were even healing the sick as they proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom.

By all appearances, on this day, after weeks of seeing God work miraculously thru their lives in pairs, Jesus brings them to a **faith exam** – and they failed it! After a long day of ministry, Jesus tells the (12) to feed the crowd of likely 20k plus people – and their response is actually quite human – “**You want us to do what?**”

Now don't miss this. b/c for a few weeks, they've been witnessing God's power moving unbelievably in/thru them, but when Jesus asked them to feed the crowd – they freaked and their faith waned. In fact, they took matters into their own hands, and quickly calculated and determined that it'd take a year's wages just for every person to have a single bite, basically telling Jesus that He had assigned them an impossible task. All the while forgetting what they had just experienced the previous few weeks.

DYK what happened? They allowed the scale of the situation to shake their faith instead of allowing their faith to shake the scale of the situation.

Truth is, Jesus actually had them right where He wanted them – *at the end of themselves and at the beginning of God* – b/c the time had come for them to believe that Jesus was God in the flesh and Messiah.

So, Jesus takes a couple of fish, and (5) Olive Garden breadsticks – blesses them, and has the (12) distribute them to the crowd. And then, after some time, He has each of the disciples hold a basket as the crowd turns in the leftovers after everyone has had their fill. **WHY**

While there are a few theories about this, I believe it is more for the sake of the (12) than anyone else. I think Jesus performed arguably His greatest miracle and then had the (12) to collect the leftovers to reveal to them His true identity as Messiah as they literally were standing there holding the Bread of Life in their hands – and yet, they still apparently didn't see it.

The question is – why, after 2+ years, hadn't they seen Jesus as Messiah? I think it is for the same reason today that people can't see Jesus as Savior/Lord – *it's b/c we tend to want to see Jesus for who we want Him to be instead of recognizing Him for who He is.*

Remember, like the other Jews, they were looking for a Messiah to save them from Rome – not a Messiah who would save them from their sin.

So, in vs 23, since they missed Him yet again, Jesus set them afloat on the Sea of Galilee knowing a storm was brewing – to see if they might finally see Him in all of His glory – and in turn, bend their knees and bow their hearts in worship to Him.

SEE – the feeding of the 5k was never intended to be a catered fish fry, but a **final exam**. After going out on their own in Jesus' name performing miracles, the 12 returned to face their greatest test – 5k+ hungry people w/ only 5 breadsticks/2 sardines. And they failed the exam – so Jesus put them on Galilee for a make-up exam. ***Mark's version of the story raises questions.***

*Later that night, Jesus saw the disciples straining at the oars, b/c the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn He went out to them, walking on the lake. **He was about to pass by them**, but when they saw Him walking on the lake, they thought He was a ghost. They cried out, b/c they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately He spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Peter then gets out of the boat and has his exchange w/ Jesus and then together – He climbed into the boat w/ them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, **for they had not understood about the loaves**; b/c their hearts were hardened. And the result – they worshiped Him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God.*

To be honest – there's so much going on in this story we could drown in the immensity of God's glory, but what I want you to see is that the disciples finally, after 2+ years appear to have connected the dots. For in Matthew 14:33 – *they call Him the Son of God.*

They believed. Jesus was no more just a Rabbi/teacher to them – He was the Messiah and Son of God.

When it says – *He was about to pass by them* – the Greek word used refers to a **theophany**. A theophany is an O.T. visible manifestation of God. Many scholars believe this is a reference to how God passed by Moses when He hid his face in the cleft of the rock or when Elijah was able to see the train of God's glory pass by – in both instances revealing His identity.

In this case, God passed by to get the attention of the (12) so they might see Him for who He really is and respond to His calling upon their lives.

Then there's the incredible incident of Peter getting out of the boat and walking on water. Which I believe indirectly shows us what is necessary to live the Christian life. Let me explain.

How far did Peter walk away from the boat? Far enough that he either had to swim back, have Jesus drag or carry him back – or, Jesus lifted him up and together, hand-in-hand and step-by-step in faith – they walked on the water back to the boat – emphasizing to us what is required to live this thing called the Christian life – FAITH.

For w/out faith it is impossible to please God. Hb. 11:3

There is one more reality I find in this passage that not only connects the dots of the (12) finally believing but should remind us of the true reality of the G.C.

I believe the culmination of this story underscores an incredible truth about evangelism/discipleship – and the G.C. evangelism/discipleship are NOT dueling adversaries where one is greater than the other, but (2) aspects of faith that occur w/in disciple-making.

We don't evangelize people to faith and then disciple them to maturity. But like Jesus, we lovingly and intentionally meet people at the point of their need, right where they are, to begin taking personal/spiritual responsibility to walk alongside them (whether they're believers or not) to pour Jesus and His truth in us into them to help them to believe in Him and obey His will/plan for their lives.

Let me say it another way – Jesus met the (12) right where they were, invited them to walk w/ Him even while they were immersed in Jewish culture/tradition, to reveal to them His true identity as Messiah – so that they once they believed, they'd live the rest of their lives trying to help others to see Jesus as they saw Him.

The same should be true for us. True G.C. ministry isn't pointing out people's sin to condemn them, nor is it turning a blind eye to condone their sin to help people feel good about their lostness – G.C. ministry is loving people right where they are to point them to the truth/grace of God, so that in the genuine transaction of salvation – God transforms their lives into a new creation – where the old has gone so the new can come.