

# **BIB203 NT1 Life of Christ**

## **Unit 6c Johannine Synoptic Example 3**

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In the last segment, we talked at length about John 6:1-15, what came after that and how that correlated well with Mark 6:35-44 and 45-52 and Matthew 14:13-21 and 22-33. In a word, in John and in Mark and in Matthew, we had the feeding of the five thousand, followed by the disciples getting into the boat. As we came to the close at the last segment, we discovered a seeming discrepancy between the names of the places. In one Gospel, no location is given as a destination for the disciples as they get into the boat after the feeding of the five thousand. In another, we're told that Jesus and his disciples came to a town called Bethsaida and that's where the crowds met Jesus and the disciples, and Jesus taught. And there's overlap between what he did there, which was to teach and to heal their sick, prior to the feeding of the five thousand besides women and children. In John, he sets his disciples on the boat to send them to Capernaum.

Well, there's a happy solution to that. But again, it's precisely the solution that I suggested in the last segment. If Capernaum and Bethsaida are contiguous to one another, that solves the problem partially but it doesn't entirely eliminate it. But the problem is solved enough so that people who understand the rules of evidence and understand that a multiplicity of perspectives yields emphasis on one front or another, then there is no discrepancy in actual fact. As it turns out, Capernaum and Bethsaida are contiguous to one another. Capernaum is west of Bethsaida, and one can see that the boat trip was on a small segment. It took place probably in a straight line on a small segment of the Sea of Galilee. But those gentlemen, the disciples were on the boat far enough away from the shore that they were affected by the strong wind that blew at the time that they rowed away from the land so that they could only make it three or four miles.

So in sum, there is no discrepancy because Capernaum and Bethsaida basically overlap in terms of the earmarked territory. So for the evangelist who says they came to Bethsaida, fairly accurate for John who says he put them in the boat to send them to Capernaum. Well, Capernaum and Bethsaida basically overlap. We certainly understand this in our day. We have major city centers, but those major city centers have an area of influence beyond their strict borders that are considered part of that major city center. Someone lives in the city of Philadelphia, maybe in center city, but then you have people who live in Greater Philadelphia, and parts of Greater Philadelphia may actually extend into the State of New Jersey. What gives? So it's kind of the same, sort of the same thing. So there is no discrepancy. That's the long and the short of it.

Well, we come to this segment now and we want to look at verses 22 to 71 of chapter 6. And my intention is not to go through every single verse, otherwise we will be here for a long time. My intention is to really pick out the essential features of this section, verses 22 to 71 of John 6, and then begin to correlate it with Mark and Matthew and possibly Luke. So in verse 22, it says, "On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus." So they find him (verse 25) on the other side of the sea, and they say to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" which is basically "We've been looking for you." And Jesus cuts right to the chase. He says, "You are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate and were filled. Don't labor for food that perishes, but the food that endures to eternal life. The Son of Man will give that to you. God has set his seal on him." So they ask him, "What do we do to work the works of God?" Jesus says, "Believe on him whom the Father has sent." And they ask him,

“Well, what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate manna in the desert, just like it says in the Scriptures.” And Jesus then replies, “Yeah. Moses did not give you the bread from heaven. My father gives you the true bread from heaven. The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” And they say, “Well, please give us this bread always,” because their minds are still on physical food.

The cultural and social and economic context of Galilee is lower middle class to poor. That’s the range. And so for them, this is a very powerful incentive. So when they are fed and they are full, it’s a meal they’ve not quite experienced, except on rare occasions when there are get-togethers within communities for a celebration of some sort. But this, I mean, they saw the miracle and they’re looking at the economic bottom line. They’re looking at someone who can meet all their needs, all their physical needs. That’s why they’re looking at him. But what he does is he diverts the conversation. He says, “No, no, no. That’s perishable food. You want the food that lasts forever.” And they say, “Well, what do we do?” And he says, “Believe on the one that the Father has sent. That’s the true bread of God that comes down from heaven.”

Then he drives it even further. Verse 35, he identifies himself as the bread of life, that whoever comes to him will not hunger. But he reads them correctly. Verse 36, he says, “You really don’t believe me. You’ve seen me but you don’t believe.” And he says, “All that the Father sends to me, I will in no wise cast out. I will never cast them out because I came down from heaven to do my father’s will. Everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” Verse 41, the Jews grumbled against him because he talks about himself as the bread that came down from heaven. And at that point, practicalities kick in. They identify him. They say, “Well, this is Jesus, the son of Joseph. We know his father and his mother. So what’s he talking about, coming down from heaven?” (verse 42). Verse 43, Jesus says, “Don’t grumble about this. No one can come to me unless the Father draws him. I will raise him up on the last day. This is written in the prophets.” He says, “Whoever believes in me has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate that manna in the wilderness, and they died. But this is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that you may eat of it and not die. I am that living bread.” And I’m in verse 51. Like I said, I don’t want to read the whole thing. “The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

So verse 52, the Jews dispute among themselves and they’re asking practical questions. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” And Jesus says, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. If you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will have eternal life. I will raise him up. I will raise you up on the last day. My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.” It’s almost as though Jesus doubles down or triples down on what he’s saying because these folks are...his audience in Capernaum, in the synagogue, Peter’s synagogue of all places. In Luke, we see, as well as in the other Gospels, that Jesus makes Capernaum his base of operations. Capernaum is Peter’s hometown. Capernaum is where the synagogue is, where Jesus basically begins his Galilean ministry, as it were, according to the Synoptic record. So it’s like coming back full circle. There’s a point that’s going to get made at the end of this segment with respect to that. This is back in the synagogue in Capernaum and they’re grumbling at him. “We know this guy. This is Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary. We know his father and mother.” And Jesus doubles down. He triples down. He says, “Yeah, really. You really need to eat the flesh of the Son of Man. You need to drink his blood because my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed.” He’s not really trying to clarify the issue for them, if you’ll notice. It’s like he bears down on what he is saying to them.

He says, “The Father sent me. (verse 57) I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” Verse 59, “Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.” So verse 60, “Many of his disciples heard it.” Now, the word “disciples” there in verse 60 must be carefully considered. These are the people, the crowds that followed him and heard his teaching. You have other disciples besides the twelve that were chosen, and they heard this teaching and it was something that they could not swallow. They could not digest. So they say, verse 60, this is a hard saying. Listen to it. Jesus knows that his disciples are grumbling and he basically takes them to task on that gently. He says, “Are you taking offense? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?” To where he was before, well, that’s heaven. “What if you saw me ascend?” in other words. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

That’s the only concession that he makes to them. After doubling and tripling down, bearing down on “My flesh is true food. My blood is true drink,” he says, “What I am saying to you is spirit and not flesh. It’s spirit and life. But some of you don’t believe me.” And John makes the comment, “Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.” He said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Abba,” which is what he would have said. He’s saying these things. They’re having a conversation in Aramaic. We are two languages removed. We read our Bible in English. It’s translated from the Greek, but in fact, the language that Jesus used in his day, the language he grew up with speaking is Aramaic.

Verse 66, “After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.” They broke with him because they could not swallow what he was saying about himself because he was too familiar. “Isn’t this Jesus the son of Joseph and Mary? Don’t we know his parents?” “So Jesus (verse 67) said to the twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.’ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.”

So John gives us a full description. And what does that description entail? Let’s go back to the beginning of chapter 6 because I think we need to see this carefully. Chapter 6, Jesus feeds the five thousand. They are filled with the food. Five loaves of bread, two fish feeds 10,000 to 15,000 people. The people are amazed at the miracle and they immediately identify Jesus with the prophet of Deuteronomy 18. So Jesus perceives that they want to come and take him by force to make him a king. So he moves to head off that impulse in that crowd. He sends his disciples out to the sea to get into a boat and to go to Capernaum. It is dark. Jesus has not come to them. The Synoptic Gospels, Mark and Matthew in particular, talk about the fact that Jesus went up into the mountain, the hill by himself, alone. Here we read, “It’s now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.” (Verse 17) “The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. They rowed about three or four miles, and then they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. But he said to them (verse 20), ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’ Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.”

So Jesus, at some point, walks on the water to meet the disciples and they are immediately at the land where they are going. In the Synoptic record, we have Mark 6:45-52 and Matthew 14:22-33. Let’s look

at that again. So first, Mark 6 starting in verse 45. “Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.” They went up on a hill. He made his disciples get in a boat. Because we did not actually finish reading verses 45 to 52 of Mark 6 or verses 22 to 33 of Matthew 14, so we’re finishing it now to sort of flesh out what’s happening in John, in Mark, and in Matthew. We really don’t have any correlation with Luke because Luke only includes the feeding of the five thousand. But then after that, he talks about the recognition of Jesus as the Christ by Peter.

So here we are in Mark 6. “Evening came (verse 47), the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.” Verse 48, “He saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.” So that correlates nicely. That gels with John 6. “He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought that it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.’ And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.” That’s all you read about in Mark.

Now juxtapose that with what we see in John. I just summarized John 6:22-71. The crowd follows. They get there before Jesus does. They look for him. They find him. “Master, when did you come here?” And he begins to talk to them about not looking for that which is temporal and perishable, but for that which is eternal, right? They talk about manna in the wilderness. He talks about himself being the true bread of God. He talks about his flesh and his blood being meat and drink, and that they need to eat his flesh, drink his blood. And at that point, they can’t absorb that. And he tells them the condition of their hearts. He tells them that many of them don’t believe. And he said this from the beginning that only those that the Father draws will truly believe in him. And so there’s a break with a great many of his disciples. They no longer walk with him. And we have that little blurb at the end where he looks at the twelve and says, “Are you going to go away too?” Peter answers for the group and says, “We’ve got nowhere else to go. We know that you are the Messiah.” And Jesus checks that. He says, “One of you is a devil,” speaking of Judas. None of the disciples would realize that at the time, arguably not even Judas. So that’s the context of John 6:1-71, in particular 22-71.

When we come to Mark, the feeding of the five thousand occurs. Jesus makes his disciples get into the boat. He goes on the mountain or the hill to pray. He gets on the water and walks on the water. Mark says he was about to pass by them, but they saw him and they were frightened. He calms them down. He gets them to the boat with him and the winds ceased. And they were astonished because they didn’t understand what had just happened with the feeding of the five thousand. That last part there, verse 52 of Mark 6 is basically an artifact we may suggest. It is an artifact of what we see full-blown in John 6 because in John 6, you have people whose hearts are so hardened that they cannot receive what Jesus says about himself that he is the living bread of God that came down from heaven, that they need to eat his flesh and drink his blood, and the life that he will give them is his flesh for the life of the world. They can’t absorb that. They are not ready for it because familiarity breeds contempt. They say to him, “Isn’t this Jesus the son of Mary and Joseph? Don’t we know his father and his mother?” But here Mark highlights the Gospel of Mark, effectively highlights the difficulty where the disciples are concerned. Yes, they know that he is the Messiah. They know that he is the Holy One of God. But they’ve got hearts that are hardened in certain areas too. But there is no mention of this conflict that you see, this

disagreement between Jesus and a great many of his disciples. You don't see that in Mark. All you have is an artifact about hardened hearts.

So much for Mark. When we look at Matthew 14, and I'm going to come back to Mark 6 and I'm going to delve into chapter 7 just to make a point, a summary point, if you will. But let's go to Matthew quickly. Matthew 14:22-33. We have pretty much what you see in Mark, at least initially. Immediately the disciples were made to get into the boat, to go before him to the other side. He dismisses the crowds. That's verse 22. Verse 23, he dismisses the crowds. He goes up on the hill to pray. He is there alone at evening time. Verse 24, the boat is a long way from the land, beaten by the waves. The wind is against them. Verse 25, it's the fourth watch of the night. He comes to them, walking on the sea. Verse 26, the disciples see him walking on the sea and they are terrified. They think it's a ghost and they cried in fear. Verse 27, he calms them down. "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." But then Matthew adds something very interesting. "Lord, if it is you," Peter answered him, (verse 28) "Command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. Just a quick orientation, we're in Matthew 14 and we're about to read verse 30. "But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me.' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?' And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"

So, very interesting. We have this incident with Peter. Peter actually walks on the water for a short spell of time before his faith falters and he begins to sink under the waves and Jesus catches him and gently rebukes him for his lack of faith. We don't see that in Mark. We do not see it in John. It's not present in Luke. But John and Mark and Matthew can be correlated. You have a sequence of events in all three Gospels that basically line up well enough with one another. There is identity of content, arguably, at least in its broad outlines. With Matthew, take a look at verses 34 to 36. They crossed over. They came to land at Gennesaret. "The men of that place recognized him. They sent around to all the region. They brought to him all who were sick and implored him that they might touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well." You see that in Mark, if we run to Mark 6, and we're also going to take a short foray into Mark 7, and then we're going to jump back to Matthew, because the summary point for all of these segments for this particular unit is about to be made.

So Mark 6. We read verse 52. They didn't understand about the loaves. Their hearts were hardened. Verse 53 of chapter 6 of Mark, they crossed over, came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. They got out of the boat. Jesus is immediately recognized. The whole region is alerted. Sick people are brought in their beds. "Wherever he came, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, implored him that they might touch the fringe of his garment. And many who touched it were made well." Look at Mark 7. "The Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem." That statement in 7:1 of Mark, the Pharisees in the region, the province of Galilee gathered to him with some of the scribes. Those scribes had come from Jerusalem. "They saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed." And we're told in Mark about why this tradition of the elders exists in the first place. And they queried Jesus critically, "Why do your disciples eat with unwashed hands?" And he shames them. There is a New Testament theme with respect to the documents of the New Testament, particularly the Gospels. There was honor and shame in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. So they attempt to shame Jesus because his disciples do not follow the tradition of the elders,

but Jesus turns the tables on them and shames them because they are not really law keepers. They are more keepers of tradition. And that's Mark 7.

You see exactly the same sequence in Matthew 15. If you go back to Matthew 15, we've read 14:34-36. It's the same material. Matthew uses Mark. But then chapter 15:1 and following, Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem, and they ask him, "Why are your disciples breaking the tradition of the elders?" So in Mark and in Matthew, not Luke, because Luke doesn't continue the thread. In Mark and in Matthew, what we have after the feeding of the five thousand and the healing of the people at Gennesaret and people of the surrounding region from towns and villages, what we have after those events (feeding, healing in the Plain of Gennesaret), what we have is religious leadership coming to Jesus in the province of Galilee and challenging him on the lack of adherence of his disciples to rabbinic tradition, the tradition of the elders. And Jesus shames them.

But then we have the Gospel of John. And as I said earlier in this segment, in the Gospel of John, you have the feeding of the five thousand. The people want to make Jesus king. He sees that. He disperses the crowds. He also sends his disciples away. And then he goes to them in the fourth watch of the night after they've rowed about three or four miles. And they are afraid. He calms them down. The Peter event, Peter walking on the water, not included in John. Jesus gets in the boat and they are immediately at the location that they needed to be. But after that section in John, starting in verse 22 and ending at 71, there is a breaking point. There is a conflict. Things come to a head in Capernaum of all places, where Jesus tells them that they need to eat his flesh and drink his blood. So the populace, the people that follow Jesus, most of them, many of them reject him and no longer walk with him. The Jesus movement sees a great loss of population, as it were.

So how do we correlate what we see in John 6 with what we see in Mark and Matthew? Here's a point. Mark and Matthew focus on the challenge of the religious leadership on the matter of the tradition of the elders. John focuses on the loss of popularity and support that Jesus and his disciples, the twelve, experience. But then both perspectives are to be put together as part of a whole. So not only is Jesus challenged from the tradition of the elders with respect to his disciples; he also loses support, much popularity, as it were. Many people stop following him. And that correlates quite well because as most scholars have surmised and agree, have a consensus about, there comes a point where Jesus' Galilean ministry comes to a close because he is effectively rejected, first by the religious leaders and then by the people, or perhaps simultaneously. That is the point to this whole exercise with John 6 and the requisite passages in Mark and Matthew and Luke.