

Introduction: What a privilege to have the Gospel of Matthew for our companion! In particular, how thankful we should be for the work of the Lord Jesus in the Apostle Peter, driving him back again and again to the Sea of Galilee to learn the truth enshrined in Psalm 148:7-8:

*Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all the depths;
Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind, fulfilling His word.*

Whether it was storms on the Sea of Galilee, accompanied by the Twelve's fear which accused Jesus of not caring whether they perished (Mark 4:38); or walking on water and then almost drowning (Peter in Matthew 14:28); or poverty as a fisherman with no catch until Jesus directed him where to put his net (Luke 5:8 & John 21:6): all these were experiences by which the Lord Jesus drew Peter and the other disciples to Himself! May the Lord likewise use this week's Bible notes to draw us to Himself, chastening and comforting us so that we learn to trust Him in our greatest needs and poverty – even when we need Jesus to put our tax money in the mouth of a fish, Matthew 17:27!

Monday: read Luke 5:1-11 and Psalm 148:7-12. The Lordship of Jesus extends even to the guiding of the creatures in ocean depths! Even they give glory to God and to God's Son! Hear the command of God speak into the tumultuous depths of the sea in Psalm 148:7: "Praise the Lord, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths"! God can bring glory to Himself even from the untamed waves of the sea! More than that, see God's holy power control even the untamed hearts of sinful man in Psalm 148:11-12 – causing even the most rebellious to bow the knee before Him and offer praise to His name!

Isn't this just what happened, for example, when for the first time the Savior guided Peter's net to a huge, miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5:8-9? Before the presence of this holy God in human flesh, Peter wanted to run away and hide, even as Adam and Eve sought to hide from God in the Garden of Eden when the shameful of their sin first appeared! But He cannot run – anymore than fish can swim away from the Lord who made them! How wonderful to hear the voice of Jesus triumph over Peter's fears in Luke 5:10: "*Do not fear... this same grace of God by which you just caught these fish will catch you in such a way that you will not be able to contain the Good News of my saving "hook" of salvation: you will catch men with this Gospel, even as I have caught you!*" Hallelujah!

Meditate and Pray: Ask the Lord to ordain every step of your life, and even the steps by which you come to know Jesus more intimately – even if it takes deeply convicting encounters with your sin. At such times, when we want to run and hide, saying even to the Lord Jesus, "Depart from me", may we hear the voice of our fishing Savior: "I am not leaving you! I have caught you in my nets of grace. You are mine!"

Tuesday: read Luke 12:50; Psalm 42:7 and Psalm 148:7-8. We simply cannot contemplate how God controls the most terrifying powers of nature for His glory, (such as waves), without understanding how, for Jesus, being "drowned under the waves of God's judgment" was also a reality. He was not rescued from having God's "waves and breakers" going over Him on the Cross!

He knew the voice of the depths of God's judgment as He took our place (Psalm 42:8)! That is why He speaks of His upcoming death as a "baptism", under which He would descend into the very depths of God's judgment against our sin (Luke 12:50)!

Meditate and Pray: Lord Jesus, when we go through the depths of trials and disappointments, teach us to know that you are with us, even as hymn # 250 reminds us:

*Throned upon the awful tree,
King of grief, I watch with thee;
darkness veils thine anguished face,
none its lines of woe can trace.
none can tell what pangs unknown
hold thee silent and alone.*

*Silent through those three dread hours,
wrestling with the evil powers,
left alone with human sin,
gloom around thee and within,
till the appointed time is nigh,
till the Lamb of God may die.*

*Hark, that cry that peals aloud
upward through the whelming cloud!
Thou, the Father's only Son,
thou, his own anointed One,
thou dost ask him (can it be?)
"Why hast thou forsaken me?"*

*Lord, should fear and anguish roll,
darkly o'er my sinful soul,
thou, who once were thus bereft
that thine own might ne'er be left,
teach me by that bitter cry
in the gloom to know thee nigh.*

Wednesday: read John 20:30-31 and Hebrews 2:10-12. Before we get to the wonderful miracle of the fish with the gold coin in its mouth in Matthew 17:27, we consider how our Lord Jesus endured the "ocean depths" of sufferings in order to be the 'Author of our Salvation,' (Heb. 2:10). As the resurrected Author of Salvation, He was not ashamed to identify with His disciples in their weak, vacillating faith (Heb. 2:11). This explains why Jesus so eagerly returned to the work of strengthening His Church. He realized that none of His Church would survive for one day without His presence and teaching. This is why, after having sailed through the bloody seas of Calvary, He so eagerly returns to the shores of our humanity, for forty more days declaring God's name to His brothers, (Heb. 2:12). His post-resurrection appearances, then, were to ensure His own would persevere in their faith in Jesus as the Christ, (John 20:31). We too ought to celebrate these forty days, climaxing with Christ's Ascension to the highest Heavens!

Meditate and Pray: How we should thank Jesus that He never grows tired of our company. Even to the last day of the world, Jesus will be found to be our captain, helping even the weakest of us, to find safe passage into the port of salvation, as Hymn # 601 (vv. 1 & 3) remind us:

"Jesus, Savior, pilot me over life's tempestuous sea; unknown waves before me roll, hiding rock and treach'rous shoal; chart and compass come from thee: Jesus, Savior, pilot me."

"When at last I near the shore, and the fearful breakers roar 'twixt me and the peaceful rest, then, while leaning on thy breast, may I hear thee say to me, "Fear not, I will pilot thee.""

Thursday: Matthew 17:27 and John 20:30-21:4. Sadly, as we are so quick to forget God's past provisions for our needs, so the disciples, in their discouragement and uncertainty, return to the only occupation they knew apart from following Jesus: fishing – even though in Luke 5:10 Jesus clearly told them: “From **now on** you will catch men.” They despair of the Lord's provision, even though He had the power to put gold coins in fish's mouths! How wonderful, therefore, to see Jesus appear on shore at just the right moment in John 21:4 – ready to restore His disciples' wavering faith.

Meditate and Pray: It is one thing to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ at the moment of conversion, and indeed that is foundational to all that follows. Yet such ‘Conversion Faith’ will not survive unless the Lord Jesus strengthens us to weather the storms that rage on the sea of life. This is why John promises us that the work of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John has as its goal that we may “go on believing,” (present subjunctive in John 20:31), “that Jesus is the Christ.”

“Lord Jesus, please, right now, confirm me in the way of life. Strengthen the weak knees of my faith so that I will walk the path laid out for me in your Word. Help me to believe the words of Proverbs 3:5: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” Amen.”

Friday: read Matthew 17:22-27. Though the prospect of Christ's rejection, suffering and death cause the Apostolic band to be “full of grief” (Matthew 17:23), our Savior does not let their lack of understanding and support of His work keep Him from persevering in His mission. Even down to providing for the taxes which this world demands and the blood payment which our sins deserve (Ex 30:11-16), Christ is determined to miraculously provide!

For example, how and why can Jesus so miraculously provide the “atonement money” which is demanded as a “temple tax”? Because even the creatures in the depths serve His plan (Ps. 148:5-8). Christ makes the most dangerous places in the Gospel, (Mt. 8:23-27 & 14:22-33), full of provisions for Peter and for us! What an awesome revelation of Himself on these waters (107:29-32), and what glory does the sea bring to Christ alone! God's Son “prepares a fish to carry the needed temple tax money right to the hook on Peter's line! Marvelous.

Meditate and Pray: “Lord, though this world depends on a multitude of networking options, as humanity seeks opportunities for success through its own wisdom and effort, thank you that you only use one hook to do the great miracle of Matthew 17:27! You are that specific in your planning of our lives. It is by awesome *single acts that you determine our destinies.*

It is one door, one day at a time, one conversation, one word, one act to save us in the Savior's one climactic statement on the Cross – “It is finished”; one moment of being born again; one declaration of our justification; one victory over death in the Resurrection, and one single Return of your Son one day to put all things right in the end! Oh, help us to trust you to rule our lives this efficiently and powerfully. Then help us to live by the logic of the following hymns' stress on such single acts of Divine mastery , (with salient points in bold below from hymns 38 and 57), Amen.”

*Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessèd, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great Name we praise.*

***Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;
Thy justice, like mountains, high soaring above
Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.***

*Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;
All laud we would render; O help us to see
'Tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee,*

*Hallelujah, praise Jehovah,
O my soul, Jehovah praise;
I will sing the glorious praises
Of my God through all my days.
**Put no confidence in princes,
Nor for help on man depend;
He shall die, to dust returning,
And his purposes shall end.***

Happy is the man that chooses
Israel's God to be his aid;
He is blessed whose hope of blessing
On the Lord his God is stayed.
**Heav'n and earth the Lord created,
Seas and all that they contain;**
He delivers from oppression,
Righteousness he will maintain.

Sat/Sun: read John 21:1-7. We end this week with Jesus' kindness – not just to Peter in providing the fish for the temple tax, but to the whole crew of the Apostles, who would need His help on the Sea of Galilee once again in John 21. Reflect for a moment: Who was this crew of fishermen? Look at their names in John 21:2:

- Simon Peter, whose earlier denial of Christ would still require more restoration work later in John 21.

- Doubting Thomas, who as James Boice says: “was the rank unbeliever to whom Jesus appeared just verses before this.”
- Nathanael, whose pessimism and prejudice towards Jesus’ humble beginnings in Galilee come to the fore in John 1:46: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”
- James and John, called by their old names, ‘The sons of Zebedee,’ whose pride of place and harshness of spirit come out several times in the Gospels, desiring to call fire down on the Samaritans (Luke 9:54); arguing with the others about who was greatest (Luke 22:24) and even sending their mother to request special places of honor in the coming Kingdom of Christ in Matthew 20:20-21.

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What a motley crew! And yet Christ generously pours so many fish into their nets that He removes all the fear of want which drove them to return to fishing in the first place. He is still ‘the Lord’ as John declares in John 21:7 – able to rule the waves, and even the underwater routes of fish: all for His people’s benefit.

Meditate and Pray: Thank Jesus again for being such a persevering Savior, with the words of Hymn # 457 (v. 3) in our Trinity Hymnal:

“O to grace how great a debtor daily I’m constrained to be; let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wand’ring heart to thee. Prone to wander – Lord, I feel it – prone to leave the God I love: here’s my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.” (Robert Robinson, 1758)