

Mark 7-8 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

Jesus is wrapping up His ministry in Galilee and will soon be moving south to Jerusalem.

The tension between Himself and the religious authorities has grown taut.

Herod is also keeping a close eye on him.

This tension has resulted in the crowds of common folk being thinned a bit.

But those who have stuck with Jesus have become more determined to catapult Him into the role of Messiah.

They know they're running the risk of incurring the wrath of the authorities for their support of Jesus, but they believe Jesus is going to replace those authorities and they'll be rewarded for their loyalty to Him.

Tonight we'll follow Jesus as He has a run in with some of the heavyweights from Jerusalem, then departs from Galilee for a lengthy foray into Gentile territory.

I. JESUS IN GALILEE CHS. 1-9

K. Inner VS. Outer Purity 7:1-23

1Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. **2** when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. **4**When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.

The Mishnah, a compilation of oral laws made at the end of the 2nd Century A.D. says, "Tradition is a fence around the law."

By "tradition" they meant all of the rituals & rules the rabbis had developed over the generations since the law was given to Moses on exactly how to keep it.

For instance, when the Command said to rest on the Sabbath Day and

perform no work, they defined exactly what work was. You could wear a handkerchief, but not carry one, because carrying a burden was work.

So if you had a runny nose & were upstairs, you couldn't put a handkerchief in your pocket or carry it in your hand, but you could tie it around your neck and go downstairs.

They had thousands of such little rules on what constitutes work. But the most extensive set of rules in the Mishnah governed this issue of "cleanliness"

the Pharisees bring up here. Most of their traditions dealt with ritual washings.

The law it was all based on is found in Exodus 30:19 & 40:12 where the priests were told to wash their hands before officiating at the tabernacle.

Though this command was given specifically to the priests, by Jesus day, all pious Jews engaged in elaborate rituals of hand & vessel washing.

In fact, they were washing all the time!

They washed before meals, elevating their hands first one way, then another, then yet another.

When they returned from being in public, they would go through and even more elaborate ritual of washing — often taking an entire bath in the household mikvah.

The Mishnah devoted 35 pages to describing how vessels were to be washed. ^[1]

The Pharisees were so devoted to these traditions, they excommunicated a rabbi who failed to wash his hands before eating.

Another rabbi who'd been imprisoned by the Romans almost died of thirst because he used his daily ration of water to wash instead of drink.

A confrontation between Jesus & the Pharisees over this issue was inevitable because while the Pharisees were consumed with an outward form of purity, Jesus was focused on the inner purity of the heart.

He knew their traditions had nothing whatsoever to do with the Law & will of God but were convenient masks to hide their inner

corruption.

When these guys came from Jerusalem to investigate Jesus, they saw the disciples showing no regard for the rituals of hand-washing when they sat down to eat. And since a disciple is supposed to be just like his/her teacher, they concluded

Jesus had not been observing the ritual Himself.

5Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?”

See, they held Jesus responsible for the actions of His followers.

This is an important lesson for us to stop & consider.

Did the disciples, at this time, really know & understand who Jesus was? [No] Were they following Him well, or were they struggling? [Struggling]

Jesus was perfect, but His followers were far from it.

Yet Jesus’ critics judged Jesus through the lens of His followers’ behavior. They did so because a disciple is supposed to be just like his/her rabbi.

The same is true today. Jesus is perfect while we, His followers, are not.

Jesus also isn’t here in His physical presence; His Body today is His people, the Church.

It’s inevitable that outsiders are going to judge Jesus on the basis of what they see in those who claim to believe in Him.

You’ve probably heard people say, “Don’t look at me, look at Jesus.” When a Christian messes up & brings reproach to Christ, we try to divert the view of the lost by saying something along the lines of, “Well, no one is perfect except Jesus. People will let you down, but Jesus never will.”

That’s all true — but it’s a sad excuse & one we ought to stop using. We don’t find it in scripture. On the contrary, what we find are constant exhortations to walk in holiness & to be a good example to others, not to make excuses when we fail & fall.

Paul didn’t say, “Don’t look at me but at Christ because while I fail, He’s perfect.” He said, “Join in following my example. “& “Imitate me as I imitate Christ.”

Friends, I don’t want to say to you, “Don’t look at me or follow my example; just keep you eyes on Jesus.”

I want to be able to say, “If you follow my example, you’ll be pleasing the Lord because I’m following Jesus.”

While I long to hear the words “Well done” from God, what I want to hear from man is, “When I watch you, I know & love Jesus better.”

We live in an age when many who call themselves the followers of Christ are simply not disciples because they have no desire whatsoever to be like Him.

These people bring reproach on the Lord & disgrace His holy name. All we can do is seek to walk in faithfulness & hope our humble example will turn the hearts of the lost to the truth.

6He answered and said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 7And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’8 For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men— the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.”

Jesus knew these men comprised a kind of religious “hit squad” sent from Jerusalem to get Him.

His response to their question about washings pulled the rug right out from under their feet.

Reused a devastating quotation from Isa 29:13, one spoken to their fore-fathers at a time when worship at the temple in Jerusalem was going strong, but there was no sincerity in it.

The prophet had rebuked the people & told them God could see into their hearts & knew they were void of love for Him. Their outward acts of religious piety were a sham God hated.

Jesus now used that same passage on these guys. By doing so, He was saying He knew what was in their hearts!

And because He could see inside them, He called them hypocrites; men who’d elevated silly traditions & rules to the place of scripture.

These men from Jerusalem were used to having the power to intimidate people. They had the power to make sure a person was excommunicated from the synagogue, just about the worst fate that could befall a Jew.

They were used to people sucking up to them and trying to curry their favor.

They thought their challenge of Jesus would be enough to make Him knuckle under and comply with their demands.

When Jesus went on the attack, it stunned them.

9He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban”—’ (that is, a gift to God), 12then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, 13making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

Instead of the Pharisees challenging Jesus over traditions, He challenged them on how their traditions actually violated the Word & Commands of God.

The Jews understood the 5th Commandment to honor parents to mean that when they grew older, you took care of them.

But the scribes said if a man said his wealth was “corban”/devoted to God, then he didn’t have to use it to support his parents.

This was a simple little loophole they’d inserted in the 5th Commandment so a person could get out of supporting his elderly parents.

What Jesus says here to the Pharisees & scribes is enlightening about those who want to base their relationship with God on the law.

They’ll always end up modifying it so they can escape its authority & present themselves as just.

When our relationship with God is based on faith in & love for Jesus, then our hearts are motivated, not to lessen, weaken, or modify the commands of God, but to do them because they become expressions of devotion.

God wants our relationship to Him to be a thing of the heart that works itself out in acts of joyous worship.

If our religion is nothing more than an outward piety we wear like a jacket, it won’t be long before we start tailoring that jacket more to our liking.

This is what the Pharisees had done.

Jesus then used this attack by the scribes & Pharisees as a platform from which to speak an important lesson about the kind of purity God is looking for.

And what Jesus says in this passage, some Bible scholars believe is the most dramatic & revolutionary teaching Jesus ever gave. [2]

Dr. Vincent Taylor said that what Jesus says here forever liberated Christianity from the shackles of legalism that defines orthodox Judaism. [3]

14When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, “Hear Me, everyone, and understand: 15There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. 16 anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!”

This would have rocked them back on their heels because what He said flew in the face of hundreds of years of Jewish tradition.

They'd come to believe that cleanliness & purity were all about what you touched or ate.

Jesus turned the tables & said the kind of purity that matters to God isn't external and can't be affected by what we touch or eat.

Moral purity is an issue of the heart & is revealed by those things that come out, not what go in.

Our speech & choices reveal the heart & make known whether or not those hearts are given to God.

When Jesus said in v. 16, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!”

He was making it clear this was a truth they needed to heed and meditate on.

God sees what's inside us and is not fooled by external forms of piety.

Piety is good when it's a reflection of a pure heart.

But piety that is only skin deep is a hypocrisy God hates.

17When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable.

They asked Jesus to clarify what He meant for the simple reason what He was saying was so totally revolutionary.

They wanted to make sure that they were getting what He was saying.

18So He said to them, “Are you thus without

understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?” 20 And He said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. 23 A11 these evil things come from within and defile a man.”

There's a lot here — let's break it down.

Jesus begins by asking them if they're really that unaware of the radically different approach to purity He's demonstrated for them for the last 2 years.

He expresses His concern that they haven't been more quick to grasp the fact that all along He's not been concerned with abiding by the traditions of the Jews regarding ritual purity, but has instead put His emphasis on inner purity and moral excellence.

Remember, as disciples — their whole goal was to be just like Him, yet apparently they'd been slow to grasp that He'd been modeling a different kind of cleanliness for them.

Then He made it clear — God was concerned with the heart, not the stomach. Defilement is not to be found out there, but in here.

The problem is not out there in the world, the problem is in the fallen heart of sinful man.

Defilement comes when man brings out of his sinful heart into the world all such things as Jesus lists in vs. 21 & 22.

The bottom line is our heart — who does it belong to?

Either we keep it for ourselves, or we give it to God.

If we keep it for ourselves, then we will need to provide for it's satisfaction & pleasure.

That's where all the evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, & foolishness come from.

If we give it to God, for whom it was made, then He cleans out all that stuff & puts within us a motivation for holiness because He is holy.

Such holiness no longer looks like the dry, hard, boring thing the

selfish heart thinks it is.

It's a joy & delight that makes the things off the selfish-heart look like the pitiful & tragic things they really are.

True holiness — heart holiness like this is a thing of awesome beauty.

Five times in the OT the Lord speaks of the beauty of holiness. ^[4]

If all the evil things listed in vs. 21 & 22 reside in the heart of man, what's to be done? Man needs a new heart!

And that's exactly what the Prophet Ezekiel said God would do through the New Covenant.

Eze. 36:25-27• 25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

As you well know, there are thousands upon thousands of fake Rolex watches on the market.

A real Rolex can cost anywhere from \$3 to \$5,000 & up.

While most of the fakes look just like the real thing, few of them keep time as accurately — and the reason why is because their internal mechanisms are faulty.

What a great picture of the Pharisees.

They maintained a general form of purity, but because their hearts weren't loyal to God, if you looked closely enough, you would have noticed they didn't keep step with genuine holiness.

What they needed was a new heart, a new inner mechanism — but they were rejecting the very one God had sent to give them one.

L. A Foray Among Gentiles 7:24-8:10

1. In Tyre & Sidon 7:24-30

The Lord knows both the religious & civil authorities are congealing in their plans against Him & that the time is winding down on His mission so He takes the disciples north into an area only sparsely populated by Jews.

24 From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden.

The news of Jesus' power has spread far & wide, even into this area of Gentile dominance.

When the people of the region heard He was among them, they gathered round.

25 For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet.

26 The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth,

She was a Gentile. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

The way Mark words this suggests that Jesus was acting as if He was ignoring her but she made her request again & again.

She didn't let His seeming indifference to her request stop her from pressing it.

27 But Jesus said to her, "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

Finally Jesus gave her an answer that seemed to be a rebuff to her request.

She understood what He was implying through this little illustration about feeding children vs. dogs.

The Jews referred to Gentiles as dogs, so it sounded to her like Jesus was saying that He would only give favor to His fellow Jews, the children of God, & not to the likes of her, a mere Gentile.

But Jesus doesn't shut the door on her completely.

He could have by saying something like, "No! Beat it — DOG!"

There was in His reply to her request for help something that invited a further

response on her part. She glimpsed this open door & pushed forward.

28 And she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, et even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs." 2 Then He said to her, "For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter." 30 when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.

There's an important lesson on faith to be gleaned from this story.

The Gentiles were a deeply superstitious people. Many of those superstitions had been coddled & encouraged by demonic activity.

The people of this region would have looked at Jesus as a magician of

sorts. They would have not grasped the importance of faith so much as thought of Jesus as a powerful mage who worked formulas.

Jesus had to dispel all such thoughts & used this woman's request as the backdrop to teach people about what genuine faith is.

Under the scope of superstition and magic, a needy person made a request, the magician worked his formula, and the need was met if the magician possessed sufficient power.

Faith was nowhere a part of this scenario.

This woman's repeated request for Jesus' help identified her as one who realized the answer to her need was in Him, not in His doing something.

She made it clear to Jesus she knew He was the answer to her need.

Then Jesus used her faith to teach all the rest of the people there.

His reply to her request seemed to put the brakes on it — but because her faith was genuine, it pressed on in the face of apparent opposition.

That's what true faith always does — it holds on to God even when the circumstances & evidence seem contrary.

We've been dealt some serious blows here at Calvary Chapel in the last few weeks. Just as this woman's daughter was troubled with a demon, the level of demonic attack has been on a level I've never experienced in the 23 years we've been here.

Round 1 of the attack came, & I cried out to God. There was seeming silence.

Round 2 came, & again we cried out to the Lord — “Help us!”
Silence.

Round 3 & 4 — no subtlety to the devil's attack; just a bald-faced choosing us off & calling us out.

We talk about God & faith, the devil & the reality of our power over him — but what are we going to do when that devil actually makes his presence evident in a manifest way?

Will we hold fast to the Lord as this woman did and not give up or let go just because things don't turn around the moment we cry out for help?

It doesn't matter what dirt & dust the enemy kicks up & tries to blur our vision of the Lord.

It doesn't matter how difficult or hard the circumstances are to endure

— We must hold on to the FACT that God will rescue us and redeem the situation, turning what the enemy meant for ruin to blessing and unquestioned glory.

We are this close to having KOCC, 101.5 FM up & operating. The entire process has been fraught with challenges & difficulty. Yet at each step of the way, the Lord has given us favor & moved the station forward.

The amount & nature of conflict with the City over the mast to install the antenna has simply been silly, and looking back, we can see that it was the work of the enemy.

Now that that process is coming to a rapid conclusion, the enemy's attack has shifted to a whole different stage in trying to distract us. He does not want good, solid bible teaching to go out to this area for obvious reasons.

He doesn't want his hegemony as the prince of the power of the air challenged.

But contest it, we're going to.

His attempts to distract & intimidate us aren't going to work.

He's badly overplayed his hand and become too obvious. He must be desperate

indeed. Such desperation only fires me to be more determined to press through into all the Lord has for us in this Community.

2. In Decapolis 7:31-8:10

a. 7:31-37 Jesus heals a deaf-mute

31 Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee.

Located to the North and Northwest of Galilee, Decapolis was another Gentile region sprinkled with a few Jews.

32 Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him.

Those born deaf usually do not speak because they do not know the sound of words.

That this man had some measure of speech means he'd probably become deaf as a child & had only a rudimentary form of speech, now further complicated by the fact he'd lost his hearing

altogether.

Imagine how hard it would be to speak if you could not hear your own words.

33And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue.

34Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”

While Mark has given us many references to Jesus’ many healings, he’s not given many descriptions of them. He does with this one, & it gives us a picture of the great compassion Jesus had with the needy.

First, he took this man away from the crowds.

If you were deaf, would you want your hearing restored in the midst of a clamoring crowd or in a place of relative peace & quiet?

Then Jesus thrust His fingers in the man’s ears.

This was a form of sign language; Jesus letting the man know He was going to heal his plugged ears — so get ready.

Then Jesus spit on his fingers and touched them to the man’s bound tongue, another sign that healing was on the way to restore his speech.

The sigh was a visual sign from Jesus to the man that He was concerned for all the man had had to endure as a deaf-mute.

The first thing the man heard was “Be opened.”

The point of Mark’s description of this man’s healing is that when Jesus’ power is at work, it is an intensely personal thing and is an expression of God’s incredible compassion and tender love.

Jesus could have waved His hands over the crowd & healed them all at one go.

Easy, no sweat — and a whole lot less bother and work for the people, the disciples and of course, Jesus.

But He never did that — His healings were always personal & intimate. He showed individual attention to each person He healed.

You know why? Because Jesus isn’t a healer who’s friendly. He’s a friend who it just so happens, heals!

If you’re someone who needs a touch from God, who needs a healing, whether it’s physical, spiritual, or emotional, know that God doesn’t apply His power in an impersonal, distant way.

He doesn't sit on his heavenly throne & wave His holy wand over you and dispense a packet of energy that changes that thing. No, He comes face to face with you as he did with this man, within spitting distance if you will.

He puts His finger firmly on the point of need.

Then he lets you know He knows just how deeply this thing you've endured has affected you. He sighs with it's weight to comfort you that He does indeed know what you've suffered.

Friend, don't think no one knows what you've suffered — Jesus knows!

That's why He sighed in front of this man, to let him know he was not alone in his suffering. Jesus knew.

Jesus knows your suffering, and it is in His compassion that He touches you. If His healing hasn't come yet, don't despair.

Hold on to Him; His touch will come in the perfect moment.

35Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. 36Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it. 37And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

b. 8:1-10 Jesus feeds 4,000 men

1 In those days,

That little phrase from Mark has caused some scholars to conclude that Jesus may have spent as much as 8 months in the Gentile regions of Tyre & now Decapolis!

If Jesus' ministry lasted 3 years, that means a ¼ of the time He spent among the Gentiles.

1In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, 2I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. 3And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar." 4Then His disciples answered Him, "How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?" 5He asked them, "How many loaves do you

have?” And they said, “Seven.”

In light of the feeding of the 5,000 just 2 chs. ago in 6, it seems that as soon as Jesus said He wanted to feed this crowd, the disciples would have said, “Okay, here’s 7 loaves. Let’s get busy.”

But they don’t. It’s as if they’d forgotten all about the prior miracle or thought it improper to expect He would do it again.

6So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and they set them before the multitude. 7They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before them. 8So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. 9Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away,

We looked at this when we were studying Matthew some months ago. This crowd was largely Gentile while the first feeding had been wholly Jewish.

After the first feeding they had picked up 12 baskets of leftovers, here it was 7. 12 spoke to the Jews of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Jesus was saying that as their Messiah, if they would receive Him, He would take care of them as a nation.

7 was a number which spoke of perfection & completion, even among the Gentiles. Jesus was saying that if the world would receive Him as Savior, He would remove the curse & restore Earth to Paradise.

10immediately got into the boat with His disciples, and came to the region of Dalmanutha.

Which was on the western shore of the Lake of Galilee, back in Jewish territory. His foray into Gentiles land is finished and He won’t be going back.

M. Seeking Signs Vs. Seeking Truth 8:11-12

11Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him.

Jesus had no more than landed back in Galilee when His opponents renewed their attack.

They contended with Him at every point, but His answers were always brilliant and ended up making them look the fool.

So finally they made it plain — if He was the Messiah, then perform

some dramatic sign to prove it and they would give in. This was nothing less than a repeat of the devil's temptation that Jesus jump off the pinnacle of the temple. You see, the Jews had all kinds of folk stories & ideas about what the Messiah would do when He came. They said He would show signs in the skies that would prove His identity. None of these things were biblical or foretold by the prophets. But they were signs they believed would verify who He was. The problem is, they were all pointless demonstrations of raw power that had nothing to do with the grace & mercy of God. Jesus would not misuse God's precious power that way. People who won't be won by the miracles of compassion He'd already performed He would not win by miracles of sheer ability. Jesus was no showman trying to impress the skeptics. He knew who He was & felt no need to prove His power. The Pharisees already had all the evidence they needed to come to a right decision about Him. Nothing more would convince them. He knew this and it's why He refused to yield to their taunt.

12But He sighed deeply in His spirit,

Jesus sighed before the deaf man to show Him He cared and understood what he'd suffered with his affliction. The word Mark uses here is an intensified form of the same word and speaks of a depth of emotion that is exceedingly great. With the deaf man, Jesus was tender with compassion. With the Pharisees, the depths of Jesus' anger goes all the way to His spirit. You know why Jesus was so angry? Because these men were supposed to be the examples of righteousness the common people could look to for what it meant to be holy. They were the ones others followed. And their rejection of Him would lead to the damning of many souls.

He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation."

The translators tried to render this in a manner that would sound better to our English ears. By doing so, they leave out what brings across the anger of Christ.

Literally what it says was, “Why does this generation seek a sign?

Assuredly, I say to you, if I were to perform such a sign for this generation. . .” then He left the saying unfinished.

This was a common Hebrew idiom, a kind of oath one took implying that if a person did such a thing, it would be so wrong, it would be unthinkable what the consequences would be, so better to leave them unstated.

Now, that speaks volumes to us about how Jesus viewed the use of power! Being consistent with Mark’s theme of presenting Jesus as the perfect leader who lead by serving, He used power only for the benefit of others, never in the service or advancement of Himself.

N. Jesus Challenges The Disciples 8:13-38

1. He reveals their lack of understanding vs. 13-21

13And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. 14Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. 15Then He charged them, saying, “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”

Jesus was still disturbed over the unreasoned hostility of the religious & civil authorities, made so clear by the events of vs. 10-12.

So as they crossed back over the lake, He warned the disciples about the error of those authorities. He referred to it as leaven — a symbol of sin.

This will be my text for this Sunday, so I’ll leave further comment till then.

What Jesus means by the leaven of these guys we’ll take a look at Sunday — but the mention of leaven makes the disciples think of bread.

16And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have no bread.”

They say, “Uh-oh! Jesus knows we forgot to bring bread and He’s not happy.”

But Jesus wasn’t referring to literal leaven or bread. And to be frank, He’s disturbed that the disciples, His intimates aren’t more discerning as to what He does mean.

17But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them,

Notice now how He deals with them when it's time to correct them for their slowness to understand. He queries them. He asks questions that aimed at engaging them in a discussion that would make them realize their dullness was a serious matter that ought not be.

“Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? 18Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? 19When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?” They said to Him, “Twelve.” 20”Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?” And they said, “Seven.” 21So He said to them, “How is it you do not understand?”

9 questions — each meant to stir up within them the awareness that they were well past the point where they ought to have needed Jesus' explanation as to what He meant by the leaven of the Pharisees & Herod.

He couldn't possibly be speaking about bread and criticizing them for failing to have better provisions.

He'd more than amply shown He could take care of them if they needed to eat. No the problem was this — they'd heard so much from Him, with so little attentiveness to DO IT, they'd become dull of hearing.

They didn't understand Jesus when He spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees because they'd gotten into the mode of politely listening to Him with no real intent to do anything about it.

They were His official disciples & had become content to fill the role of following Him around the physical places He went without following His teaching about spiritual things.

“Disciple” was merely an occupation when discipleship ought to have been their pre-occupation.

Their problem came from familiarity. The repeated exposure to Jesus' teaching, when not reflected & acted upon worked a progressive insensitivity & dullness in them. [\[5\]](#)

The same thing will happen in us if we fail to think through and act

upon the Word of God we come into contact with. Use it or lose it.

In John 7:17, Jesus made it clear that it is only those who are willing to DO the Word & will of God who will be able to understand it. When you come here on Wednesday nights, you get an earful of the Word. There is great danger in that if we don't come to get a heart-full too, and to come with the expectation that when we hear something that needs to be done, we will do it.

2. He illustrates their lack of spiritual clarity vs. 22-26

22Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. **23**So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. **24**And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking." **25**Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly. **26** Then He sent him away to his house, saying, "Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone in the town."

[Sunday]

3. He challenges them to proclaim their views vs. 27-33

a. vs. 27-30 Peter nails it

27Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi;

This region, known to the Greek world as Baniyas, was a much sought after resort location.

The snows which melt on Mt. Hermon to the north find their way through the bedrock and come gushing out of the ground all over this area to collect in the stream beds that combine to start the Jordan River.

Jesus knows that He will soon be heading to Jerusalem and so takes the disciples away from all the hubbub of the crowds to this quiet, lush, gorgeous area.

This was a kind of vacation for them, a last retreat before the end.

and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, "Who do men say that I am?" 28So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the

prophets.”

Jesus asked the boys what they'd heard people were saying about Him. What were the popular opinions and ideas.

Some thought He was a reincarnation of John the Baptist.

Some thought He might be Elijah, who was foretold to be the forerunner of the Messiah.

Some thought Jesus was just one of the many prophets God had sent Israel, like Isaiah or Jeremiah.

29 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.”

The Messiah!

He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him.

b. vs. 31-33 Peter blows it

31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke this word openly.

Mark means there was nothing of the parable in this — it was simple, straight-forward communication.

Jesus detailed the steps of what was about to happen when they turned around & headed back.

Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

Peter, flushed with the success of his confession of Christ, and as Matthew tells us, commended by the Lord as one who is enlightened by the Spirit of God, thinks now that he can counsel Jesus.

Here is Jesus, pouring out His heart to His friends, and Peter begins to rebuke Him!

“Now, Jesus, remember, I get revelations, and I'm telling you, I know it's been tough, but let's have not more of this negative confession.”

“You're the Messiah, remember? Messiah's don't suffer and die. They reign.”

“So let's have no more of this silly talk that shows a lack of faith.”

33 But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

I hadn't ever seen this before. Jesus looked *at all the disciples* as He rebuked Peter! Because while Peter spoke up, he was only voicing what they all thought.

Jesus' rebuke seems awfully stern, but it was right on the money. Just as the devil had worked through the Pharisees to ask for a sign from heaven, he was now subtly at work in Jesus' own closest friends to dissuade Him from going to the cross.

He was playing on Jesus' deep affection for these men & their love & admiration for Him to cause Him to step away from the path the Father had set.

The cross meant shame, not just for Himself, but for them.

They could not grasp just how important the crucifixion would be.

All they could see was the hideousness of it all, and Jesus knew they were slated to go through a very dark time as their whole world came crashing down when He was lifted up in such public shame.

What kept Him true to His mission was the knowledge that Resurrection Sunday would bring the light that would recast the cross as the ultimate triumph & glory, not defeat & shame.

4. The cost of discipleship vs. 34-38

34when He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. **35**For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

These verses are the central theme of Mark's whole gospel.

They speak of a complete repudiation of power & self, the very antithesis of what the world screams our lives ought to be about.

If Jesus had turned the Jews upside down with His teaching about purity at the beginning of our study tonight, then here at the end of it we see Him turn the whole world's ideas about life upside down.

Life is not about me, about acquiring things & power for myself

God gave us life as a gift to use — something not to keep but to spend, to give away. The One we must give it to if we're to use it rightly is Him, the Giver of Life. — This is a 20 dollar bill. What value does it have? It's worth \$20.

But when is that value realized? Only when it's spent.

Now, if this 20 had a mind of its own, it could seek to seek to find its value in such things as food, cars, nice clothes.

Or, it could give itself away by seeking, not to secure its own comfort & pleasure, but by blessing others.

This 20 possesses no real value until it's used! And the best use it will know, is when it gives itself away.

Because it keeps its value as a 20, it can give itself away many, many times. The same is true of us — although we are of infinitely greater value to God than a 20 dollar bill.

36For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? 37Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Actually, the world tends to reduce the idea of the value of a human being to money. Jesus makes it clear that life cannot be reduced to digits, decimals & amounts.

The things that make for real life are intangible but not less real because they are things of the spirit.

38For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

There it is. Jesus draws the line in the sand & let's everyone know that the time has come to decide about Him.

His opponents have settled into a place of firm resistance and will not be persuaded.

His few disciples are with Him.

Now the rest must decide — either they step across the line of faith in Jesus, or they are eternally doomed.

[1]

Hughes, R. Kent *Mark* pg. 164

[2]

ibid. pg. 166

[3]

ibid

[4]

I Chr. 16:29 2 Chr, 20:21 Psalm 29:2 96:9 110:3

[5] Ibid pg. 190