

Mark Chapters 8-9:13

Last week – covered Chapters 6:14-7:37

- The story of John the Baptist getting beheaded
- Jesus feeding the 5,000
- Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee
- Defilement comes from within
- Jesus beginning to engage with the Gentiles via delivering an evil spirit and healing

Up until these chapters, we've seen Jesus perform many miracles. However, He has yet to reveal who He is – even to His disciples. They probably suspected that He was the Messiah, but He has not yet confirmed that. As we get into these chapters, I'm seeing Jesus is becoming more focused on the ultimate objective of His first earthly ministry – the cross. We're going to see Him start to disclose to His disciples who He is and where He's going. The stakes of following Him are going to be raised.

¹ In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples *to Him* and said to them, ²“I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. ³ And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar.”

The people are still thronging Jesus – they're following Him wherever He goes. Our compassionate Good Shepherd, always recognizing the needs of His sheep, tells the disciples that it's been three days with nothing to eat. He knows that many have come from far away. I would suggest He knew where each and every one was from – simply because He knows each of us and everything about us. As I noted in last week's teaching, one of God's names is Jehovah Jireh, which means the LORD will provide. His instinct and will is to provide for our needs, so by the way He's communicating to the disciples, He's teaching them the need to be attentive to the needs of those who they're going to serve.

⁴ Then His disciples answered Him, “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?”

Remember, it hasn't been that long since Jesus fed the 5,000, so these hard-headed and maybe hard-hearted men aren't seeing the familiarity of this scene.

⁵ He asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven.” ⁶ So 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. ⁷ They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before *them*. ⁸ So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. ⁹ Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away, ¹⁰ immediately got into the boat with His disciples and came to the region of Dalmanutha.

We have basically the same scene as the first mass-feeding miracle. There are fewer people, and there are fewer leftovers (for the 5,000, there were 12 baskets leftover). On the surface, I wondered why Mark would include what appears to be mostly a duplicate miraculous feeding. I'm embarrassed to admit thinking like “Been there, done that.” Then I did some digging and uncovered, what I believe, is at least one notable reason for the inclusion of this second feeding miracle.

The word for basket in the feeding of the 5,000 was one that described a type of basket used by the Jews. For the 4,000 feeding, the word for basket was one that was typically used by the Gentiles. Furthermore, if we go back to last week's reading, the last setting is Decapolis – this is an area that was

generally populated by Gentiles. Therefore, it's possible that the significance, beyond the blatant miracle of turning seven loaves of bread and a few fish into enough to feed 4,000 people – and then some, is Jesus is now ministering to and serving Gentiles. For the legalistic religious bozos and, maybe even the disciples, this is a radical step. Jesus has no partiality to people – He loves us all the same regardless of gender, age, religion, or nationality.

¹¹ Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him. ¹² But 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.”

At this time in history, the Jews were looking for the Messiah. However, the Messiah they were looking for would deliver them from the Roman rule and restore the Jews to their prominence that they had during King David's and Solomon's reigns. The Pharisees revealed here that one of the proofs that the person was the Messiah was that he would be able to perform signs and wonders from heaven. When I read this, I felt like I wanted to ask these knuckleheads – have you been paying attention to what Jesus has been doing? I have to believe that thought might have been in Jesus' mind as He sighed deeply.

I believe the LORD knew even if He did perform a sign, the Pharisees still would not believe. Jesus does not want to be a side-show or magician. Going back on all the miracles He's performed so far, every one of them – no exceptions – were done for the purpose of serving the people's needs. There was no self-glorification motivation with Jesus' miracles. Proof of this is how often we keep reading how He tells everyone He heals to not tell anyone.

I've said this already a couple of times during this session, and I'll say it again here. The Pharisees, the scribes, and I would argue the majority of people today – even many Christians – are looking to the physical, or tangible, benefits from God. Jesus, though, is always first focused on the spiritual. The LORD does this because with God being a perfect and holy spirit Being, *He* cannot have what He so deeply desires from each of us – a reconciled relationship.

That is what Jesus' mission was all about – making a way, solely by faith, for people to be reconciled to their originally created state – to be in fellowship with God. That reconciliation would have to be in the form of a permanent forgiven state. This isn't to say God ignores our physical needs – we just saw proof that He does in the mass feeding. However, His first priority will always be on the spiritual.

One last comment about looking for signs and wonders. As exciting and amazing a sign or wonder might be, it's not sustainable. Think about the last amazing thing you experienced – perhaps it was a great movie or sporting event. How much of that do you remember? We need to invest our efforts in the sustainable Word of God. Jesus confirmed this truth in Matthew 24:35, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”

Furthermore, there is, and I believe soon, coming a person who will perform great signs and wonders – but they will be done to glorify himself. I'm speaking of the antichrist. I'm in the pre-tribulation rapture camp, so I don't believe anyone here will need to worry about this. However, if I'm wrong, then we, and everyone else, need to be careful looking for that someone who starts performing signs and wonders. Jesus made it clear in our reading those things won't be coming from Him.

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

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

As I've gotten older – both in age and in my faith – I've developed a real love for the disciples. They're seemingly always not getting what Jesus is truly talking about. I can relate to that! Moreover, they're forgetting things. Sadly, I can relate to that, too! They've forgotten to bring enough bread to feed everyone. Then they hear Jesus warning them of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. All they can interpret from the LORD's warning is they got busted for not bringing enough bread!

¹⁷ But Jesus, being aware of *it*, said to them, “Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? ¹⁸ Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember?”

Jesus, knowing their thoughts, starts to step on His friends toes a bit by accusing them of not understanding and having hard hearts. He drills down a little harder asking them, in essence, have they not been seeing all the good He’s been doing? Have they not heard all the wisdom and the power in His teaching. Have they forgotten already? Man, if this were me on the receiving end of these words for Jesus, I would have felt two-foot small – and pretty stupid. Thankfully, though, Jesus is not condemning because there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. This is Jesus the teacher, and now He offers a couple of examples of His good works to remind them of what He provides vs. the Pharisees and Herrod.

¹⁹ When 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.” ²¹ So He said to them, “How *is it* you do not understand?”

Leaven, in the Bible, is often used as a symbol of evil – of sin. Therefore, when Jesus is warning the disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herrod, He is in effect warning them that whatever they are teaching or promoting, it has an anti-spiritual, or anti-God component to it. A little of their leaven-like teaching can truly spoil what is otherwise a properly taught truth of God. We saw in last week’s reading Jesus rebuking the Pharisees for making their incorrect interpretations of the Law into traditions to be adhered to – not the Law. Since God’s Word is the truth, the only attack the enemy can mount against it is to attempt to deny that truth by replacing it with lies. Nothing is more unsustainable than a lie.

²² Then 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.”

I think it’s worth noting that Jesus led this blind man out of town – He kind of had to lead him because he was blind. The significance was that He was still seeking to serve people privately in order to minimize the commotion around Him. This healing, though, is different than the previous ones as it took two efforts for the Lord to heal the man’s sight. This opens the door to the possibility that when we request healing from the Lord, the healing we receive may be gradual. We might show some improvements, but we’re not fully healed.

I will confess that I don’t really understand all that much about healing. I have zero doubt that God has the power to heal every one of us. However, I cannot explain why He chooses to heal some and not heal others. If it were me doing this work, I would likely show favoritism to those I love or who are nice to me. This is just one of thousands of reasons it’s good that I’m not God. If He were to only heal “the deserving,” that would eliminate grace. If we’re not getting the healing we’re asking, we need to go to His Word to sustain us. A good verse to start that with is Proverbs 3:5: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;”

²⁷ Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, “Who do men say that I am?” ²⁸ So they answered, “John the Baptist; but some *say*, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Peter answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.”³⁰ Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him.

Jesus takes the disciples up to a beautiful place at the foot of Mount Hermon – Caesaria Philippi. This is north of the Sea of Galilee. He asks the guys, “Who do men say that He is?” Their responses include John the Baptist, Elijah, and one of the prophets. Notice He didn’t say “no” to their answers. Then He asks THE question each and every person who has heard of Jesus will have to answer at some point – Whom do YOU say I am? Peter answers and calls Him the Christ. Christ is not Jesus’ last name – it’s a title. It literally means the anointed One. This is the first time Jesus reveals to His disciples who He truly is. Yet, He tells the disciples to keep this to themselves.

Matthew’s version of this scene offers important additional detail. From Chapter 16:17-18, “Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.¹⁸ And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” We can take from Jesus’ words that revelation that He is God the Son – the Messiah – the Savior of the world – is initiated from God the Father in heaven. I believe God is ready to reveal this truth to every member of His creation, but they have to come in humility and the truth that they are sinners and in need of His forgiveness.

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. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.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.”

Did you notice that the *very first thing* Jesus disclosed to the disciples that He was the Messiah was that He would be betrayed, suffer, be killed, and then rise again? One of the millions of things I love about God is that He is so straightforward with us. He’s always been that way. Go back to the Garden of Eden – what did He say to Adam about eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil? He will surely die. Not only is God always straightforward with us, but also He always tells the truth. Yet, if we sin and then find ourselves in a mess because of that sin, we wonder how this mess could happen? Ergo, the dumb sheep label.

Poor Peter – he’s just had this remarkable revelation of who Jesus is – I believe the greatest moment in a person’s life. Then he goes to rebuke the Lord for saying He’s going to die (he clearly didn’t hear the “after three days rise” part of what Jesus said). The LORD’s response? “Get behind me Satan!” From a spiritual experience perspective, it doesn’t get more extreme than that! In Peter’s defense, hearing from the man you’ve been faithfully following, witnessing His countless miracles, and personally feeling the benefits of being cared for by the Good Shepherd that He’s going to suffer, die, and rise again would be a tough message to absorb.

As I thought about Jesus’ words in verse 33, “For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men,” I was reminded that there is a distinct difference in thinking as the world does vs. the way a citizen of the Kingdom of God – a spiritual realm – thinks. For me, one of those distinctions is without the benefit of a spiritual perspective, it is more difficult to recognize the good and evil intentions behind our circumstances. For extreme situations like murder and adultery, those *should be* obvious evidence of evil. However, if we find ourselves subtly compromising on unholy situations – maybe not even giving them a second thought, we’re missing the evil in the temptations. Conversely, if we’re going through a painful season in our lives, the pain we’re experiencing is masking the goodness the experience is doing in shaping our spiritual maturity. This is exactly where Jesus goes with His next words.

³⁴ When 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.³⁶ For what

will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? ³⁷ Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ For 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.”

We see here that Jesus has begun to press in on those who are following Him. Up until now, He’s been teaching them life lessons through parables, healing them, and feeding them. Until this point, following Jesus has been pretty simple – good teaching and an abundance of free food! Tragically, many churches, for the sake of building their congregations, have diluted both the truth and the power of God’s Word. The leaders just want the people to feel good about being at the church. The primary purpose of a Jesus-following church is spiritual formation – growth. If Jesus is dealing with difficult topics – the kind of topics that might not make people feel comfortable in their current state, then so must we.

Again, being straightforward, Jesus tells the people that if they’re going to truly want to follow Him, they’re going to have to deny themselves. Stop here. What is this component of our lives that His statement speaking to? – Our selfishness. Isn’t the essence of selfishness the opposite of self-denial? This is radical stuff Jesus is telling the people – telling us. The LORD doesn’t stop there – He tells them, and us, to pick up their crosses and follow Him. Jesus is no longer pulling the punches – He’s really challenging the people’s hearts and minds with this statement. A cross was the symbol of shame and judgment to the people in these days. Not only was Jesus foretelling them of His destiny, but also He was informing us that if we’re to follow Him, we’re going to have to carry our own symbol of the shame and judgment Jesus experienced on our behalf. I can imagine the people thinking something like, “What happened to the nice guy teaching and free food?”

We need to remember that Jesus implored us to pick up *our* crosses. What does that mean? Firstly, He is not asking us to pick up *His* cross. His cross is the one that was designed solely for His primary mission – to be the sacrificial Lamb of God and make a way to have our sins forgiven and be reconciled to God the Father.

Our crosses are the ones that remind us that we are sinners saved solely by grace via faith. They are reminders of our need to be humble, deny our flesh, and follow Jesus wherever He wills us to go in obedience and service. The hard part of that command is we don’t know where Jesus is going to take us. What we need to remember is that regardless of where He takes us, He is going to be there with us. This is why it is so essential we focus our energy on knowing His faithful character revealed to us through His Word. If we can truly trust in Jesus, then following Him without knowing where He’s taking us becomes an easier – and maybe even a joyful experience.

¹ And He said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.”

Here as we step into chapter 9, we have Jesus making this remarkable statement. What did He mean by this? My interpretation is that the ones whom He is speaking of – the ones that won’t taste death till they see the kingdom of God – are Peter, James, and John. Lets’ keep reading.

² Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. ⁴ And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”— ⁶ because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid.

I believe His transfiguration before Peter, James, and John was what He was speaking to in verse one. They’re witnessing the glorified Jesus – as if they were transported into the spiritual realm. It’s interesting to me that Mark, through likely Peter, knew that the two people with Jesus were Elijah and

Moses. Were they wearing name tags? Why Elijah and Moses? Elijah is symbolic of the prophets. Moses is symbolic of the Law. Jesus said in Matthew 5:17, *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”* Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law because He was perfectly obedient, and He is the fulfillment of the prophets as He is who they were speaking to.

Peter, being afraid and not knowing what to say, takes the mindset of an Orange County real estate developer and suggests they build three tabernacles for each of the three. I took notice of the attitude behind the statement he did not know what to say. At my uncle’s funeral, one of his lifelong buddies shared a saying that he and my uncle lived by, *“Never miss an opportunity to shut up.”* This is especially true when you’re in an uncomfortable situation that you think demands something to be said – like ministering to a person who is hurting or grieving. When you don’t have the words to say to bring comfort, just putting your arms around someone and keeping quiet can speak much louder and be more meaningful than anything you can say.

⁷ And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” ⁸ Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves.

I’ve often wondered what this must have been like. What was volume like? What did God’s voice sound like? The message here? Listen to Jesus. That is what Vickie and I are hoping you’re hearing as we go through this study.

⁹ Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ So they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant. ¹¹ And they asked Him, saying, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” ¹² Then He answered and told them, “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? ¹³ But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him.”

Peter, James, and John are still not grasping the rising from the dead concept. They weren’t caught up on their Old Testament reading where there were indications that the Messiah would be cut off and then return. A couple of them are:

Daniel 9:26: “And after the sixty-two weeks, Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;”

Psalms 16:10: “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”

The three amigos then ask Jesus as to why the scribes say Elijah must come before the Messiah. The LORD confirms that what the scribes are saying is true, but that Elijah *has* come. What, or who, did He mean by that? Jesus said in Matthew 17:12-13, *“But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise, the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.”* ¹³ Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.” The interpretation here is that John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah.

Next week we will cover verses starting in chapter 9:14 and going all the way through 10.

Questions:

1. Have you ever been able, in retrospect, to see the good that came out from a difficult season in your life?
2. What sustains your faith when God is not answering your prayers – or at least not answering them in the manner you want or expect?
3. What is a spiritual truth that may be opposite of how the world thinks that you struggle with?