

MARK

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Mark chapter 7 as we continue our study through the Word of God. As we concluded our study last time we saw Jesus and His men in the area of Gennesaret, which was located just south of Capernaum. And there in Gennesaret people came from near and far to be touched by Jesus. People were carrying those who were too sick to walk or couldn't walk. And as Jesus entered their villages they just wanted to touch the hem of His garment to be healed. And we are told that “**. . . as many as touched Him were made well.**” Mark 6:56.

Now as great as you may think that is, there was the Jewish religious establishment that were trying to find some fault in Jesus to discredited Him and we will see that this evening in our study.

With that as our background, let's begin reading in Mark chapter 7 beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word this evening.

MARK 7**VERSES 1-5**

Here we see this delegation of religious leaders, who traveled some 80 miles from Jerusalem, not to embrace what Jesus was saying, not to draw close to God, but to discredit Jesus, find some fault in Him, to bring Him down.

And these Scribes and Pharisees are trying to catch Jesus breaking the traditions, which they believed was “*the fence of the Law.*” You see, it was not the Law of God that protected the tradition, but the tradition that protected the Law. How did all this come about?

The Scribes copied the Word of God and they became the legal experts of the Law, which was contained in the first 5 books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy, also called the Torah. They then began to define the principles of how these things should be carried out in our daily lives, which became the oral law and then the traditions of the elders.

In the Mishna you will find all the rules and regulations that were developed from just the simple statements made by God. The Mishna or the oral traditions became more important than the Word of God. “Rabbi Eleazer said, ‘He who expounds the Scriptures in opposition to the tradition has no share in the world to come’ . . . The *Mishna*, a collection of Jewish traditions in the *Talmud*, records, ‘It is a greater offense to teach anything contrary to the voice of the Rabbis than to contradict Scripture itself.’” (Warren Wiersbe)

This is a very dangerous place to be where the traditions of men, the words of men are more important than the Word of God. But make no mistake about it, this is still being done today.

For instance, the Roman Catholic church believes the Pope is infallible and his words supersede the Scriptures where they differ. Thus, Mary can be without sin, she can be co-savior, even though the Bible never says those things. The traditions of man supersede the Bible in their minds, and like I have said, that is a dangerous place to be!

And you have to just shake your head at these religious leaders of Jesus day. They come to Jesus complaining that His men are not washing their hands correctly before they eat. Kind of weird that they were watching them wash their hands and eat but they were trying to discredit Jesus and here they are looking at His followers to do that.

And make no mistake about it, they took this hand washing very seriously. They said that if you ate bread with unwashed hands that bread was no better than excrement! A rabbi who did not do this ritual washing was excommunicated! And another rabbi, who was imprisoned by the Romans, instead of drinking his ration of water he used it for ceremonial cleansing and nearly died of dehydration. But among the Jewish religious leaders, he was seen as a great hero for his sacrifice!

Now what did this ceremonial cleansing or handwashing entail? The water that you would use had to come from special stone vessels. You see, ordinary water might be unclean. You also needed enough water to do this ceremonial cleansing or handwashing to fill one and one-half egg shells.

Once you had the water you would pour the water over your hands, starting at your fingers and have the water run down towards your wrist. Then you would rub the fist of one hand into the other to cleanse them. After that you would pour the water over your hands again, only this time you would pour it from the wrist down towards the fingers.

And it was worse than that. The Mishna contained 186 pages on how you can work and keep yourself clean. It contained 35 pages on how to wash your pots and pans! And if that is how you are trying to approach God, you will never reach Him as these religious leaders were going to find out!

VERSES 6-9

Notice how Jesus confronts the Jewish religious leaders, not by answering their question but by exposing their hearts. They focused so much on these trivial things, these traditions like hand washing, that anyone who didn't follow what they said was excluded. Thus, they kept people from God, they made approaching God unattainable and the people were weighed down by all their traditions that they needed to keep.

Thus, Jesus hits these men hard as He quotes Isaiah 29:13. Listen to how The Living Bible puts this verse here in Mark, **“Jesus replied, ‘You bunch of hypocrites! Isaiah the prophet described you very well when he said, “These people speak very prettily about the Lord but they have no love for him at all. Their worship is a farce, for they claim that God commands the people to obey their petty rules.” How right Isaiah was! For you ignore God’s specific orders and substitute your own traditions. You are simply rejecting God’s laws and trampling them under your feet for the sake of tradition.’”**

He hit the nail on the head regarding these guys. They had all the externals down for looking spiritual, but their hard hearts were far from God, and Jesus calls them hypocrites or a person who puts on a mask to disguise themselves. Yes, the words of Jesus were hard to swallow but Jesus wanted them to awaken out of their spiritual sleep and thus, He exposed their hearts!

And what Jesus was telling these men He is also speaking to us. You see, these are nothing more than doctrines of men and they are not of God. Thus, they are empty, they are worthless, and God does not accept them. Do you really think God cares how many times you wash your hands? Of course not! Do you really think God cares how long your hair is? Of course not! Do you really think God cares if you wear a 3-piece suit or a dress to church, or jeans and a shirt? Of course not! Why? Because God wants your heart!

And let me say this because I have seen this before. When you look at legalism what you see happen is that they take an opinion of man, a commandment of man and they teach it as a doctrine from God. But in doing that you are making the words of man carry the same weight as the Word of God!

And like I have said, I have heard this over the years in regards to music, in regards to hair length, in regards to dress and-so-on. Do you really think a person is closer to God if they wear a suit and tie verses jeans and a tee-shirt? Of course not and many times it is hypocrisy, they are playing the part looking spiritual. There is nothing wrong with wearing a suit and tie unless you make it into a law and say that you can't worship God without one or for the women, wearing a dress.

Don't lay aside the Words of God for the traditions of men because in the end, what will happen is you will negate the Word of God to keep the tradition of men!

I like the way Ironside sums this up for us. He wrote, "To the spiritual mind, it is a question of unceasing wonder that men should be so ready to follow and even fearlessly contend for the authority of human traditions, while they are just as ready to ignore the plain teachings of the Word of God." How true that statement is today!

VERSES 10-13

Now Jesus gives to them an example to show them how their traditions have caused them to negate the commands of God! To do this Jesus takes them back to the Word of God where God said we are to honor our parents. In fact, if you brought dishonor to them you were to be put to death. And the idea is not to just obey your parents, but to bring them honor, care for them, provide for them, help them when they need help.

But now we see their tradition, how they interpreted the law. If you didn't want to care for your parents, you could say, "**Corban**" which meant it was given over to God. You see, your parents would get nothing and you would keep it all. This was the tradition of the elders!

Yes, they would look very spiritual, so what was wrong with what they were doing? Listen again to what Jesus said in verse 13 because here is the reality of what they were doing, this is what it all boils down to.

Jesus said, that they were "**making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.**" Mark 7:13.

By keeping the tradition of men they were negating the Words of God. And it was not just speaking of honoring their parents or their hand washing, but hundreds of these traditions went against the Word of God.

VERSES 14-16

When the religious leaders came the crowds took a step back, but now Jesus is calling them back, He wants them to understand the truths of God and not be deceived by the traditions of men.

You see, it is not what you eat that defiles you, but what comes out of your heart that does! You can tell where a person is at in the Lord by what comes out of their mouth, you see, it will show you where their heart is at by what they say.

Now please understand that there are things that we can take into our lives that can hurt us, they can harm us, they can defile us. We see that with drugs, alcohol, pornography, false teaching. Jesus is speaking of ceremonial cleanliness and thus, the focus is what is coming from your life, that is truly what will defile you!

VERSES 17-23

You can tell how entrenched His men were with the traditions that they were taught over the years. They didn't understand the point that Jesus was making about taking in certain foods and how it does not affect your heart, your spiritual condition. Thus, Jesus answers their question, He expounds on it a little more.

And His point is simple. You see, from the heart comes sin. It has nothing to do with what you eat, how you washed your hands, the society you came from, the parents you had, and-so-on. Man is born with a sin nature.

That is our problem and Jesus gives us 13 statements that show what is in the heart of man. The first seven are plural and deal with our wicked behavior. The last six are singular and deal with the attitude of the person. And they are not pretty as you can see. But, that is what comes out of the heart of sin. Thus, God is not interested in our religious traditions, the traditions of the elders. Then what does He want?

Listen very carefully because it is not your money, your time, your service, He is not interested in this or that. Then what is He interested in? This is what God is interested in.

In John 6:29 we are told, **“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’”** Why? So He can give us a new heart!

Paul said in II Corinthians 5:17, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”** That is what God wants to do in our lives! But, it is our choice who and what we want to follow. One leads to death, the other to life, abundant life!

Spurgeon, in looking at the heart of man, wrote, “The source from which these rivers of pollution proceed is the natural heart of man. Sin is not a splash of mud upon man’s exterior, it is a filth generated within himself.” How true that is!

The only solution is that you need a heart transplant, you need to be born again! The heart of man is wicked and we see what is inside of man by what comes out of man. That should not be the case for Christians. What should flow from our lives are the things of God because the Spirit of God lives in us!

VERSES 24-26

Jesus now travels some 40 miles northwest of Capernaum to Tyre and Sidon, Gentile territory, which is called today, Lebanon. And we are told that Jesus meets a woman there and this woman was a Syro-Phoenician. What that means is that the land she was living in was controlled by the Syrians and Phoenicia was the country. This was the place of her birth and she was brought up in the Greek culture, she was a Gentile.

We might not think too much of that but please understand what that meant. She had no heritage of God’s Word. There was no hope for her in the god’s that she worshiped, probably Astarte and other pagan gods that were popular in that region.

Then why in the world did she come to Jesus? The simple answer is that her daughter was **“severely demon-possessed.”** That is true, she was. But that is not the only reason. You see, she had plenty of gods to go to for help. Then what was the problem? The problem was that these gods of stone were cold, they were lifeless and they could not help her daughter.

In other words, she is at the end of her rope, she has no one else to go to for help and she has heard about Jesus and she comes to Him believing He can deliver her daughter from this demon possession!

As you read this story it seems that Jesus wants to get away with His men for a time, to be alone, but here comes this Gentile woman who was in despair. And she is pleading with Jesus over and over again for Him to heal her daughter!

How do you think Jesus is going to respond to her request? I think, as you understand the compassion that Jesus has for people, He is going to reach out and heal her daughter. But that is not what happens, not exactly. Let's read on and see.

VERSES 27-30

Now as she keeps asking Jesus to heal her daughter the disciples want Jesus to send her away, she was annoying, according to Matthew. Also in Matthew we see that Jesus tells her, “**I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**” Matthew 15:24. He is basically saying, “Sorry, but I am here for the Jews and not for Gentiles. You can go now!” Again, why would Jesus say that? I believe He was trying to stretch her faith as we shall see.

And as she continues to cry out to Jesus for help, Jesus basically tells her that you are not to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs or literally puppies! Yes, the Jews called the Gentiles wild dogs, but that is not what Jesus is doing here. A puppy is cute, loveable and that is what He calls this Gentile woman. And I love her response, “**Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs.**” Mark 7:28.

And the Lord honors the faith of this woman and heals her daughter. Interestingly enough, the disciples wanted to get rid of her but Jesus wanted to stretch her faith, and that is what took place. She had a hunger in her heart for God and was humble before Him and God filled her by healing her daughter. What a great combination of qualities to have in your life, a hunger for God and a humility before Him! How hungry are you?

Many speculate why Jesus went to this area, this Gentile region there in Tyre and Sidon? Some say to get away from the crowds. But I don't think that was the reason. I believe Jesus came to this region because He had an appointment to meet this woman and see her faith grow as well as healing her daughter!

I like what Barclay has to say regarding this and how he links it to what Jesus was speaking about regarding clean and unclean. He wrote, "The previous incident shows Jesus wiping out the distinction between clean and unclean foods. Can it be that here, in symbol, we have him wiping out the difference between clean and unclean people? Just as a Jew would never soil his lips with forbidden foods, so he would never soil his life by contact with the unclean Gentile." Something to think about!

VERSES 31-37

Keep in mind that this area called the Decapolis was a confederation of ten cities located on the east side of the Sea of Galilee and this too was a primarily Gentile area. Also, the Decapolis was near the area of the Gadarenes, the place where Jesus freed the demon possessed man, actually two men, and as He did the people asked Jesus to leave, to get out of town for He ruined their pig business.

And one of the young men that was delivered from this demon possession wanted to go with Jesus, but Jesus tells him to go and share with his family and friends what God has done for him. Thus, these multitudes could be the fruit of his ministry, as they bring this deaf man to Him, to Jesus.

Now this man wasn't born deaf but lost his hearing over time, gradually, to the point now his speech has been affected. And Jesus came to him, touched him and heals him. And He heals him in a very different way. He gets this man alone. He put his fingers in his ears. He spat and touched his tongue. And then He looked up to heaven and said, "**Ephphatha**" or "**Be opened.**" And he was healed!

God can heal and He does heal in many different ways, never forget that.

Now there is something here that I also find interesting and that is before Jesus healed this man it says that "**He sighed.**" Why did Jesus sigh before He healed this man?

I believe that the reason He signed was that He was torn over what sin has done to people, how it destroys their lives, both physically and spiritually. Before we reach out and touch people I think we must be broken over their condition which then drives us to reach out to them and see them saved. Also, Jesus looked up to heaven and what a great lesson for us to follow. Not to do the work by the power of our flesh, but the power of God working in us and through us!

And that is how Warren Wiersbe sees it as he wrote, "The 'sigh' was an inward groan, our Lord's compassionate response to the pain and sorrow sin has brought into the world. It was also a prayer to the Father on behalf of the handicapped man. (The same word is used in connection with prayer in Romans 8:23, and the noun in Romans 8:26)."

Once Jesus heals this man he tells him not to tell anyone what He did. But how can you keep silent. Think about it. Once you have been touched by Jesus it is hard to stop talking about Him and what He has done in your life, as it was for this man. And the people were blown away at the love and power of God. There is no one or no place to go except to the Lord, the giver and sustainer of life.

And I like what we are told in Mark 7:37 in regards to Jesus and what the people saw, **“He has done all things well.”** Absolutely, Jesus does not do the work half-heartedly but He gives His all and so should we. As we look at creation, as we look at His redemptive work, ***HE HAS DONE ALL THINGS WELL!***

And listen to what Paul says about us in I Corinthians 10:31, **“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”**

In Colossians 3:17 we are told, **“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”**

Also in Colossians we are told, **“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.”** Colossians 3:23-24.

And in III John 5-6 we are told, **“Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church.”**

We too, like our Lord, need to do all things well to give glory and honor to God and to bless the people, show the love of Jesus to them. ***HE HAS DONE ALL THINGS WELL AND SO SHOULD WE!***

MARK 8**VERSES 1-4**

We see that these multitudes of people who were following Jesus were with Him for three days now. The big problem is that they have no food to eat! Not only that, but there were some 4,000 men, plus women and children, maybe some 10,000 to 15,000 people! Why did they do this? Because they were hungering and thirsting after God, and if you do, He will feed you. You see, God was not angry with them but had compassion on them and He will feed them.

I also see Jesus teaching His men here. I see Jesus wanting His men to put into practice those things that they learned. In other words, Jesus previously fed 15,000 to 20,000 people with just five barley crackers and two small pickled fish, like sardines. Now here they are again, in a situation where people are hungry, no food to eat and what are they going to do?

And as Jesus puts this before His men, they answer Him by saying, “**How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?**” Mark 8:4. Now before we are too harsh on these men, don't we do that? Of course we do. We find ourselves in a situation and we wonder how we are going to get out of it!

We need to keep in mind that Jesus can take the impossible and make it very possible. In fact, He doesn't need much, if we will give Him what we have He can take it and multiply it for His glory. You see, the solution to this massive problem was right before them, **JESUS!** May we keep that in mind as we go through various situations, storms in our own lives!

Now keep in mind that this is not the same story of the feeding of the 5,000 men plus women and children. That feeding was to the Jews but here we see Jesus ministering to Gentiles. And I think that is a good point. Jesus came to set all men free, both Jews and Gentiles!

It is as Paul said in Romans 1:16, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”** And Jesus said in John 3:16, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”**

VERSES 5-10

Jesus wants to know how much food they have. I guess they never thought of giving this to Jesus in the first place, even though they saw how Jesus fed all those people previously with the food that a young lad gave to Him, just five barely crackers and two small pickled fish.

But as Jesus asks His men they give to him seven loaves of bread and a few fish. And with this Jesus fed some 10,000 to 15,000 people! And they too were filled, not stuffed, but just satisfied.

Understand this, Jesus will always satisfy those who come to Him. The demands we have will never outweigh the supply that Jesus has for us. In fact, they had seven baskets filled with leftovers!

And keep in mind that these were not small baskets filled with leftovers. They were not small hand baskets as we saw in the first feeding of the Jewish people back in Matthew 14:13-21. These baskets were like hampers, big enough for a man to fit in.

In fact, Paul was placed in a basket like this in Acts chapter 9 as He was trying to escape from the Jews who were after him. So we see here that some 10,000 to 15,000 people were fed by Jesus!

Also, and I think this is an important lesson for us to learn and apply to our lives. What did the disciples have to do before they could feed the people? They had to go to Jesus and receive from Him and we must do the same before we feed people the Word of God.

Now after this feeding we are told in verse 10 of Mark chapter 8 that Jesus and His men got into a boat and they cross over the Sea of Galilee to the area of Dalmanutha or Magdala as Matthew 15:39 tells us.

This area was located by Tiberias on the western side of the Sea of Galilee, the place that Jesus had his run in with the Pharisees and Scribes over ceremonial cleansing and he put them to silence. So now these religious leaders are waiting for Jesus so they might get Him this time.

VERSES 11-12

Ministry is tough, as we see here. As soon as Jesus gets on the shore the Jewish religious leaders attack Him, not physically but with words. They wanted to dispute who He said He was. They wanted to show He was not the Messiah, that He was not even a man of God. They wanted a sign from heaven and Jesus just sighed. Why? Because His whole life was a sign to them from His birth to the miracles that He did. There were many infallible proofs, they just chose not to look and see.

Today man does the same thing, they try to discredit Jesus, saying there is no sign that He is real, while the signs are all around them if they would only open their eyes and look and see! Now, because they rejected all the signs Jesus did, the only sign they will see is the sign of Jonah, which pointed to the resurrection of Jesus! And Matthew gives us that information.

Now what happens when people reject Jesus? We don't have to guess because Mark tells us!

VERSE 13

They are on the move again, to the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee. And what we see here is that Jesus is not going to stay where He is not welcomed. What a sad picture. These Jewish religious leaders should have known better, they should have known the Scriptures and what they said of the Messiah and recognized that Jesus is the Messiah, but they didn't. They rejected Him and He rejected them!

One writer summed it up like this in regards to what happens to people when they reject Jesus. He wrote,

What a terrible thing it is to have Christ turn his back on you and sail away. But that is ultimately what he does to those who continually refuse his revelation. There comes a time when he gives no more signs, no more help in understanding. But what about those who do follow him?

- R. Kent Hughes, Mark Volume one, p. 189

Let's read on and see how Jesus responds to those who do follow Him, not perfect people, not perfect faith, but a love for the Lord.

VERSES 14-16

As you read this it would seem that they departed so quickly that the disciples forgot to pack food for the journey. Jesus was teaching them spiritual things, they were always thinking on the physical plain, missing the point!

And as they are arguing about who forgot the bread, Jesus says to them, “**Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.**” Mark 8:15. And they still didn’t get it. They still think it is about forgetting to bring bread along for the boat ride!

Keep in mind that leaven was more than just yeast. It was just a pinch of dough that was left over from the previous batch and a little pinch of dough from the old lump could make the whole new lump of dough rise and “*puff up.*” And the idea is that a little presence of sin can corrupt a large portion of a person’s life, the life of their family, the life of their friends, the life of a church! It is deadly!

And what Jesus is saying here is that the doctrines, the teachings, the sin of these religious leaders will affect you if you come in contact with them. Be careful is the warning!

Now what I want you to also see is that Jesus is willing to teach those who may be simple, may be slow to catch on, you and me! He didn’t give up on His men and He doesn’t give up on us. All we must do is seek Him and He will reveal Himself to us!

Jesus is going to teach them the lesson of applying what they learned to their lives, and we will see that as we read on.

VERSES 17-21

Jesus begins to take some inventory of His men. Let’s see, each one has a heart, check. They each have two eyes, check. They each have two ears, check. They each have a brain, check. And yet they still don’t understand? They had all the equipment to understand, they had the information to understand, they just did not apply it to their lives!

And to show them that they should have understood this, Jesus asks them about the feeding of the 5,000 men and the feeding of the 4,000 men with just a few barley crackers and fish. And the question He wants them to answer is simple, ***“How many leftovers did you gather after all these people ate?”*** And they answered the question correctly, they knew exactly what was left over!

They were thinking physical and Jesus was making a spiritual application with this warning of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. You see, Jesus could have provided food for them to eat, they had one loaf with them and for these men, that would have been plenty for Jesus to multiply and for them to be filled. So that was not the issue and Jesus is making sure they understood that.

What does this have to do with us? Have we become so familiar with Jesus that we are not learning from Him anymore? It is possible. We read the Word of God, we see that these stories came to pass. But when it comes to our own lives, we don't learn the lessons that God has for us, we don't apply those things to our lives!

Look at one big issue today and that is discernment in the church. Every bizarre doctrine seems to be embraced as truth. We have worship like it is some kind of rock concert. We have teachers telling us that sin is okay. We have teachers telling us that going to a small church is wrong, you are hurting your family. And on and on it goes and there is no discernment or a lack of discernment. I think Jesus is saying to us as well, **“How is it you do not understand?”** Mark 8:21. We should understand these things and we should be growing, maturing in the Lord!

Thus, as we read God's Word we should do so with the anticipation of the Holy Spirit showing us and helping us to remember the things we need to know and to apply these things to our lives. In other words, ***WE ARE TO PUT INTO ACTION OR PRACTICE WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED!***

For these men, they finally did get it, for Matthew 16:12 tells us, "**Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**" Be open to God and what He is showing you. Learn the faith lessons! And apply those faith lessons to your life.

VERSES 22-26

Jesus did many mighty works in Bethsaida but in Matthew chapter 11 He curses this city because of their unbelief. Jesus said to them and Chorazin, "**Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.**" Matthew 11:21-22.

They saw all these miracles that Jesus did and yet, they refused to repent and get right with God. They rejected Jesus, they refused to believe. How sad!

Now here in these verses we see a group of people bring their blind friend to Jesus to be healed, they believed He could do it. That is love and faith on their part!

First of all, we see that Jesus took this blind man out of Bethsaida. Why did He do that? Maybe it was because of their unbelief! And here we see Jesus spit on this blind man's eyes and then touch them and He asked if he could see. And the man tells Jesus that he can see partially. He said, "**I see men like trees, walking.**"

That tells me that at one time this man could see, he knew what trees looked like. But as you read this don't you think it is kind of strange that this man's sight was not restored completely by Jesus when He touched him?

Was He losing some of His power? Why couldn't He or didn't He heal this blind man completely at first? I believe He was stretching this man's faith. God will take you down the path that you need to go so that you will trust in Him more and more. You see, Jesus did touch this man again and his sight is restored completely, to 20/20 vision.

Now I don't believe this ex-blind man lived in Bethsaida, but he was brought there to meet Jesus. So after he is healed Jesus tells him to go home, don't go to Bethsaida because of the hardness of their hearts. And what a testimony this man had, once blind but now he sees! That is the testimony of all those who have come to Jesus Christ, spiritually blind but now we can see!

VERSES 27-30

Now Jesus and His men travel to the area of Caesarea Philippi, which was located about 25 miles' northeast of the Sea of Galilee and a few miles to the north of Caesarea Philippi was where the snow-covered Mount Hermon was located and it rose to a height of more than 9,000 feet above sea level.

This was Gentile country with many pagan shrines, and the biggest was the Pan god which was located in a cave where at one time the springs would flow which went into the Jordan River.

I think it is very possible that as Jesus and His men walked by this shrine to Pan or Paneion, Jesus posed this question to them, "**Who do men say that I am?**" In other words, "Amongst all these gods, who am I?"

And like today, many have their opinions on who Jesus is. Back then, some were saying He was Elisha, others said that He was John the Baptist, and some said He was the Prophet. But they all missed the point He was making, that He is the Messiah, God incarnate, the fulfillment of what the Old Testament prophets had said. But they were not looking for someone who was going to free them from their sins, but to deliver them from Roman bondage, persecution!

And then Jesus makes this question personal. He asks them, “**But who do you say that I am?**” In other words, Jesus is saying, “I don’t care what all these others think of Me, what are you saying about Me, who am I to you?”

And Peter said, “**You are the Christ!**” Now Peter did not come to that conclusion on his own, but the Father revealed this to him and the same is true in our lives if we would only respond to what He is showing us. Matthew fills in some of those details for us.

That is the most important question you can answer, “*Who is Jesus?*” You see, if you don’t get this right, you are lost in your sins and you will enter eternity apart from Christ. Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the World! God incarnate!

Now keep in mind that the lesson is not over. They needed to understand that He is the Messiah before they hear the next point. Listen to what Jesus tells them next.

VERSES 31-32a

We have seen that Jesus is the Messiah and now He tells His men that He is going to suffer many things, He is going to be rejected by the Jewish religious leaders, He is going to be killed and three days later He will rise from the dead! That is the part they missed, that He is going to be raised from the dead!

We need to be careful because we do the same, we have what we might call selective hearing when it comes to the things of God. We need to listen to what God has said and not listen to what others are saying, what the Devil is saying. God's Word is our standard to live by and it is God's Word to us, never forget that!

Now we also need to keep in mind that the cross, this sacrifice was what the Messiah was to do and it was spoken of in the Scriptures. In Isaiah 53:3-12 we are told, **“He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked - But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide”**

the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.”

You see, they are thinking that the kingdom was going to be established, but before the kingdom could be established there had to be the forgiveness of sins so that they could live in the kingdom with the King, with Jesus. And thus, the cross before the crown!

One writer put it like this, “A suffering Messiah! Unthinkable! The Messiah was a symbol of strength, not weakness.” (Wessel)

And Barclay made these comments, “Sometimes the Messiah was thought of as a king of David’s line, but more often he was thought of as a great, super-human figure crashing into history to remake the world and in the end to vindicate God’s people . . . The Messiah will be the most destructive conqueror in history, smashing his enemies into utter extinction.”

And now Peter, who had this revelation from God about Jesus, is going to speak forth and he is looking at the establishment of the kingdom, not the death of the Messiah! And it is amazing how clearly we can hear from God one minute and then, because we allow our own wisdom to get in the way, we are listening to the Devil! Let’s read on and see what transpires with Peter here.

VERSES 32b-33

Now please understand that Peter approached Jesus in love. He loved the Lord so much that when He spoke of His death Peter could not take it. And thus, he spoke out of his heart but his heart was wicked and he was used by the Devil. You see, he was not demon possessed but we can listen to the voice of Satan, as Peter did here, thinking we are speaking for God, and we are not.

Then how do we know that what we are saying is of God or not? Simple, is it in accordance with the Word of God, if it is not, then it is not of God! Peter's words were contrary to what Jesus was just saying and again, not of God and then it must be of Satan!

And notice what Peter says to the Lord, ***“No Lord, that is not the way we have it planed out, don't talk so foolishly! The Kingdom is going to be established. I will sit on your right side and one of these others on your left! We have big plans for you Lord!”***

Now I am paraphrasing of course but that is basically what Peter was saying. And please understand this, you can't tell Jesus ***“No!”*** and then call Him ***“Lord!”*** Those are opposing views.

And what Jesus said of Peter must have been shocking, not only to Peter but to the other men, ***“Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”***

Why would Jesus say that of Peter? Because Satan's plan is to keep people from the cross because that is the only thing that can save them. If Jesus never went to the cross, we would still be in our sins. That was Peter's plan! But Jesus came to do the will of the Father, to go to the cross and pay in full the penalty for our sins. Praise God for that love and that finished work!

VERSE 34

Think about this for a minute. Jesus just spoke of His death and resurrection and as much as that blew their mind, now Jesus is telling them that to be a disciple of His, you must follow in His footsteps. It is the cost of discipleship.

And the cost of discipleship is this. First of all, Jesus says that if we want to be a disciple of His we must deny ourselves. In other words, you must deny a life of self-centeredness. It is opposite of what the world is saying. They want us to focus on ourselves. The Lord wants us to focus on Him and others!

Warren Wiersbe put it like this, “Denying self is not the same as self-denial. We practice self-denial when, for a good purpose, we occasionally give up things or activities. But we deny self when we surrender ourselves to Christ and determine to obey His will.”

Next, Jesus speaks of taking up the cross if we want to be a disciple of His. Now, today, in the twenty-first century, we have made the cross artwork, a piece of jewelry. But please understand, in Jesus’ day, the cross spoke of death.

In other words, you must put to death those things that hinder your relationship with Him, identify with His suffering and death. One writer put it like this, “Cross bearing does not refer to some irritation in life. Rather, it involves the way of the cross. The picture is of a man, already condemned, required to carry his cross on the way to the place of execution, as Jesus was required to do.” (Wessel)

And lastly, if you want to be a disciple of Jesus you must willingly and obediently follow after Him. It is a life of surrender and sacrifice but that is the best place for us to be. You see, there is always death before glory, even in this life.

VERSES 35-38

What in the world is Jesus talking about? If you want to save your life you end up losing it and if you lose your life you save it, what does that mean? That seems like a paradox, but it isn't.

If you live to satisfy self, the flesh, you will die apart from Christ. If you die to this life now, you will enter into life with Christ for eternity! It is as Paul said in Romans 8:16-18, "**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.**" In other words, it is the cost of being a disciple of Jesus!

Then Jesus talks about gaining the whole world and losing your soul. This is an argument from reason. If this world is only temporary, and no matter what possessions you have accumulated in this life, you can't take it with you, you can't even profit even if you were able to gain the whole world, because in the end you will be condemned for eternity in the Lake of Fire!

You will never see a U-Haul following a hearse because you can't take it with you! Although someone posted a picture on Facebook with a U-Haul behind a hearse, but I think you know what I mean.

And think about it. Even if you could, what good would it be if you were the richest man in Hell? It is as Psalm 49:16-20 says, **“Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased; For when he dies he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him. Though while he lives he blesses himself (For men will praise you when you do well for yourself), He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. A man who is in honor, yet does not understand, is like the beasts that perish.”** How true that is.

And the bottom line is this, what Jesus said in verse 38. It is your choice how you will stand before God, in Christ or apart from Him. In Christ you will stand perfect because the righteousness of Christ has been imputed into your life by faith. You will be seen as white as snow. You will enter into everlasting life with Him.

But, outside of Christ you will stand in your own righteousness, which are like filthy rags, and you will enter into eternity apart from Him, you will endure eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire!

Let me show you what I mean about a life apart from Christ and the destination of that person. We are told,

The most famous living author of the 1930s was William Somerset Maugham, “Willie.” He was an accomplished novelist, playwright, and short story writer. His novel *Of Human Bondage* is a classic. His play *The Constant Wife* has gone through thousands of stagings. He was a man who lived for his own refined tastes, his comfort, and his sexual perversions. In 1965, at the age of ninety-one, he was still a fabulously rich man, although he had not written a word in years. He still received over three hundred fan letters a week.

What had life brought W. Somerset Maugham? *The London Times* carried this excerpt by his nephew, Robin Maugham:

I looked round the drawing room at the immensely valuable furniture and pictures and objects that Willie's success had enabled him to acquire. I remembered that the villa itself, and the wonderful garden I could see through the windows – a fabulous setting on the edge of the Mediterranean – were worth £600,000.

Willie had 11 servants, including his cook, Annette, who was the envy of all the other millionaires on the Riviera. He dined off silver plates, waited on by Marius, his butler, and Henri, his footman. But it no longer meant anything to him.

The following afternoon I found Willie reclining on a sofa, peering through his spectacles at a Bible, which had very large print. He looked horribly wizened [shriveled] and his face was grim.

“I've been reading the Bible you gave me . . . And I've come across the quotation, ‘What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?’ I must tell you, my dear Robin, that the text used to hang opposite my bed when I was a child . . . Of course, it's all a lot of bunk. But the thought is quite interesting all the same.”

Robin Maugham goes on to describe an empty, bitter old man who repeatedly fell into shrieking terrors, crying, “Go away! I'm not ready . . . I'm not dead yet . . . I'm not dead yet, I tell you . . .”

He was a man who gained the whole world and lost his own soul, a “keeper” who lost. On the other hand, there are “losers” who are the ultimate keepers.

- R. Kent Hughes, Mark Volume one, pp. 202-203

Make no mistake about it, there is the choice we must make in this life. Paul said in Romans 10:8-10, **“But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For ‘whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”**

Romans 10:8-13.

That is a promise of God! As I said, here is the application, to make Jesus part of your life or not. The choice is yours. One leads to death the other to life. It seems so easy, and yet we let the things of this world lead us down the wrong path. Come to Jesus, He loves you so and wants what is best for your life. That is how you are to apply God’s Word and you will never be the same again if you do! And I will close with this. We are told,

One hundred and eighty years after the death of Charlemagne, in about the year 1000, officials of the Emperor Otho opened the great king’s tomb, where they found an amazing sight apart from the treasures. What they saw was this: the skeletal remains of the king seated on a throne, the crown still upon his skull, a copy of the Gospels lying in his lap with his bony finger resting on this text: “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”

- R. Kent Hughes, Mark Volume one, pp. 204

That is something that each one of us must decide for ourselves, but for me, I have decided to follow Jesus and there is no turning back!