

THE VERDICT IS IN

Mark 7:1–8:30

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Thus far, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus has only been called “Son of God” by the demons. No one else except Him and the demons know His identity. Persons see Him as a spectacular figure, a prophet even. The religious opposition sees Him as a Son of the devil. But it is the Lord’s will that we might come to understand the verdict of heaven upon Jesus, the verdict which Peter pronounces in the last paragraph of our Scripture for today: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Moving to that verdict is not always an easy thing. It’s froth with many thoughts. It’s presented with many obstacles. We will see some of those as we move through chapter 7 and 8 today.

Last time, we looked at some of the pressures that Jesus allows some of his disciples to have. Pressures that, if they’re to continue with Him, they must learn to come to grips with. The pressure of unbelief, of physical fatigue, of unpromising political situations. Pressures, pressures on disciples. As we once more look at the Word today we see now, not so much the pressures on the disciples, but some of the weaknesses in the disciples which precede their great summit of faith. I want us to look very carefully at those weaknesses today, which are in the disciples’ lives. Real spiritual growth occurs as we recognize where we are weak, where work needs to be done. Those weaknesses that we have should not deter us from the real moments of tremendous growth.

So if there are weaknesses in your life today and you feel unwanted and unacceptable to God, then I hope that by the time we’re through today you will be able to say, “With all that I am, and

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God knowing all that I am, it is still possible for me to have a deep and abiding relationship with God.”

What are the weaknesses of the disciples? Let me note three of them in particular as we move through the Scripture today.

I. One weakness the disciples have is dullness.

It really comes in relation to the whole section, verses 1–23, where Jesus is talking about tradition and where His teaching is coming; in direct contrast with the teaching of the Pharisees and the hypocrites. Jesus is trying to teach His disciples. He’s trying to teach the Church. He’s trying to teach us that true religion is a heart relationship with God, first and foremost. What religious people have frequently defined as spiritual behavior is nothing more than an exterior gloss. Religious externalism. Jesus, through the dialogue with the Pharisees and through an illustration which He gives in verse 14 and the following verses regarding “what is outward does not defile a man but what is inward,” is seeking to bring the disciples through to a whole breakaway from the traditionalism they’ve grown up in. He says to them, in fact—when they have not understood the parable which He has given—He indicates to them in verse 18, “Are you so dull?” (NIV).

The disciples had a problem of learning ...of learning what spiritual relationship is really all about. Incredible as it may seem, they had this problem even after Jesus gave the teaching in Mark 7. Even though they knew that Jesus was not hung up on externals, however, in their own discipleship they still had some watermarks to pass through where they became hung up on externals.

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Isn't it fascinating to note how we know clearly what Jesus' teaching is and yet things, which have been so deeply embedded in us from the past, linger on—even after we have become Christians—and seek to paralyze the vitality of our walk?

In Acts 10, we see Peter in a vision, which is repeated three times for him, of a sheet coming down from heaven loaded with all manner of unclean food—pigs and evidently reptiles and all sorts of things—that Peter, the kosher person, would not eat. The Lord has to take it through a replay, like an instant replay. He has to run through the vision three times in order for Peter to get the message, which, long before, Jesus had taught in Mark 7, that it's not what's outside of a person that defiles, it's what's inside. It has to be repeated again for Peter in Galatians 2, where in Antioch he behaved insincerely, having eaten baloney and ham sandwiches with Gentile believers, there he gets under the pressure of religious externalists who were also called Christians, and momentarily leaves their company to pick up his dietary habits again. And he must be withstood by Paul.

Pharisaism is not simply something that happened two thousand years ago with a small religious sect in Palestine composed of about six thousand members. Pharisaism is an enduring part of the human experience. Wherever we see God vitally at work in spiritual life, we also see the encroachment of the enemy trying to turn us to a super-spirituality or an externalism which is like that of the Pharisees. We see—don't we?—as Jesus works with the disciples, that He is trying to get them to come out of the tradition of Pharisaism.

There are some qualities of Pharisaism in Mark 7:1–23 that I'd like for us to see. Then we'll know what to avoid.

A. One quality of Pharisaism is: it asks the wrong questions. It harbors its attention on the things which are really peripheral and minor instead of the major questions of life. We are told in verse

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1 that the Pharisees gathered together to ask Jesus the question, “Why do Your disciples eat with unwashed hands?” The corresponding passage in Matthew 15 notes that these same Pharisees and scribes had come all the way from Jerusalem to ask Jesus the question. The Pharisees avoided contact with the Samaritans and they had taken the longer route around the eastern end of the Jordan. They had walked 100 miles. What was the question burning in their minds as they walked? Was it some great question regarding His identify? Was it some question like, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Or, “What is the greatest commandment?” If you walked 100 miles to ask a person a question I would say you had to be fairly strongly motivated and the question would have to be fairly central to issues of life. The Pharisees, however, upon approaching Jesus, came out with the number one theological concern of the day, “Why do Your disciples eat with unwashed hands?”

Only to hear the question is to realize how far the religious tradition had strayed from reality. It is so easy to become bogged down with side questions when we need instead to be constantly pointing to the real motivations that Jesus asked us as His disciples to turn toward. Love for God and love for the brethren supersede any other dominating question.

The Pharisees were all hung up evidently because they heard about the feeding of the five thousand men plus women and children, making the crowd anywhere from ten to fifteen thousand people. That whole horde of people had evidently eaten without going through the ceremonial cleansing. It isn't the idea of washing the hands as something hygienic. That wasn't the purpose. The idea was that it was something spiritual. It was a certain way to wash your hands. You didn't just put them in the tap water and wash them. The Pharisees had a way they washed their hands. If you washed the inside of your hands and got them clean, when it came in contact with the dirty side of the other hand it became unclean again. So you kind of had to do it

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in sequence. Here, this terrible sacrilegious act had occurred in the feeding of the five thousand—all these people had eaten without washing their hands. It makes no difference if there was a miracle or not. The important thing was they had not washed their hands.

So the peripheral questions are raised.

B. Another mark of Pharisaism which should be noted is that Pharisaism is a kind of incipient religious tradition that tends to put people down. It puts people down. For evidence of this, I look at verse 14 and compare it with verse 1. In verse 1, “The Pharisees...had come from Jerusalem” and verse 14, “again Jesus called the crowd to him” (NIV). In other words, the implication is, when the Pharisees came, the people receded into the background. As someone said, when the theological heavyweights came from Jerusalem, the common people receded into the background. When Jesus got done with them, He had to collect the people again. Because what is the tradition of Pharisaism? It’s to, in a sense, say, “We’re better. We know more. We have a greater understanding into the insights of God. We’ll hold the complicated discussion and let you in on the tidbits later.” Jesus’ reaction to Pharisaism was: not putting people down but instead putting people together and having a high regard for the individual and his worth regardless whether he had been to the best schools or the worst schools or had a literate knowledge of the Scripture or had no knowledge of the Scripture. Religious traditionalism which puts people down is not in the mold of Jesus.

C. Another quality of Pharisaism as a religious tradition is: This kind of Pharisaism wears a mask, it depends upon a mask. In fact, the very meaning of the word “hypocrite” is a person who wears a mask. The word “hypocrite” was first used for actors on the Greek stage. The reason why it was used for them is they would wear a mask—much like we do on Halloween—to portray the character they were playing. They would stick a large megaphone through the mask

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so that the people sitting around in the open amphitheater could hear what the guy was saying.

Obviously, everybody knew that he was just playing a part.

The hypocrite was someone who was just playing a role, wearing a mask.

You say, there is no such thing as a person who never puts on a mask. All of us put on masks at various times. I've asked a number of people today, "How are you?" All of them have dutifully said, "Very good." And I responded the same thing even though I feel like I'm coming down with the flu. We all do this.

What is the difference, therefore, between a Pharisee who's wearing a mask and a person who is honestly wearing a mask? The trouble with a Pharisee was that he never knew that he had the mask on. He thought the mask was for real. He could see the masks on everybody else, but he couldn't see the mask on himself. It's really this spirit of hypocrisy which Jesus is attempting to correct, the spirit which looks upon others and makes assessments that they are wearing the mask instead of seeking for a heart relationship with God, which is based upon truth and well-being.

We see the masks which are being worn.

It isn't just religious people who wear a mask. I sometimes think we overwork the word "hypocrite" in the sense of people who put on a pious air. But there are also many people who say, for example, "I will never become a part of the church because I don't want to be in the company of all of those hypocrites. I'm going to be honest. I'm not going to be a hypocrite." It reminds me of what would have happened in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican if the publican would have gone to the place of prayer and the Pharisee was over there saying, "Lord, I thank You I'm not like other men," and all this kind of stuff. And the publican comes along and says, "Oh, God, I thank you I'm not like that self-righteous Pharisee, that self-righteous prig. I'm

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glad I'm an old nasty sinner, and I'm proud of my honesty and the fact that I am what I am.”

That's just another way of looking at self-righteous Pharisaism.

Jesus comes to strip us of that and to help us lay down our masks so that we can be real, as real in our home as outside our home. As real in the body of believers, in church, as we are outside the body of believers. He had that against Pharisaism. The Pharisees were wearing the mask and probably never realized it.

D. There is another quality of Pharisaism, which the Lord objects to strenuously. The disciples' dullness in not understanding it is really dealt with by the Lord. The other element in Pharisaism is the surface view of sin which was held by the Pharisees. The Pharisees thought they had a very serious view of sin. In fact, I believe there were over six hundred and thirteen codified regulations affecting daily patterns of living, which the Pharisees had codified and became oral law which were used in addition to the Scriptures. So one was fairly well restricted and they thought they had spirituality really worked out.

But Jesus defines their level of spirituality as only surface, because it never went beyond the outer man—what he looked like, what he did, where he went. It did not look into the heart. Jesus says, “Sin is far more than something that can be corrected through a job of ritualistic plastic surgery, in terms of religious methodology.” Sin in the human life is as if a person, when he is opened up, is a can of worms. He can't come to grips with his sin by dealing with it by himself. It's impossible for any of us in this room to conquer our sin by attempting to deal with it ourselves. You can't do it. You'll be frustrated, defeated and broken every time. Even in spite of the fact that there is much goodness represented in each of our lives, there is also—lurking in the human psyche—that which is very dark and dangerous and foreboding. It is there. It has come from Satan, who has initiated his serum, his venom in the world and we are part and parcel of

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what he has done. If we are to come to grips with it, we need a more serious view of sin than the Pharisees had that said by doing something on the outer man, you can plaster him up and make him ok with God.

Not so, said Jesus. For as He looks into the heart of man, He discovers tremendous potential for evil. Jesus notes in verses 21 and 22 some twelve specific categories of sin. The language in which the Maker writes the first six categories are in the plural: evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, coveting. The last six are in the singular: wickedness, deceit, licentiousness (the practice of any kind of sexual behavior according to one's desire), envy (jealousy), slander (attacking another person's character), pride, foolishness (making sin a joke, taking something which is definitely sinful and making fun of it). Jesus says, "All these evils come from inside" (Mark 7:23, NIV). Notice Jesus not only describes sin as physical acts but also occurring in the spiritual realm. Things like envy and slander and pride, which are not so evident as thefts, fornications, and adulteries.

All of this, of course, comes from the state of being in sin. Jesus comes to grips with our sin by dying on the cross, by taking the punishment that we would have born. When we receive Jesus Christ into our lives, we then are treated by God no longer as sinners but as sons. There's a difference in God's attitude toward us as we move into Jesus Christ, beyond the surface view of sin.

Nowhere perhaps is the surface view of sin more evident than in some of the rituals and traditions that some persons try to put upon other people. I think, for a simple example, of playing ball, or balls that you use in association with sports activities. Some have been laden with good connotations and some laden with bad connotations. Like, for example, we take a pigskin thing that's inflatable and it's round and we bounce it along the floor and throw it though

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a hoop. In most places that's ok. Or we take an oblong object and we inflate it, it's made of pigskin also, and we kick it down the field. And that's ok. Or we may take a little hollow vacuum ball and hit it across a net with a racket and that's ok. Or a little wooden ball with a mallet and hit it through a wicket and that's ok. But if we take a smaller wooden ball and hit it with a stick across a green felt substance that becomes wrong. Or a wooden ball with three holes and roll it down a wooden floor... that becomes wrong. There are all kinds of devious ways to impose traditions rather than asking what the heart of things really consists of, where a person's attitudes are.

In the Scriptures, we see that the Early Church had some traditions which were good. There is such a thing as good traditions, when they're in line with the Scripture. I like the tradition of worship...where we gather together. We always sing, we always pray, we always hear the Word of God. That's a tradition we should cling to, because it's through the tradition that we know God in deeper ways. There is richness in the tradition.

But there are traditions that are simply manmade and concocted and which have to be judged by the Word of God. We as believers are called upon to recognize our—often—dullness in understanding the sharpness of what spirituality really consists of—a heartfelt relationship with God, accompanied by love for the brethren.

So that's one failing of the disciples here, as they move along in their journey to call Jesus Christ Lord.

II. Another failing of the disciples, which can be seen in chapter 7, is the word I would choose to call “callousness.”

It's in the story of the Syrophenician woman who comes to Jesus. Jesus has left the region of Galilee—probably for one good reason: because of Herod's persecuting activities that were a

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potential threat to His life—so He moves out of the territory of Herod of Galilee and goes up north, to the coast of the Mediterranean to the region of Tyre and Sidon, Gentile cities. The Gospel of Matthew—Matthew 15—shows us some additional insights into the text which help us to further appreciate the callousness of the disciples on this occasion. What Jesus decides to do on this occasion is role-play with the woman. He decides to role-play, as if He were a disciple, so that when the woman comes to Him—Matthew 15—and says her daughter is greatly possessed or greatly distressed by a demon and all the traits of obvious demon possession are manifest, including physical violence, speech violence, the debilitation of one's personality. All these things are going on.

She comes to Jesus and, unlike any response we ever see Jesus make in his life, He sits there and absolutely pays no attention to her. He does not say a word to her, and studies how the disciples are going to cope with the situation. Seeing that He's not paying any attention to her, she works through the lower echelon of command and begins pleading with the disciples. Their response to the woman is a callous response. They come to the Lord and say, "Send her away." No kind of thing like, "Lady, we've just been on a trip where the Lord gave us authority to cast out demons and maybe we can come to your house and see what's wrong with your daughter, maybe we can help." At least if we can't help her spiritually, maybe we can help you get the house in order and see that your physical needs are taken care of, or maybe we can help you in some way.

But no, the disciples, in their very prejudiced condition, just wanted to help people that they knew and were of their own kind. They weren't ready to help this woman at all. They were ready to sit there and ignore her. They were having a good time taking a nap or resting. After all, Jesus had been promising them a rest for a long time and now they've gotten to where they could rest. And who's this woman to come barging in on their peace?

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There's a tremendous moral here that we as Christians need to learn. The call of God on our lives to help people and to get involved in the work of the church, the work of personal ministry of one kind or another, is never a convenient thing. It's always easier to say, "I'm busy. I've got my TV programs due right now. Or I've got the book that I checked out from the library one more day and I've got to get it done. Or my shopping's coming up and how can I take care of that need. It's an intrusion on my time. Send them away, Lord."

So Jesus has to do something with this callousness, so He continues to role-play with the woman. He says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." That's the prejudice of the disciples. They really believed that. They were narrow in their perspective. Jesus had said earlier in His ministry, "I'm the light of the world." So He's not making a statement here that He is prejudiced. Something else is involved.

She picks that up. She's not going to be turned down. Evidently she perhaps sees the twinkle in the Lord's eye as He says that. She catches the wink in His eye, which the disciples didn't. She keeps on coming at Him. He says, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs" (Mark 8:27, NIV). Jesus, on this occasion, could have used two words for dogs. He was probably speaking to the woman in Greek. One word for "dog" is a kind of wild wolf pack that kind of runs around in the street and raids the garbage and bites people. Another kind of word for dog is "little doggie," like a poodle or dachshund or something like this, that you keep around the house. You know how kids are with these. They grab things off the table and give it to the dog (mine do!). So Jesus uses this softer word because after all the children would give the bread crumbs to the dogs.

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Whereupon she replies—she states the truth, “True, you shouldn’t give the children’s bread to the dogs, but the dogs do get the crumbs.” He says, “Woman, great is your faith. Go your way in peace. Your daughter is made well.”

Sometimes, when you read words, they appear very hard and cold. But when you hear people say things, like I can to my best friend, “Stupid idiot!” If that appeared in print, it would look very bad, but my friend knows I’m really calling him one of my more endearing terms. It’s a sign that I know him well enough to address him that way. So it’s really an affectionate term.

Jesus does that here with the woman and repudiates the callousness of His disciples. He goes on from there; the next healing incident is of a man who has an impediment of speech. He’s not completely mute, but he does have an impediment of speech and he can’t hear. Jesus deals with him differently than any other person. He doesn’t just have a pattern program of approach. Each person is an individual. He puts His fingers in his ears. He spits on His fingers and touches his tongue and the man hears.

As great as this miracle is, one must come face up with the stress in the Gospel of Mark, that there are many miracles of speaking and hearing that the Lord wanted to do with people who were 100 percent well physically in their hearing and their speaking capacity. But there were miracles of speaking and hearing He could not accomplish, so that He cries out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Mark 4:9).

Wherever Jesus goes, He finds it almost easier to perform the physical miracles, because His own working on the spiritual life is thwarted by our unwillingness to open our ears in the inner man and our mouth to speak forth His praise.

“He has done everything well,” the crowd said of Jesus (Mark 8:37, NIV). The word “well” here is fascinating. It’s been used once previously in the text for today; here Jesus said to the

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Pharisees, “Well do you neglect the commandment.” “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God” (7:9, NIV). In other words, you neglect the commandment in a very artistic way. And the way that they did it, of course, was through the term “korban” where, if their parents needed some care and they didn’t want to give it to them in their old age, they’d simply say, “I’ve already given all my assets to God and I can’t give any to you.” Actually, in fact, they hadn’t. It was kind of a catch phrase they used in order to get away from their parental responsibilities of the fourth commandment, “Honor your father and mother.”

So Jesus had used the word “well” sarcastically with the Pharisees. Now it’s used in reference to Jesus, “You do all things well.” When you put something together, it’s artistic, it’s whole, nobody has quite the master’s touch.

III. A third characteristic of the disciples which shows their failing: not only their dullness and their callousness, but their faithlessness.

It really stands out in 8:4. His disciples answered Him this is in respect to the crowd who is with Jesus, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?” (NIV). In chapter 6, Jesus had fed the five thousand men, plus women and children. What’s with the disciples not having faith here? What we don’t realize is that probably about six months of time had intervened between chapter 6 and chapter 7. The first feeding had taken place around the Passover time. People had sat down on the green grass. Now they’re sitting down on the ground. It’s a number of months later. So the disciples have given their characteristic quality, they have forgotten the previous thing Jesus did. They’ve gotten into a new jam and forgotten He had the power to deal with it. Faithlessness.

This crowd had been with Jesus for three days. What credit to the crowd! If there was ever a crowd that deserves the accolade “Best Crowd in Human History,” it ought to be this group.

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They went for three days without food, listening to the teaching ministry of Jesus. It doesn't even mention that there were miracles associated with that meeting. Simply that He was teaching.

There was such a capacity within their heart to hear what He was saying that they were staying with Him, even though they had not had anything to eat. The disciples are faithless on the occasion.

Dr. V. Raymond Edmund, who for twenty-five years was president of Wheaton College, told this story. One day, a student came to him with a very dejected look. He didn't even look up when he came into the office. He just walked in and took a chair. He shoved a blue piece of paper over the desk, face down, to Dr. Edmund. Dr. Edmund, looking at the piece of paper, knew immediately what it was. It was a little statement from the business office stating that a bill was due and, of course, if you don't pay the bill, it's the end. This student went on to tell his story, that he'd worked very hard. He'd saved every bit he could and, five days ago, he'd gotten a notice that there was twenty-nine dollars and seventy-five cents due on his bill. That was a number of years ago. Probably that would be equivalent to much more today. He said, "Today's the day it's due. I do not have it." Dr. Edmund looked at him and said, "I want you to write down an equation." The student, not exactly knowing what was involved, took the blue slip back as Dr. Edmund dictated. He said, "First of all, how much money do you have?" "Seventy-five cents." Dr. Edmund said, "I want you to write this, "Seventy-five cents to twenty-nine dollars and seventy-five cents is as five loaves and two fishes to five thousand people, plus women and children." I share that with you because I know there are many students here. God has situations in our life where He calls upon us to simply trust Him. And to have faith, even though we do not see the materials at hand whereby He's going to supply our need.

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Fortunately, the story of the student had a happy ending and he was able to make it through school. I've seen occasions where it was God's will maybe for a student to drop out, the money didn't come in, and God had another direction. Either way, faithfulness, a trust in God, produces the right result.

The experience of the Pharisees in this occasion is exactly the opposite. They come back at Jesus, in verse 11, and seek a sign from heaven from Him. They're not satisfied with everyday, ordinary miracles. They would like something real spectacular—like the one-minute TV commercial during the Super Bowl—from heaven, declaring that God is God and all the earth should repent; yet God calls us to faith, not on the basis of some phenomenal sight event, but on the basis of our coming to Him in personal relationship. He won't violate our freedom of will by not allowing us the option to say "no" to Him. He gives us the evidence which will cause us to say "yes", but which requires, nevertheless, a step of faith toward Him to realize His goodness and His life.

The disciples obviously are bothered, because Jesus says to them, "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod" (Mark 8:15, NIV). They think they've forgotten to take bread. But Jesus, as He often does, speaks in terms that the disciples don't at first glance understand and He's saying to all disciples of all ages, "Don't live life like the traditionalists who are all hung-up on routine and rituals. And don't, on the other hand, live life for the power grabbing that is done with the Herodians who live for what can be seen, who live for the physical."

Then Jesus heals the man at Bethsaida, again an unusual healing in terms of method. The man is healed gradually. Jesus accommodates His great power to the limitedness of the man's faith and the healing is received. It's a fitting healing, coming before the confession of the disciples' faith in Him. Jesus' purpose is, as someone has put it, "to skin our eyes." He's come into our life so

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we can really see. So when He gives sight, on the one hand, to a blind man physically, in the next paragraph, we see sight coming to the disciples. Through all their dullness and callousness and even through their faithlessness, yet the Lord has been winning and working with them to bring them to a point where they could make a great affirmation.

So they come to Caesarea Philippi, 25 miles north of Bethsaida, 25 miles out of Galilee.

Caesarea Philippi is a beautiful city at the base of Mount Hermon, built by Herod Phillip; a city which was named after Caesar. When the disciples had first begun to follow Jesus, this is what they wanted. They wanted Jesus to have an earthly capital. In fact, in John 1, when the disciples first saw Jesus, they said, “We’ve found the Messiah!” Why did they say that? Jesus had seen Nathaniel sitting under a fig tree and they thought anyone with that power of prevision must be something else! He must be the Messiah we’re looking for. So they called Him Messiah. The only problem was: their definition of Messiah was different from Jesus’ definition of Messiah. So for two years He’d been working to give them a redefinition.

Their earlier basis for calling Him Messiah was, “At last, we have the super-politician, the political ruler to emerge.” Now Jesus is saying, “You’ve been with Me for two years. You’ve seen that we lost the campaign in Galilee. We’re out of the territory and we can’t go there because of Herod. We’re now away from the emotional throngs. We’re away from the miracles of healing. We’re just here—you and Me. We’re in this Gentile city, a capital. We’re here, and I want to know now, who do you say that I am? I don’t want to know from you, who do you say I am in the hour of great emotional tide, when everybody else has their conflicting opinions? I don’t want to know from you who you say that I am after you’ve seen me do one of the greatest miracles. I want to hear from you, Who do you say that I am? I want to hear the answer when you’ve had the chance to deliberate on it, when you’ve had the chance to think it out, when

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you've had the chance to make a commitment that is stronger than feeling, stronger than an emotional tide, stronger than any one particular act. I want you to make a commitment of faith to Me that will be a commitment for life which nothing else will take away, which no circumstance can pluck out of your grasp. I want to know who you say that I am."

In that moment of solace and loneliness and exile at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus points to the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" He knew who the crowds thought He was. But the disciples had to restate it. The crowds thought He was great, wonderful. But do you believe something about Jesus that is bigger than, "He was a great religious speaker, a great teacher." Jesus calls His disciples to believe that He is the Messiah, the anointed one, the Son of God. Having believed that, then Jesus can go on to advise the disciples, "Don't tell anyone that you've made the confession." The crowds still thought of Him as the political Messiah. If the disciples went through Galilee saying, "He's the Messiah. He said so Himself." It would arouse the wrong expectations. It was not the time. He silences them.

Another little sterling quality of the written Gospel comes out here. In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 16, when Peter confesses "Thou art the Christ!", Jesus turns and says to him, "Blessed are you Simon Peter. Flesh and blood hasn't revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven. You are given the keys to the kingdom." Fantastic accolade goes to Peter when he makes the confession. In Mark, the instance is completely missing. No words to Peter in the Gospel of Mark. Why? I think it's because, behind the Gospel of Mark stands the preaching of Peter—and Mark, his disciple. The incidents in the Gospels when Peter would look good, Peter doesn't, in his testimony, point out the things that made him look good. He doesn't say, "The Lord said to me, 'You have the keys'." He simply ignores the situation. Just as Mark 6, when they're in the storm at sea and Peter walks on the water, you won't find it in the Gospel of Mark. Mark had

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learned that hard lesson of all disciples, the lesson of humility and letting go, and letting the people sing your praises rather than singing them yourself.

What should we say about this whole passage of Scripture as we review it before our eyes? Jesus is trying to get us to look at the fundamental issues of life, to the matters of the heart. In light of the Patricia Hearst kidnapping this week, it's really amazing to look at the feedings of the crowd in the Gospels. What a difference! People who are in order, people who are sitting on the ground, people who are hungrier for an inner work of renewal than an outward work of physical need being met. I don't want to downplay physical needs because they're certainly in the world. But Jesus could have made bread every day. He could have made the Hearst fortune look sick! He could have provided enough bread to last Galilee until this very moment. But He chooses not to. He chooses, instead, to do something far more radical and fundamental. He chooses to reach into the heart, to cause people to start acting and behaving as children of God, who love God, who know what it is to have order in life and to have a deep love for one another, so that, when people are hurting, then they can give help and share their bread.

Jesus' purpose is not to make bread for us, but to change our heart so that we can share bread with others. He comes to change the inner man. That's why the question arises, "Who do you say that I am?" It is so important. Because once we say that, once we come to the experience of a new birth by confessing Him as the anointed one of God, we are ushered into a whole new relationship, the old life is changed, the values which are given are new values and we become sons and daughters of God.

Closing Prayer

Again, Father, it has been our joy to have looked at the Scriptures which provide us life. And, in looking at the Scriptures today, we have seen so much of ourselves. I see times, Lord, when I am

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pompous as the Pharisees, callous as the disciples or faithless. I think all of us in this room, Lord, have had that experience. But through it all, through the inadequacies of our life, You yet give us the golden opportunity to be related to You. To say, with faith, “Thou art the Christ.” We thank You, Lord, for the many in this room who have arrived at that commitment and for whom today’s Scripture has been more than theory but a living reality. Lord, we pray that the kind of things You were teaching the disciples in those years will be learned well by us also. That we too, Lord, might guard ourselves from a feeling that we’re superior in spirituality. Keep us honest, Lord, and humble before You, so that the Pharisaism that breeds deep in all of our hearts would be held at bay by Your righteous life, that the callousness, whereby we just push people off and don’t let our lives be invaded with need, will be corrected. That You’ll give us faith, faith to realize that wherever You have just a little you make it go an awfully long way.