

TRADITION OUTSIDE GALILEE MINISTRY
How To Study The Bible
Part 8
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We've been traveling through the gospel of Mark. We're actually only going to take the first part of the gospel of Mark for this series. The reason for doing that is I hope by walking us through about Mark 9 by that time you would have had enough good study techniques in the gospel of Mark you could carry it the rest of the way on your own. We're coming to the hinge moment in the gospel of Mark and that's where we'll end tonight – the hinge moment of 8:27-8:30.

As we've gone along in Bible study we've tried to say that one of the good features of Bible study is to take a moment every time we set down with the Bible and review where we have been. By now we should have been able to shorthand memorize the gospel of Mark. I know you know the division titles; you're just reluctant to speak them out in public. But so far we've looked at the first four paragraphs 1:1-1:13 – Preparation; 1:14-1:45 – the Opening Events of the Lord's ministry; 2:1-3:6 – Opposition; 3:7-35 – Counter Opposition; 4:1-34 – Kingdom Parables; 4:35 to the end of chapter 5 – Selected Miracles; 6:1 – Disciple Training. That's all there is in the gospel of Mark so far.

Tonight from 7:1-8:30. We're going to look at two further sections in Mark's gospel that spans these 10 paragraphs. A little longer section tonight but I'll not try to be long accordingly.

Let's take a paragraph at a time and we'll link them together. The first three paragraphs of chapter 7 really belong together and remember those of you who are newcomers tonight that I am using the Revised Standard Version of Mark. The reason why is this is the version I cut my eyeteeth on in the gospel of Mark. It's hard to blast somebody out of their habits. And it has better paragraph divisions than the other bibles.

7:1 “Now when the Pharisees gathered together to him with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem they saw that some of the disciples ate with hands defiled. That is unwashed. The disciples and all the Jews did not eat unless they washed their hands observing the tradition of the elders. When they came from the marketplace they did not eat unless they purified themselves and there are many other traditions which they observed the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze and the Pharisees and the scribes asked him ‘Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders but eat with hands defiled?’ He said to them ‘Well did Isaiah prophecy, as it is written: “These people honor me with their lips but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.” You leave the commandment of God and hold fast the tradition of men.”

We'll stop our reading right there and violate one of the good rules of Bible study I've tried to communicate. That is the first thing we ought to do when we sit down with a particular passage is read it through in its entirety and take a moment to give a title to each paragraph so we can kind of reconnoiter the land and figure out where we are. Then things begin falling together. But I'm afraid that if I read from 7:1 through 8:30 that it would be too long. But this is an invigorating practice to do when you're alone. Don't try to dive into the Bible and immediately get a whole lot out of it. Take some time and just do the good study methods that are available and then the Holy Spirit will begin to speak to you and burn things into your heart.

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Certainly one of the first things we've tried to do with each paragraph is to give it a title. This paragraph has a real easy title. It has to do with Unwashed Hands. I think we could all remember those 8 verses with those 2 words. Unwashed Hands.

In the three paragraphs that are together 7:1, 7:9 and 7:14 – all three of those paragraphs deal with the theme of legalism. And the Pharisees criticism of Jesus. So as we look at the paragraphs tonight I want to talk about some of the characteristics of legalism and each paragraph bears witness to a different characteristic of an external kind of religion.

First we ought to simply note the fact that some of the literally style of the gospel of Mark. One of the tip offs that he is writing to non Palestinians – that is non Jewish people living outside Israel who are unfamiliar with customs, culture and geography. One of the tip offs to the fact that he's writing to that group is found in this paragraph. It's the fact that in the modern translations, verses 3-4, are enclosed in brackets or parenthesis. Mark has to explain what it is that has motivated this question since indeed it would be a ridiculous thing for a pagan to think of anybody walking anywhere to ask somebody why they didn't wash their hands before they eat as though that was something to do with religion. That's something you ask 6 year old Johnny when he comes to the table: "Did you wash your hands before you eat?" For us it's not a religious question, it's a hygienic question. But for the Pharisees it's a very important question.

This is not the first time that Mark has done this. Think back to the raising of Jairus' daughter. Remember Mark still hears Jesus speaking Aramaic. Talitha cumi. Then Mark has to turn around and say "This means *Little girl arise.*" He knows that it is insufficient simply to let the Aramaic of Jesus lay in the text without giving an explanation for it. So a clue within Mark itself that he is writing to non Jewish people who are outside the land of Israel and for whom a matter so technically refined as the theological question of eating without washing your hands needs to be explained.

We also ought to take a moment perhaps to talk about the Pharisees and where they came from. The Pharisees some scholars feel have gotten short shrift in the New Testament because they were basically a positive influence within the Judaism in the 170 years prior to Christ. It's often the case that we tend to disagree most with the people who see things the most with us. I think the dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees was kind of family. They shared the same historic doctrines. Jesus theologically has been called a Pharisee and I think that's probably a good appellation of him. He believed in the inspiration of the Old Testament. He believed that it was God's authentic written word. He believed in the resurrection of the dead. He believed in angels. He believed in the Spirit. He believed in the last day. He believed in the coming of the Messiah.

And Pharisees really grew out of a reaction within Judaism dating from about 170 B.C. when there was a falling away from Judaism within the life of Israel and there was a tremendous movement to go Greek. To be Greek and to leave the ways of the fathers. The Pharisees really started out as a revival movement and as a holiness movement within Judaism to bring people back to an authentic faith in God. But the problem that holiness movements always have whether they're Judaism holiness movement or Christian holiness is ultimately the letter of the law can become more important than the spirit of the law.

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That's exactly what happened with Phariseeism and Jesus takes issue time and time again with Phariseeism. Here it's seen in a very graphic fashion. Matthew 15 in fact puts this text even more graphically than Mark. Matthew says that certain Pharisees came down from Jerusalem to ask him, "Why do your disciples eat with unwashed hands?"

Think about that. Jerusalem is about 100 miles to the south of where Jesus is here in Galilee. A 100-mile journey is a three-day solid walk, staying overnight as you go along. I just simply ask, Have you ever walked 100 miles to ask anybody a question? Have you ever walked across the street? And if you walked 100 miles to ask somebody a question it would have to be a burning question. It would be an important question. If I thought at all that Jesus had really knowledge of God I'd want to ask him, What is heaven really like? What is God really like? Explain how you can be truly God and yet God is one? Could you tell us about the various rankings of angels? Can you tell us whether there's life on other planets? How old really is the world? What are Adam and Eve doing now? I can think of a lot of questions. Here you've got an opportunity to ask somebody that knows answers to questions. So why in the world would you walk 100 miles to ask, "Why do your disciples eat with unwashed hands?"

What we have in the washing of hands is more than the washing. The Pharisees because of the Levitical laws of ceremonial cleanliness had a particularly described method of washing the hands. It was important that they be washed in such a way. It was important that you do it right.

What I'm suggesting in looking at this paragraph is that in coming 100 miles to ask this – it's Matthew that tells us they came specifically to ask that question – that we get an indication of their values. That for them that was the issue.

And that's kind of sad. It's sad when a ceremonial issue becomes elevated to the kinds of status that this is. It's a characteristic of all legalism no matter what garb it wears. Whether it wears the garb of holiness, legalism, Pentecostal legalism. Indeed one of the great dangers that the church fights in all areas of the world is legalism. It seems to me in my ministry to believers that when I have ministered where Christians are having a difficult time that the thing they wrestle most with is legalism. That stunts the growth of the church as much or more than the hostile environment they face.

But a characteristic of legalism here and there are three characteristics in these three paragraphs: legalism and a legalistic spirit is essentially negative. The legalistic person, the negative person can look at life and they will inevitably focus on the one thing that is wrong. Rather than giving thanks and seeing all the things that are right.

The Pharisees could have come to Jesus and said, "We came from Jerusalem because we've heard this marvelous report on what you're doing. Can we see Jairus' daughter? Can we talk with her and see what power of God was upon her? And we'd like to talk with the little boy who had the five loaves and two fishes. And the guy with the withered hand. We know we didn't like the way you did that on the Sabbath but we'd like to talk with him and see if the healing stuck." There were so many tremendously positive things that the Pharisees could have singled out that Jesus did. They could have looked at all the positive teaching that he had been giving. But instead the legalist inevitably goes like a needle that's always stuck on north. The legalist says I will find the one thing that's wrong and I will hammer away at that and I won't see anything that's good and I'll elevate it and press it because that is what's wrong.

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So you get an essentially negative attitude in legalism. It never fails. Always finding something to correct. Jesus disagreed strongly with this approach. He said your heart is far from me. You're all hung up on little things.

The second paragraph in this section begins with verse 9. He said to them "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said honor your father and your mother and he who speaks evil of father or mother let him surely die. But you say if a man tells his father or his mother what you would have gained from me is *Corban* [Now Mark explains gain because he knows people don't know what *Corban* is.] that is given to God then you're no longer permitted to do anything for father or mother thus making void the word of God through your tradition and many such things you do."

The paragraph title could be one word – *Corban*. We've got Unwashed Hands and *Corban*.

The second characteristic within legalism is that it finds it easier to correct other people than to correct themselves. To see the wrong without rather than see the wrong within.

That's a human tendency too. But the legalist carries it to the extreme. So Jesus goes on the offensive here and says, You have elevated the law, Honor your father and mother, which by the way in biblical days meant more than paying them verbal respect. It meant taking care of them in old age. If you didn't obey that that was not part of keeping that commandment "Honor your father and mother." Jesus says that's the commandment. But he says to the Pharisees, You've found a neat way around that. It's this devise called *corban* meaning "Given to God." What that exactly was, for example a wealthy Pharisee who didn't really want to support his parents in the style that they should have been supported and he's got a lot of funds to do it but he doesn't want to use it for them and thereby honor them he comes to the temple and in the process of a ritualistic gift the Pharisee comes and makes a big deal about all his property he gives to God, here's the deed, my bank account. Give all of this to the work of God. All the stuff is "given" to God. But it's only in name only. It's an artificial kind of transaction because the Pharisee then would go back and under the terms of the designation of the gift he continued to use it for his own purposes. Only from a technical point of view it was *corban*, it was given to God. His parents could come in need and he turn them away. It was a technical devise by which they evaded their responsibility to the law of God.

Jesus, knowing that this was a weakness, he not only defends himself but he goes on the offense and attacks. He says that a characteristic within legalism is it can see what is wrong in others but is unable to see that this act, this artificial act of designating money and then not paying parents was itself an indication of awful evil within the heart.

It is easier to spot the evil in others than in ourselves. Jesus says we must stay away from that kind of spirit and look honestly at the log in our own eye lest we try to pick the speck out of our brother's eye.

The third paragraph in this section begins with verse 14. "He called the people to him again and said to them, 'Hear me all of you and understand there is nothing outside of man, which by going into him can defile him. [We need to exercise moderation in our eating. The Lord is not saying go eat anything you want. But he's talking about Phariseeism and about kosher diet habits,

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which ate certain animals and didn't eat others.] But the things which come out of a man are what defile him.' When he had entered the house and left the people his disciples asked him about the parable. He said to them then, 'Are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him since it enters not his heart but his stomach and so passes on.' [Then Mark again inserts] By this he declared all foods clean [Why does Mark say this? Because the early church still had a problem on this issue. There were believers who said it's against the law of God to eat pork. There were believers who said it's against the law of God to eat anything strangled. This argument got so bad that in the Jerusalem church, Acts 15, they finally agreed to compromise and the gentile Christians agreed not to eat things strangled just because the Jewish believers were so uptight about that. He declared all foods clean. That is, it's ok to eat pork.] What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. Out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and they defile a man.'"

The third mistake of legalism is it's always working on the outer man and not working on the inner man. I'm not so crazy as to suggest that sometimes our outer appearance is not an indication of what's going on inside. Certainly teachers have learned that in terms of student dress is often an indication of how students behave in class. Jesus is not so much keying on that issue but he is keying on the fact that the legalists inevitably is harping always on the externals. Jesus is saying you can have all the ducks in order and you can eat the right food and part your hair on the right side of the head and wear the right length of dresses and the right color of clothes and keep the jewelry to whatever is supposed to be the Christian minimum – do all that and it's no good if on the inside all these festering conditions of the heart are going on. That it's no good to simply be an external holiness people. I'm convinced that one of the things that Jesus wanted to do in life is he wanted to give us great joy and liberty and happiness in being alive. Legalism and negativity brings a spirit that continually represses and constrains and binds up. It doesn't give people room to develop their personhood after the image of God or to relax, lighten up, enjoy or have a good time. Jesus saw that as he talked to the Pharisees. He said the evil is out of your own heart. You've got to deal with it there. Don't think that evil is so simple that you can regulate it by some kind of a law and measure by an external yardstick. It's out of the heart.

He is headed right toward the cross when he gets into trouble with the Pharisees. They do not like at all what he has said and that will become evident.

These three paragraphs together comprise the shortest section of the unit of thought in Mark's gospel. We'll give the shortest section the longest title. Inner Versus Outer Defilement.

So we have Preparation, Opening events, Opposition, Counter Opposition, Kingdom Parables, Selected Miracles, Discipleship Training, and Inner Verses Outer Defilement.

Now we come in verse 24 to a series of seven paragraphs . "He rose from there and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon and he entered a house and would not have anyone know it yet he could not be hid. But immediately a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Greek Syrophenician by birth. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, 'Let the children first be fed because it's not right to give the children's bread and throw it to the

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dogs.’ But she answered him, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’ He said to her, ‘For this saying you may go your way. The demon has left your daughter.’ And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.” This is one of the most unusual stories. What is going on here?

Let’s give it the title Syrophenician Woman. Isn’t it interesting that a 2000-year-old political situation reflected in this name Syrophenician is being repeated in the world today? Syro means Syria. Phoneia is the contemporary area of Lebanon. The Syrians have always claimed Lebanon as their own. This woman was a Syrophenician. Where are Syrian troops today? In Beirut trying to establish order in ancient Phoenicia. Things don’t change.

Jesus had gone up there, gone to Lebanon. Why? Because things are too hot in Galilee. He’s taken on the whole establishment. And besides that, I think Jesus is just physically tired. The disciples are tired. He kept promising them a rest and then all these crowds show up and this crazy boat ride in the middle of the night. All this stuff going on and they’re exhausted. So because the political situation is so hot Jesus gets out of Galilee up the sea coast to Tyre and Sidon in Lebanon and he’s hiding out. He doesn’t want anybody to know he’s even in the house because he knows what happens when he gets in the house. People start taking the roof off and stuff like that. He just wants to be alone. “I need some rest,” is what he’s saying. So this lady comes to him this Syrophenician also called a Canaanite.

There’s nothing that makes you identify as much with a person as a parent whose child is sick and they want help. That is the situation she’s in. You don’t read anything about her husband if she had one or if he was long gone or whatever. But she’s a beautiful model of the single parent who’s concerned for a sick child. This child happened to be demon possessed. She didn’t even bring the child with her. We look at this conversation Jesus has with her and we’re a little bit puzzled at Jesus at this point. He seems to be putting her down – something that Jesus didn’t do to people. She begs him to cast the demon out and he says to her, almost disrespectfully “Let the children first be fed. It’s not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” “Dogs” was a specific religious word that the Israelis at that time used for Gentiles. Gentiles were dogs. So Jesus very clearly is saying, “I’m not in Jewish territory now. I’m a Jew, you’re a gentile. It’s only right that I should help my own. I’m giving my healing and ministry to the Jewish people. It’s not right to take that and give that to the dogs, the gentiles.”

Is Jesus being anti-Gentile? What’s going on? Some have suggested (and I think any one of these suggestions is good) that what Jesus is simply doing with this woman is repeating back to her theology. That all her life she believed this, that Jews were first and she was second best. Jesus was wanting to draw out, elicit her faith. “Do you really believe this? You’ve come to me. Do you really believe I can help you? Have you broken through the stereotypes here?” That’s a possibility.

There’s another possibility. It’s the only place in scripture where I think a tape recorder would tell us what actually was going on. I think that what Jesus said to her makes a lot of difference by tone of voice. It’s one thing to say to the woman, and look disdainfully at her, “Let the children first be fed for it’s not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” That’s one thing. But then for the Lord to say with a playful tone in his voice and a sparkle in his eye and kind of a tease. To draw out her faith. I suspect that that is what the Lord had in mind because whatever he says does draw out her faith. She’s not going to be put off.

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One of the things if we're going to come to spiritual development in our life is we've got to get past barriers other people erect and barriers we erect to spiritual growth. We're going to get things thrown in our path that's going to make us want to turn away. We might be hungry for God and all that and then somebody stumbles in front of us. Maybe a prominent Christian leader or something and we say, "Forget it!" We've got to get past those barricades. Jesus is helping this woman have a more mature faith. She had faith when she entered the room but he's helping her faith to grow up and be more mature.

She answers him, I think playfully, "Yes, Lord. Even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." One of the things that is so neat here is that Jesus is willing to engage in this kind of witty dialogue with this person and let the person come back at him. That shows that he is approachable and open and vulnerable.

So he says, "For this saying you may go your way. The demon has left your daughter." This is the only long distance exorcisms in the gospels. Very few times did Jesus even heal without being physically present. But never did he cast out a demon without being present. But if the wind and the waves could recognize his voice a demon who is several miles away could pick it up without a radio transmitter. The demon was gone.

Next paragraph. "Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went to Sidon through the Sea of Galilee to the region of the Decapolis. [The Decapolis is an area that means "ten cities." It was a region of ten non-Jewish cities around the parameter of Galilee. Mostly on the eastern side of Galilee. Again he's staying out of Galilee.] They brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech. They besought him to lay his hand upon him and taking him aside from the multitude privately his ears were opened and his tongue was released and he spoke plainly. He charged him to tell no one. But the more he charged them the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astonished beyond measure saying he has done all things well. 'He even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.'"

What is happening in this paragraph could be called the Decapolis Deaf. It was a deaf man. Let's give him a title by his region.

So tonight so far we have Unwashed hands, Corban, Tradition, Syrophoenician, Decapolis Deaf. Notice something unusual here. Jesus has now started to use a different method of healing. Why he did this only he knows. Maybe this man believed that if God ever appeared that's what he would do. Who knows? But Jesus used a unique method of healing. In a few moments we'll see he repeats with a blind man. What Jesus was doing in his ministry was giving people something visible to hang on to. But also by using different methods of healing he was showing that his healing was not confined to one method.

Here again people split up. I can see denominations arising over his method. The fact is the Lord uses a variety of methods. And he's still doing it today. He uses a variety of churches. It's ok to be who you are, who God's called you to be. God has a variety of ways of accomplishing his purposes and his word.

There's another question to. Notice that in the gospel of Mark Jesus has at various times told people not to tell. We can understand why he told the demons to shut up. Jesus did not want

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testimony from demons. But he tells people not to tell. The first person he told not to tell was the leper in Mark 1. He cleansed him and he said don't go tell until you've shown yourself to the priests for cleansing. But he went out and told and the result was Jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in the country. It limited Jesus' mobility in ministry.

Some say that Jesus here was a master psychologist. If you want to get the word out, tell somebody "Don't tell anybody." However if that is the true interpretation of this verse, to me it says something false about Jesus. That he was a manipulator of people. That he was playing on their psyche in an unfair kind of way. I've never been able to buy that.

I think more reasonably the explanation is two fold why he on various occasions was telling people not to tell. It was very politically dangerous for him right now. He was once more on the perimeter of Galilee in the Decapolis. He did not want to risk a premature arrest. An excited rabble, tremendously questioning crowds to generate the kind of political heat which would wind him up in trouble so he's saying "Keep this quiet between us." That's why he takes him aside. He actually takes him aside privately and heals him. He doesn't want it out. But again, it's hard to keep that kind of news quiet. The more he charged them the more zealously they proclaimed it.

One other thing I think may have been in the Lord's mind. This is just a suspicion. I have a view that Jesus did not use miracles manipulatively. I could not imagine Jesus in terms of methodology of having an open air meeting and hanging a great banner out in the town that says, "Come and see what's going on! Signs and wonders being done here tonight!" Obviously wherever Jesus was there were signs and wonders but I cannot believe and accept based on what I know of the ethics of Jesus that he used miracles in a manipulative sense. He was concerned to reach the person. Sure the news would get out. Sure it was an authentication of his messiahship. But Jesus was not some kind of Madison Avenue slick PR guy who was just using stuff to get crowds. I wonder if on occasion Jesus, who himself was personally financially poor and who grew up as a good Jew and as the Son of God of course, with the understanding that giving of alms and giving to the poor is one of the highest duties of life. Jesus had taught earlier in his ministry that when you give alms you should do it in secret. I wonder sometimes if he didn't see his healing as a giving of alms to those who were needy. He really didn't want to call attention to it because he wanted like anybody else to have a chance to give somebody a gift without anybody talking about it. Just to give it quietly.

I believe this was what was at stake. I'll get a chance to ask the Lord someday about that. It seems to be consistent with the wonderful character of Jesus Christ who didn't manipulate people but truly gave just because he wanted to give.

"In those days when again a great crowd had gathered and they had nothing to eat he called his disciples to him and said to them, 'I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes they will faint on the way and some of them have come a long way.' His disciples answered him, 'How can one feed these men here with bread here in the desert?' And he asked them, 'How many loaves have you?' And they said, 'Seven.' He commanded the crowd to sit on the ground and he took the seven loaves and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people and they set them before the crowd and they had a few small fish [that seemed to be the lunch in those days! Fish and bread.] Having blessed them, he commanded that

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these also should be set before them and they ate and were satisfied. They took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full and there were about four thousand people. He sent them away and immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.”

The title for this paragraph of course – Four Thousand Fed. Separated from the five thousand fed. What’s the difference between these two miracles? Were there really two feedings? Yes but there were some significant differences. One difference is that the first feeding came at the end of day that the crowds had been with Jesus when he was teaching. This feeding comes at the end of three days. Jesus could have had a crowd-eternal if he had just provided food every time. A free lunch. If he did that on a perpetual basis he’s going to produce laziness in people so he’s not in the business of free lunches. But here this crowd had demonstrated it’s earnestness by being with him three days and so hungry for his presence and for his healing – Matthew the parallel passages tells us phenomenal healings. It was probably one of the most action packed moments in the Lord’s ministry. The gospels just handle it with a quick summary. But it’s been three days and it’s time to get back to work, to go home. Everybody’s out of food. That’s one thing that’s different. Jesus has compassion. He doesn’t do the miracle because somebody’s forcing him. But because he has compassion.

It’s also a different time of year. If you look closely in the miracle in Mark 6 it says Jesus sat the crowd on the grass, the green grass. A specific term used in both the English and the Greek. That suggests it’s springtime because the grass is only green in the springtime. Other times of the year it’s brown. But here they set on the ground. That gives us a different time of the year. Probably within a few months of Jesus’ passion when this happens. Then another thing which should be seen of course is that the numbers are different. Five thousand men plus women and children in the first feeding and now it’s four thousand people. So a smaller crowd. But they’ve been with him three days so some people have probably already left. Then we have a different quantity. Instead of five loaves and two fishes, it’s seven loaves and a few small fish. Then the baskets are different. The earlier they had less to begin with but wound up with more. Here they have more to start with and wound up with less. Again, Jesus feeds the hungry and provides the comfort needs of the people that are with him.

Verse 11, “The Pharisees came and began to argue with him. Seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. He sighed deeply in his spirit and said, ‘Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly I say to you. No sign will be given this generation and he left them, getting into the boat he departed to the other side.’” This paragraph could be called No Sign.

Isn’t this amazing? After the greatest miracles in Jesus’ ministry according to Matthew’s gospel (Matthew 15) after those tremendous miracles after being with the crowd three days the Pharisees shortly after that come and say, We’d like a sign. Which is their way of saying we do not accept the healings as a sign that you’re from God. After all the prophets did healings, Elijah did healings, Elisha did healings. How do we know that you’re more than a prophet? Show us a sign from heaven. Bring a lightning bolt down. Do something in the sky. Do something visible that is a clear indication that you’re the Messiah. Jesus says, No way. You’re going to have to decide of me on the basis of the utterances I’ve already given you. Jesus digs his heals in and he consistently refuses to give a sign other than the signs that he’s already given.

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This hardening of the Pharisees heart becomes so deep against him that ultimately when Jesus rises from the dead and the soldiers bring word after the resurrection that he had risen these same people who were the first to know that he had risen bribed the soldiers to say that the disciples came and stole the body. They didn't pick up on his evidences.

It's the same way in our life. We're either moving toward the Lord or we're moving away from the Lord. The more we move away from the Lord the easier it is to move away from the Lord and the more hardened and skeptical and philosophic we can become when the real reason why we're moving away from the Lord has nothing to do with our intelligence or with unanswered questions in most cases. The real reason is there is moral sin in our life which we are unwilling to deal with and put away. "Show us a sign," and Jesus says, no. "I say to you no sign will be given this generation." And he gets into a boat and departs for the other side. Notice he's keeping his geographical movements protected. He's skirting the Lake of Galilee so they cannot arrest him.

Now we're back to the disciples in a really incredible passage. Verse 14. "Now they had forgotten to bring bread [they had just had seven baskets full but somebody had left the baskets on shore] and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. He cautioned them saying, 'Take heed. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.' They discussed it with one another saying, 'We have no bread.'"

Sometimes people comment, "Did Jesus have any humor?" Here it is folks. It's very, very subtle. "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see and having ears do you not hear and do you not remember when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand how many basketsfull of broken pieces did you pick up?" They said Twelve. "And for the four thousand how many basketsfull of pieces did you pick up?" They said Seven. He said "Do you not yet understand?" We'll call this paragraph Leaven of Pharisees.

When we first read this it seems so mystical. Why does he quiz them on how many basketsfull and all this? It's because he's saying, If you forgot your bread aren't I capable of expanding the bread. Didn't I do it for the five thousand? Didn't I do it for the four thousand? I'm capable of making more bread. I'm not worried about bread! I'm worried about leaven! Don't let the leaven of the Pharisees or the Herodians get into you?"

What's he talking about? He's talking about their attitudes in life. The Pharisees were the legalists who could find the one flaw when everything else was right, who could look on the outer rather than the inner and who could see what was wrong with someone else without ever looking at themselves. Don't let that get in your life, Jesus is saying. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.

Then the leaven of the Herodians was simply "Whatever you want to do, do it." The Herodians were the accommodationists with the world. Get rid of both extremes Jesus said. Don't let that into your life.

Sobering words to the disciples. They came to Bethsaida that's where Phillip was from, one of the twelve. It's on the northeast corner of the Lake of Galilee. Again keeping on the perimeter. "Some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man

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by the hand and led him out of the village. When he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands upon him he asked him, ‘Do you see anything?’ He looked up and said [a strange statement. If you had been blind how would you know what men looked like?] I see men but they look like trees walking.’ Then again Jesus laid his hands upon his eyes and he looked intently and was restored and saw everything clearly. He sent him away to his home saying, ‘Do not even enter the village.’” Again Jesus is trying to keep the news quiet. This is the only progressive healing in the gospel. Thank the Lord there is an example of progressive healing in the gospel. Because it gives us all hope when we’re only partially healed that there is more that’s on the way. Jesus gives to this man a greater focus in his healing. He can work by process.

The last paragraph is linked to the paragraph I just read and I want to treat them as a unit. Verse 27 “Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages Caesara-Philippi. Jesus is on a retreat again. He needs to be alone. He’s out of Herod’s territory. He asks his disciples “Who do men say that I am?” And they told him, John the Baptist, others say Elijah, others one of the prophets.’ He asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him. ‘You are the Christ.’ And he charged them to tell no one about him.”

In the Bethsaida Blind paragraph a man had come into physical sight. In this last paragraph which we will consider tonight we’ll call Who am I? Jesus’ inner group is coming to spiritual sight. It’s striking that the two go together. One man has only seen dimly at first but as Jesus touches him he sees more clearly. When the disciples first begin following Jesus two and a half years earlier down by the Jordan where John was baptizing they saw him but they did not see him clearly. When they saw him as Messiah they thought that meant political ruler – king and all that. But he has over these two and a half years touched their eyes again to see who he really is and what he is saying to them on the way to Caesara-Philippi is, Now I’ve given to you all that I’ve given. I’ve taught you about the kingdom. I’ve done my miracles. I haven’t done the signs from heaven. In light of all the utterances I’ve presented to you, who are the people saying that I am at this point? It’s interesting what the masses are saying. The Pharisees already think he’s from the devil, we know that. But the masses of people they would say he ranks up there pretty good. That also shows us that even among religious people they were not too biblically refined because they were holding (some of them probably) to reincarnation. Some say John the Baptist. Others Elijah. And others one of the prophets. That is the mass of opinion is Jesus is ok. He’s not of the devil like the Pharisees say. But neither has the crowds bought the idea that he was the Messiah. No one in the masses after Jesus’ great Galilean campaign, when it was all said and done, done of the masses were saying, He’s he Messiah. It’s “He’s a prophet.” And that’s the verdict loud and clear.

So on the way to Caesara-Philippi Jesus then says, “Who do you say that I am?” A personal question. Peter comes out: “You are the Messiah.” Peter has put it all together and said “I’m willing to accept you on the evidences you bring of yourself. I have been willing to lay aside my preconceptions of what Messiah meant. After being with you all this time, I too have come to believe you are the Messiah.” Notice how Mark leaves out the words which we would expect, the familiar words “Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven. You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Below I give to you the keys of heaven and earth. Whatever you’ve bound on earth shall be bound in heaven. And whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

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All that gone from Mark because Peter's preaching and he isn't talking about his good points. They still were charged to tell no one about him. Here is where all the comments up till now suddenly have a purpose. He has told people before, Don't tell anyone. And they've gone out and done it. The leper went out and did it and he messed up Jesus' travel plans. The man who was deaf in the Decapolis went out and told everybody and Jesus had to get out of the area. The disciples had seen that Jesus meant what he said when he said, "Do not tell anyone." So it seems the oddest thing in the world for Jesus to say to someone who has just come to faith in him, "Now I'm glad you came to faith in me. But don't you dare tell anybody about it."

Isn't that the opposite of our Christian faith today? We say if you come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ the first thing you ought to do is go out and tell somebody about it. Tell everybody that Jesus is the Lord of your life. But here's Jesus the first person in his kingdom and he says immediately, Don't tell anybody what's happened. Don't tell.

Why does he do this? Because Jesus knows the crowds. If this inner circle of Jesus began to fan out through Galilee and say, "He's the Messiah!" When people hear the word "Messiah" they're not going to think of Messiah as Jesus was defining it – the one who would suffer. The one whose kingdom was the kingdom of love rather than the kingdom of power. The king who would go to Jerusalem and die on a cross rather than a king who would go to Jerusalem and set on a throne. They wouldn't understand that. They'd hear the word "Messiah" and all their expectation of a political ruler, the let's go to Jerusalem and kick out the Romans would be revived. And he'd be on a charge of political sedition. So he says don't tell anyone. The crowds aren't ready for it.

They must live with one of the hardest commands he ever gave them – don't tell.

We'll see next week that he immediately turns around after that and begins to announce his death. When he starts telling that they don't really want to tell anybody anyway. So it makes sense that they not tell.

Here's this hinge passage in the gospel of Mark. It takes Jesus from a conflict with the Pharisees to a growing commitment that his disciples had to him. As individual people who are in this room reflecting again on the gospel text centuries later we make a choice once more as to who Jesus is in our life. We have to make a decision on the basis of what you know about Jesus, is he your Lord?

When I first began to follow Him I think my idea was if you put your life in the Lord's hands absolutely nothing can stop you in life. Everything will be a success. Now as I look at where I am in life I really see that greatness in the kingdom of God is not vast audiences. It's not big churches. The greatness in the kingdom of God is trying to do small things well. Jesus sets before us in his kingship an understanding of who he is by telling us that there are times in our life when we have to re-evaluate who we're serving and what we're following. When the Lord calls us to make fresh commitments to his identity even when that person is revealing to us, the person of Christ, takes a different tone and complexion and imagery than what we first thought we were buying into when we started to follow Christ but sometimes he does unpredictable things. He does things that from our point of view don't always add up. But as we stay with him, *if we'll stay with him*, we'll see as we go through the gospel story how in Christ's time he puts it all together.

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Jesus had said to the disciples when they had first begun to follow him follow me. Drop your nets. Leave your tax collector's table. Come and follow me. Within two and a half years I promise you, you will have worked through one central issue. By the end of two and a half years you will have made a decision as to who I am. Which you will probably forget the first jam you get into. That's what you're going to get for following me.

That doesn't sound exciting does it? It would be far more exciting if we could just learn in thirty seconds or a minute all the faith we need to have in Christ the rest of our life. If it could all be easy and we didn't have to work things through and think questions out and work through difficult choices in life. But this is part of discipleship of working things through and knowing him more and learning from him. Once that basic confession of faith is made in Christ it holds us in every event in life. Because once we have become gripped with his reality it does make a difference in what we think and in how we behave and it certainly makes a difference of our destination in life.

I want to encourage you wherever you are in your pathway discipleship to open up your life to a new way, to Jesus and own him for what he is in your life today.

Our Lord, it's one thing to see how Peter came to faith in you but it's another thing to look at our own life and see for example that if we're a person who is fretful that you reveal yourself to us as the God of peace. If we are a person who carries hurt you reveal yourself to us as the God of forgiveness. If we are a person who is prone to carry around unresolved anger in our life you have revealed yourself to us as the Christ of reconciliation. And Lord, those are ever bet a touching point of faith for us as it was for Peter to call you the Christ. Do we believe that you are the Lord of peace? Do we believe that you are the Lord of reconciliation? You present yourself to us in those ways and say "Now I've shown you who I am and I ask of you to put into your own life what I have in mine. Will you do it?" Lord, there does come a critical moment in our life where we look at you and we look at ourselves. You ask us in that moment of criticality "Who am I? And who are you?" Lord, in that moment when you ask us we pray that faith would arise in each of our hearts to own you for what you are and that if our inner or outer life has been taking directions which are not consistent with your nature and with your purpose and identity we ask Lord that however difficult it may be for us that you mold us anew so that we become little Christ's. Christians. Agents of peace. And agents of reconciliation. There are definite moments in life where you bring us to decisions and you call us to put our faith in you for who you are. You did that with Peter. You do it for us. We gladly and willingly own you anew this evening as our Lord and our savior. As the Christ, the one sent from God to bear our sins, reveal the eternal Father, give us everlasting life. That one you are and we seek to know you more and to be filled with your presence. In your name. Amen.