

Mark

Section 4 – 10 weeks

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This was originally an expository series of sermons given in the church where I was serving as Pastor. A few years later, they were edited to be used as a Bible Study. There are a few things I feel I should share with you before using this material:

First: I had no intent of sharing or publishing this material until encouraged to do so by some friends. While I did consult several commentaries as I was preparing the original sermon series, I did not make notes of the references used in the messages. There was not in the beginning, nor is there now, any intent to plagiarize. Should you see anything you feel is the original thought of another, I ask for your grace and mercy.

Second: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I tend to spell certain words phonetically for the purpose of emphasis. When transforming these notes from sermon notes to teaching notes, I felt inclined to leave a number of these phonetic spellings. They help me to make emphasis in the lesson at particular points.

Third: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I make little effort to conform to rules of grammar. One example is that I often use a hyphen (-) to indicate a point where I may want to pause slightly and to keep certain thoughts connected as I speak. Another example is that I will use local colloquialisms to make points in the message.

Please accept that these notes are not an academic work. But I do hope they will help the preacher or teacher to be able to more quickly prepare their own sermon or teaching.

The account we will read in this lesson is very much a parallel of the feeding of 5,000 recorded in chapter 6. Many critics claim the account recorded in chapter 8:1-10 is really the same event as in chapter 6; and that there were not two different feedings of a multitude.

The critics argue the disciples would not likely have forgotten the previous feeding so soon. They also argue what probably happened is that the story was passed along orally for several years - became slightly altered in some areas - and when it came time to write it all down - it sounded like two different accounts - but it isn't in reality.

After some prayer and study - I clearly disagree with this assessment. There is in fact a parallel account of not only the feeding of the multitude in chapter 8, but the parallel events continue - just like there was a crossing of the sea following the feeding of 5,000 in chapter 6 - there is a crossing of the sea following the feeding in chapter 8.

Following the events in chapter 6 was a conflict with the Pharisees in chapter 7. Then a conversation about bread, followed by a healing, then a confession of faith. Here in chapter 8 the exact same series of events are recorded - and each one is a different and separate event from the earlier events - just in the same order.

There are 3 reasons why I am convinced these are separate events - just parallel:

The first - you have heard me say this before - when a teacher has something that is important for the students to learn - the teacher repeats it. Jesus repeated a series of events because the disciples failed to comprehend the lesson. He literally said that following the earlier events. So it should not at all be a surprise to find him repeating these events so that they might finally get the message.

Secondly - there are a number of differences in these events which can only be interpreted as a different event. And in verse 1 of chapter 8 it says, "another large crowd." We will see the differences as we read the accounts.

Third - I believe the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Scriptures. This means it was not the work of human beings. If the Holy Spirit told Mark what to write, then it cannot be the result of a story being changed as it was passed along from person to person. The Scriptures are the Holy Inspired Word of God - and they can be trusted.

Read Mark 8:1-3 and make notes:

The phrase "during those days" - connects us with the close of chapter 7 - where it tells us Jesus and his disciples were in the region of the Decapolis. This means they are still in the region of Lake Gennesaret. This also means Jesus is still in the region where there is a mixed population of Jews and Gentiles. This brings us to one of the differences from the event in chapter 6.

In chapter 6, Jesus was teaching a large crowd of Jews. Here Jesus is teaching a large crowd of Jews and Gentiles together. Another of the differences is in the statement by Jesus that these people had been with him for 3 days. In chapter 6 the people had been with Jesus for the better part of 1 day.

Another difference is in chapter 6 - the disciples appear to have interrupted Jesus' teaching to point out to him the people need to be dismissed so they can eat. Here it appears the disciples kept quiet about such things while Jesus taught for 3 days. This time it is Jesus who is saying to the disciples the people need to eat.

Read Mark 8:4 and make notes:

Here is another of those differences. In chapter 6 the disciples point out what they see to be an impossibility and explain 8 months worth of wages would not provide the food needed to feed that crowd. Here the disciples don't express impossibility. They only ask Jesus "where." Basically the whole tone of the conversation with Jesus is different.

In chapter 6 they felt they had to interrupt Jesus and point out to him the people need to be dismissed in order to go and get something to eat. Here the disciples haven't interrupted Jesus for 3 days of teaching - and when Jesus finally points out to the disciples the huge need of the people - their tone sounds more like "well, what are you going to do about it?" This time they are not seeing impossibility - they are only wondering how.

Read Mark 8:5 and make notes:

Another difference - in chapter 6 it was one of the children of the crowd that had the meager resources Jesus used to feed the crowd. Here it is the disciples who had the meager resources Jesus would use to feed the crowd. "How many loaves do you have?"

Here is a noteworthy point. In both events of Jesus providing for the physical needs of a multitude - Jesus involved his disciples in the action or activity of making this provision. Jesus was the provider - but the disciples were given the responsibility of getting the provision into the hands of the people who had need.

Read Mark 8:6 and make notes:

In chapter 6, the disciples instructed the people to sit in groups of 50 and groups of 100 - here there is no such instruction. Since it was customary for the people to sit or recline when they ate - it is reasonable to believe the people probably did sit as they ate - however, without the specific instruction -it is reasonable to accept the fact that they may have continued to sit in one large crowd.

Read Mark 8:7 and make notes:

This is another difference from chapter 6 - and it is noteworthy. It was customary practice for the Jews to always give thanks for the bread and then separate the bread and pass it around to all to eat. Jesus did this on both occasions before sharing the bread. In this mixed crowd, perhaps only the Jews would have made a note of his having done this. It was not customary, however, to give a separate prayer of thanks for fish, or other food stuff before eating it. Here in this mixed crowd, Jesus sets an example of giving thanks to God for our daily food - for all food, not just the bread, is a gracious provision from God.

Read Mark 8:8 and make notes:

Just like the miraculous feeding in chapter 6 - the people are satisfied. God's provision is more than enough to meet our needs - he fills us up. Our God is called "*El Shaddai*" - meaning "God who is more than enough." In chapter 6, - 5,000 people were fed and 12 baskets of food were left over. Here less people were fed - 4,000 - and there was less food left over - 7 baskets.

There are those who have suggested spiritual messages are to be found in the numbers of both of these events. Suggesting symbolic interpretations for the numbers. We need to be careful that we don't get caught up in that line of analysis in this issue; because it will lead us away from the message. The symbolism these people suggest have no connection to the training of Fishers of Men - and that is the primary purpose of this writing.

The simple fact that such a large crowd of mixed peoples sat together for 3 days and listened to Jesus' teaching is a beautiful picture and a pre-figure of what the Church is supposed to look like. The fact that this mixed crowd of Jews and Gentiles ate together, the divine provision of food, is a beautiful picture of the kind of fellowship the Church is expected to share.

Read Mark 8:9-10 and make notes:

After dismissing the crowd, Jesus left the region of the Decapolis and returned to the western side of the lake. Dalmanutha is believed by some to be the area of Magdala.

What are we to take away from this passage ?

First - We need to remember that Jesus is the provider - make no mistake about that. But the disciples are expected to deliver the provision to the people. We need to make sure we don't tunnel vision this statement and only apply it to food, clothing, etc. This responsibility to deliver the provision to the people applies also to the Spiritual Provision. We cannot sit around and say things like "well, we will make a nice place for people to come" – "when they see how nice it is, they will come." As Fishers of Men – we are given provision – wonderful spiritual provision – and we need to be careful to make sure we are faithful to take this provision to the people around us. "Spiritual Gifts" – are a provision. What are we doing with the provision ?

Second - We need to remember that God can multiply the resources of the disciples to whatever degree is necessary in order to meet the need. We don't need to be concerned about "how much" or "how many" we have. Whatever our resources may be – even if they appear meager – in the hands of God, it will be more than enough. After all – our God is El Shaddai (one of the names God is called in the Old Testament). He is The Everlasting God who is More Than Enough.

Too often today, we find Church People who are living their lives - with worry and fear – just like they don't know - or have forgotten that Our God Is More Than Enough! Too often they don't even try because they look at their meager resources and just give up! What really is our faith in God's ability to multiply the resources?

Third - If we are going to be the kind of church Jesus has designed us to be - then we need to make sure our provision and our fellowship is available to all people.

Can you imagine what the crowd probably looked like that day when Jesus fed the 4,000? For 3 days this mixed crowd had stood together and had sat together while they listened to the wonderful life giving words from Jesus. Then they all got to eat together. If we are going to be the kinds of Fishers of Men God desires for us to be - we will be inviting - providing - and fellowshiping with all peoples.

There is no skin color that is excluded. There is no eye shape that is excluded. There is no culture that is excluded. There is no nationality that is excluded. There is no ancestry that is excluded.

For God so loved "all peoples" that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes on him will not perish but will have everlasting life. It is not God's will that anyone should perish, but that all come to eternal life in Jesus Christ. God does not condemn anyone to hell; but those who reject Jesus have condemned themselves already. Narrow is the way that leads to life everlasting and few find it.

Wide is the way that leads to destruction and many travel that way. Do you see anything we have to offer the great multitude that is traveling the pathway to destruction?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

The disciples had just finished witnessing a repeat of a lesson they failed to grasp the first time. And for those critics who claim there wasn't two feedings of crowds; today's Scripture passage is somewhat of a problem. It records Jesus mentioning both. We will pick it up following the feeding of the 4,000.

Read Mark 8:11 and make notes:

This kind of request was not something new to the Jewish people. From O.T. times, it meant they were looking for a token of some kind that guarantees the truthfulness of what he is saying or the legitimacy of what he is doing. It was common when a prophecy was given that could not be verified immediately, that a sign would be given which authenticated this prophecy.

This concept is of some importance when we evaluate the relationship between the Pharisees and Jesus. The recognition of a sign was primarily for evidence of trustworthiness - not of power. Their request for a sign was not a demand for Jesus to perform a miracle. We don't find Jesus' miracles called signs in the gospel of Mark. And there doesn't seem to be any indication the Pharisees regarded his miracles as signs. Instead, the Pharisees seem to view Jesus' miracles as actions that need to be authenticated with a sign.

The Pharisees had witnessed the results of his miracle working power. They had concluded he was demonic. So, they are demanding a sign from Jesus to determine if his miracles were from God and not the work of demons. The request for a sign from heaven is asking for a public definitive proof that God has sent him.

With this insight of the significance of a sign, it sheds light on the statement that they were "testing him." There is a biblical provision for testing a prophet to determine if he has been sent from God (Deuteronomy 13:2-6; 18:18-22). This is another way of saying "What is the source of your authority?"

However, there is one concern here in this verse - it is the statement "To test him, they asked." The Greek word used here is technically to be translated "tempt" - while "test" can be an appropriate translation - it would mean to test in an attempt to catch - like a fisherman would "test" a particular bait or fishing lure. When we consider this word; it makes the request for a sign by the Pharisees look like an insincere request. Could it be that they were asking for a sign in order to get the people to witness him perform some magic?

As we have already established - it was appropriate to seek a sign from a professing prophet. But the word used in this text indicates they were tempting Jesus to do something of which they could accuse him publicly.

Read Mark 8:12 and make notes:

If you will remember from chapter 3 – The Pharisees had decided his power was demonic. Jesus was certainly aware of their hostile attitude toward him and their unbelief. We can see in Jesus' deep sigh that he experienced deep emotional grief over their unbelief.

It indicates an exasperation which leads to the question, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign?" There are those who find some fault with Jesus' attitude when he says "no sign will be given" to this generation.

His refusal to give a sign has some significance. The demand for a sign historically expressed their desire to judge him according to the norms that had been defined by their Scribal interpretation. Jesus had already pronounced these scribal norms as having become decayed and lifeless. These people were asking to judge Jesus by a standard that was completely inadequate to see the reality of who he is.

These people were trying to accept Jesus or reject him by means of a divine sign. Jesus was calling people to accept him by way of a personal relationship. There just isn't much personal - regarding a public sign is there?

Read Mark 8:13 and make notes:

This departure from the Pharisees and sailing back to the other shore is a very visible expression of how Jesus feels about their position. By his getting into a boat and leaving, he is saying to them, nothing good could come from any further discussion with you, so there won't be any more discussion.

By his sailing to the Gentile shore once again, it shows a rejecting of the Jewish religious leaders in preference of Gentiles. The Pharisees had demonstrated they simply lacked the discernment and faith to see the Kingdom of God when it came to them. And still today, the Gospel remains hidden from Un-Belief doesn't it?

Read Mark 8:14-15 and make notes:

The leaving of the Pharisees was so abrupt that the disciples didn't have time to obtain provisions. When they set sail they discovered they had only one loaf of bread.

Jesus takes advantage of the freshness of the encounter with the Pharisees to caution the disciples. Yeast was recognized as a symbol of corruption and how much of an impact corruption has. Yeast was such a small quantity as compared to the flour and other ingredients of the bread. And yet, this small quantity, almost insignificant, winds up affecting the entire batch of dough. That is a great description of the characteristic of evil. Jesus was calling his disciples to faith and understanding. The kind that comes apart from signs. We will come back to the "yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod" later.

Read Mark 8:16 and make notes:

It is actually encouraging to read and see that these first disciples were just as human and fleshly as we are today. Jesus was sharing with them a kingdom principle. But they were so focused on the physical that they automatically assumed he was talking about the literal bread - or shortage of it on board the ship.

Jesus' subtle reference to the Pharisees and to Herod went right past the disciples and they didn't even realize a message had passed their way. The disciples were so preoccupied with their physical needs that they didn't notice the spiritual message sent to them by the Savior.

Read Mark 8:17-18 and make notes:

Jesus rebukes the disciples with a series of sober questions. These first disciples - the ones we often call the apostles - were so carnal that they were spiritually blind and spiritually dull of hearing. After repeated and continuous exposure to Jesus and his teaching, they still didn't get it. "Can't you see?" - "Can't you hear?" - "Are your hearts hard?" - "Don't you remember?" This spiritual blindness can still be seen today.

Perhaps one of the saddest places to see this spiritual blindness is in the persons who actually receive a miracle from Jesus and somehow fail to see Jesus. Those people who receive the benefit of divine power in their life but fail to see the divine Jesus desiring personal relationship.

Read Mark 8:19-21 and make notes:

By asking questions, Jesus takes the disciples back to the two different miraculous feedings of a crowd of people. Jesus gives the numbers in each crowd and asked the disciples for the number of baskets left over. The disciples do remember the accounts and they give the correct answers. And then Jesus asks the question, "Do you still not understand?" The disciples don't yet understand the secret to which Jesus' work has pointed. While the unbelieving world is asking for a sign to determine whether they might accept Jesus' teachings or reject them; Jesus has been demonstrating exactly who He is to those who will believe.

The Jews believed bread was a gracious gift from God and bread simply could not be eaten without taking time to give thanks to God for the bread. Jesus had demonstrated bread in his hands had no limit. The very thing this people declared to be a gracious gift from God is shown to be without limit in the hands of Jesus.

How could the Jews of that day fail to make the connection? Why? How? Jesus is the One True Bread! All bread comes from the One True Bread. If the disciples had caught on and understood the message - when they found "one loaf" on board the ship - they would have probably rejoiced - they found "one loaf" - what a symbol of the person they have on their boat.

The disciples had become so concerned over the physical bread that they did not understand the message of the spiritual bread. If they had not allowed themselves to become so focused upon physical bread - maybe they would have grasped the message from the One who is The Bread of Life. If they had not become so concerned about the physical things of life - maybe they would have understood the message of the loaves and the fishes. If they had understood that message - they would not have become concerned over having only one loaf of physical bread; because they had the One who is The Provider with them.

So, what are we to take home with us from this passage? "Leaven" signifies a small or hidden thing that may have a huge effect. In the bible "leaven" or "yeast" is almost always used in reference to evil. What was the "leaven of the Pharisees"? And what was the "leaven of Herod"?

A lot of people will tell you the leaven of both of these was "unbelief." The Pharisees certainly suffered from unbelief - and Herod most definitely had unbelief - but that is more of a result of their leaven than it is the leaven itself.

The "leaven of the Pharisees" was hypocrisy. Do you remember Jesus called the Pharisees "hypocrites"? The "leaven of Herod" was an evil lifestyle. Do you remember John the Baptist declaring the intentional sinful lifestyle of Herod?

There are two big reasons why Jesus did not want his disciples in that day to allow the leaven of either the Pharisees or Herod into their lives. And it is the same two big reasons that Jesus does not want disciples today to allow the leaven of the Pharisees or that of Herod into our lives.

First - The very people we are supposed to be "Fishing For" - will see the "hypocrisy" or our sinful lifestyle and we will never be able to bring them to Jesus. Just think about this Fishers of Men in Training - our hypocrisy or our sinful lifestyle - could be the very thing that causes some people to never come to Jesus. And we will play a part in causing them to spend an eternity away from God suffering horribly.

Second - A lifestyle of hypocrisy will result in "unbelief" own our part. A lifestyle of wicked, evil, or sin will also result in "unbelief" within us. Unbelief is a problem when it comes to receiving from Jesus!

And these two "leavening agents" will spread throughout our life, mind, and soul and will cause "unbelief" to rise within us - hypocrisy and sinfulness! Jesus knew his disciples would not be able to believe in Him for provision if the yeast of hypocrisy or the yeast of sinfulness remained in their life. And Jesus wanted those disciples, as well as us today, to not only have life – but to have it to the full. And we can't have life to the full if we are cut off from the provisions of Jesus Christ.

As much as it was true for those Fishers of Men in Training - it is true for the Fishers of Men in Training today. If we want to receive from the divine provision of Jesus Christ - then we must be careful that we do not pretend to have a life that we do not have. We must not pretend to be something we are not. We must acknowledge that we have weaknesses.

We must acknowledge we know that we have not achieved perfection; but we must not use this acknowledgment as an excuse to continue sinning. We must work to get all sinfulness out of our lives. There simply will be no receiving from the Divine Provider - if we are living an ongoing lifestyle of sin. Hypocrisy will permeate our being until we are unable to believe. Sinfulness will permeate our being until we are unable to believe.

This message is helpful to know in two ways. First, this helps us understand why we as Fishers of Men - must live our lives as "who we are" and without pretending to be something or someone we are not. And we must be continually working to get sin out of our lives instead of just living with it.

Secondly, this helps us understand how to better minister to those we meet - sometimes when someone is saying "I want to believe, but I am just finding it hard to believe." It could simply be they are holding themselves guilty for something that God has already forgiven them for. But it sometimes means they are living a lie - they are living the life of a hypocrite - and that is why they cannot believe.

Or they are continuing in a particular sin as a part of their lifestyle - and that is why they cannot believe. Don't automatically judge the person having trouble believing as one who is a hypocrite or an evil doer. It is appropriate to ask them - And it is appropriate to share with them why you would ask such a thing. But it is also appropriate to help them forgive themselves for the things God has forgiven them.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

If you remember, a couple of lessons prior - we shared the events of chapters 6 & 7 would basically be repeated in chapter 8. After Jesus fed the 4000, crosses the sea, then he has an interchange with the Pharisees - and after this he heals a man.

Some have tried to say the second series of events did not happen. They suggest these are the same events being retold. In the previous 2 lessons I have pointed out the differences in the first and second occurrences. And in the lesson we will see one more difference.

In the previous section, Jesus healed a man who was deaf and could hardly talk. In this section, Jesus heals a man who is blind. These are obviously two different healings – but they do share some similarities besides occurring at the same place in the order of events.

Read Mark 8:22 and make notes:

There is an interesting thing about this account and it is rather subtle. After a series of events being recorded "in the region of" - or "in a such and such territory" - we are now told Jesus and the disciples went to a specific village - Bethsaida.

Bethsaida is the home town of Andrew, Peter, James, and John. But that is not what is noteworthy for the message today. We might want to slow down here for a minute and note there was a blind person in the home town of the disciples. Do you think there are blind people in our home town? Spiritually Blind People?

But now to the subtle message. Bethsaida means "house of fishers"! Jesus is in the process of training the disciples to become Fishers of Men- and as he is about to conclude a very important message for his Fishers of Men in Training. He takes them to a village whose name means "house of fishers" for the conclusion of the lesson. Wouldn't it be something – if our spiritual house could become known as “the House of Fishers?”

Read Mark 8:23 and make notes:

If you remember in the earlier event, the people who brought the deaf man to Jesus and begged Jesus to place his hand upon the deaf man. Here, the people who bring the blind man to Jesus beg Jesus to "touch him." In the earlier event with the deaf man, Jesus took the man away from the crowd and ministered to him in a very personal and intimate manner. In this event, Jesus takes the blind man "outside the village" and ministers to him in a personal and intimate manner. Jesus "spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him" - how could you not call this intimate and personal?

It was not Jesus' usual practice to take people away from the crowd to minister to them. Jesus usually stayed where he was when the people came to him for healing. But in these two occasions, Jesus took the men aside to minister to them in a personal way. Throughout the gospel of Mark, Jesus' miracles are all very public and not in any way secret. There are only 3 instances in Mark where Jesus performs a miracle in private: the sending away of the mourners before raising the dead girl; the healing of the deaf man; and the healing of the blind man here in chapter 8. These are exceptions and not the rule. These 3 were specifically for the disciple's learning – not for the public knowledge.

Unlike today, the blind people in those days were confined to standing or sitting on the side of the road and begging for donations in order to survive. And we can imagine how often the blind person heard people pass them by without offering any donation toward helping them. How often this blind man must have heard people passing by, and the people not even saying "hello" - "how are you" - "may you have a nice day" - or anything that would acknowledge he existed.

As we have already pointed out, both the deaf man and the blind man were ministered to in a very personal manner. In taking this blind man by the hand and leading him out of the village, Jesus communicated to this man "you are important to me" - "I am not ignoring you" - "I am not passing you by". How much this personal attention must have ministered to this man! Can we do likewise to those we meet?

Read Mark 8:24 and make notes:

If you remember, in the incident with the deaf man, I shared with you reasons why it is likely that man was not born deaf, but became deaf later in life. There is reason to believe this man was not born blind, but became this way sometime later in life.

Did you notice this blind man responded that he could see people but “they look like trees walking around”? This man would not have known what trees looked like if he had never been able to see at some time. A person who is born blind would not be able to visualize a tree.

Read Mark 8:25-26 and make notes:

This is another case where Jesus is restoring something to a person which had been taken away from them. And we see something noteworthy in Jesus' healing ministry to this man. First, Jesus asked the man if the ministry has been effective. Secondly, there is explicit reference to a partial healing - and this was Jesus doing the ministering here. Third, the laying on of hands a second time for the healing before the healing was complete.

This distinguishes this healing from all the others in the gospel of Mark. This healing alone indicates a partial healing and the need for more ministry before the healing is complete. This passage wreaks havoc with the teaching of some today who say "if you really have the gift of healing, then people will be completely healed when you pray for them and lay hands on them."

Also, there is this interesting instruction of Jesus to the blind man who had been healed. "Go home - but don't go into the village". In an earlier message we saw where the failure to obey Jesus' instructions to keep quiet about the healing resulted in a disturbance or interruption to Jesus' ministry. It is reasonable to understand this is what Jesus was desiring to avoid in this instance.

Things like making the deaf to hear, the mute becoming able to speak, and restoring sight to the blind is the kind of things that get people excited. And these things can get the people so excited that they actually interfere with the ministry. These are the very kinds of things that are promised in passages such as Psalms 146:8, Isaiah 29:18, and Isaiah 35:5.

What should we take home with us from this passage - besides the reminder that we should minister to people in a personal way?

First - "Jesus can restore what has been taken from us." Since this lesson was repeated - it must be important for us to grasp. As Fishers of Men – we do not need to live our lives in fear and worry about Satan destroying our life. We should not live our lives foolishly and recklessly. We should in fact be good stewards. But we don't have to fear Satan's threat to take things away from us. Jesus has more power to Restore than Satan has to destroy!

The second thing we are to take home with us is a little more subtle. Unless we slow down and allow this passage to "soak in" we could very well miss this one. If you have wondered why it has been repeated several times that there are parallel accounts of similar ministry - and why take the time to address the comments of some critics regarding there not being two occurrences of these events - and why take the time to point out the differences in the two sets of events to show that they were in fact two separate sets of events - Would you like to know why this point has been focused upon repeatedly?

When something is really important - a good teacher will repeat it! The Holy Spirit is an Excellent Teacher! The miraculous feeding of a large crowd, followed by a testing by the Pharisees, followed by a miraculous healing - what were the messages we found in these events?

These are very important to Fishers of Men - and the Holy Spirit wants us to have them in our hearts and in our minds. Okay, we can see the message about Jesus being "the bread of life" - and that explains why the miraculous feeding needed to be repeated - the disciples missed the message the first time.

But how does the healing of the deaf man who was having trouble speaking and the healing of the blind man fit into this message to the Fishers of Men in Training? Has anyone noticed Jesus asked his disciples "can't you hear" – "can't you see" – "don't you understand?" Not only was it important for the disciples to understand Jesus was the True Bread – it was important for the disciples to have their ability to "hear" and to "see" - healed by Jesus.

Those first Fishers of Men in Training - needed to see a literal unstopping of deaf ears - and a literal loosening of a bound up tongues - and a literal opening of blinded eyes - so they could understand the importance of Hearing the Word of God - the importance of Confession - and the importance of Understanding the Word of God.

There are a lot of people who hear a sermon on the need for salvation - and they respond by asking Jesus to save them - and that is as far as their Christian experience goes. Has anyone noticed how difficult it is for us to talk to others about Jesus Christ - until we have had a personal experience with Jesus? As carnal believers, we have trouble speaking, don't we?

Has anyone noticed how difficult it is for us to hear from God - until we have a personal experience with Jesus? As carnal believers, we have trouble hearing, don't we?

Has anyone noticed how difficult it is for us to understand God's Word - to see the things of the Kingdom - until we have a personal experience with Jesus? As carnal believers, we have trouble seeing, don't we?

The Second thing: Jesus can help us receive communication from God. Jesus can give hearing to the un-hearing ear. Jesus can give sight to the unseeing eye. Jesus can give understanding to the dull of mind. And as Fishers of Men - we need all three!

We cannot be the kind of Fishers of Men God desires for us to be - if we have nothing more than some contractual agreement with God about salvation. Jesus wants to be as personal and intimate with us as he was the deaf man and the blind man. Until we allow Jesus to have personal time with us - we will never be "Fishers of Men in Training!"

Once we allow Jesus to have personal time with us - we will hear better - we will understand - or see better - and we will find it much easier to talk about Jesus. And the more personal time we have with Jesus – the better we see and hear!

He sincerely desires to unstop our un-hearing ears. He sincerely desires to help us see - or understand the things of His Kingdom. He sincerely desires to empower us to speak of his mercy and grace.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

The passage we are going to look into in this lesson is pretty much in the middle of the Gospel of Mark. I can't tell you whether it was part of the plan of the Holy Spirit when He was telling Mark what to write and that it be in "the middle". But I do think it is in a fitting place. For the passage today deals with the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah. And recognizing Jesus as the Messiah is pretty much at the center, or we might say the heart, of the gospel message. For us to recognize Jesus as Savior is at the center of us being the kind of Fishers of Men God has designed us to Be.

Read Mark 8:27 and make notes:

Jesus has led his disciples approximately 25 miles north from Bethsaida to the district that was dominated by Caesarea Philippi. This is the region that is the source of the Jordan river. This is the area where Herod built a city he named in honor of Caesar. We can get into foggy areas sometimes by trying to make meanings out of every little detail - but I can't help but wonder if there is any theological significance to the fact that Jesus' dignity of being the Christ was first recognized, at least first stated by his disciples in the region which is devoted to the affirmation that Caesar is lord.

While Jesus is here in this particular region, he begins to question his disciples concerning what was being said about him. Frequently Jesus asked a question in order to set the stage for some new teaching. Basically that is what he is doing in this situation.

Read Mark 8:28 and make notes:

The answer to Jesus' question about who the people say Jesus is, reveals something important. The truth about Jesus' dignity and Jesus' function is still veiled from the people as a whole. What this is telling us is that the people see Jesus as a re-incarnation of some important person from the past. They do not see Jesus as anyone or something in and of himself .

It would be a compliment to any one of us, to be seen as the embodiment of one of the great prophets from the past. But to see nothing more in Jesus is to fail to recognize Jesus as God coming to man. The prophets from old, Elijah, and John the Baptist, all served as preparation for the coming of the Messiah. When the Messiah comes and people see nothing more than one of these great people from the past having "come back," is to completely fail to see Jesus for who he is. When we fail to see Jesus for who he is, we are headed toward tragedy.

Read Mark 8:29 and make notes:

This was a crucial question for the disciples. Jesus was a master in the skill of asking questions to get people to think things through so that they could arrive at the proper answer. Not arriving at the answer because they were told the answer but because they considered the important aspects and arrived at the proper conclusion. We see an important distinction being revealed between who the people at large perceive Jesus to be and who those that have been with Jesus for some time perceive Jesus to be. The very fact that the disciples have arrived at this insight is important, or significant.

This is a crucial time in the ministry of Jesus. While the disciples don't know what is coming, Jesus does. It is so very important at this time that the disciples are able to make an open affirmation of the messiah-ship of Jesus.

In the gospel account where Peter is the one who says "who the disciples see Jesus as" and the place where Jesus speaks to Peter about "this is what I will build the church upon"; many people have interpreted these passages as Jesus saying "Peter" is the person upon whom the Church will be built - or that Peter was the one Jesus designated as the first head of the church. This is probably not the best interpretation of these texts – but we will discuss that later.

For now, let me just say that it is very likely that the disciples have had more than one conversation among themselves about Jesus - who he is - what he is - and so forth. Just think about what we might think and say if we were one of the persons who lived with Jesus and moved about the countryside with Jesus - and we not only saw the miracles he performed but we also heard the explanations he gave to the disciples and the teaching that only they heard - wouldn't it be the natural thing for us and the other disciples to discuss "who this Jesus really is"?

Remember, the gospel of Mark is written in summary fashion. Mark records the shortest version possible of each account he does record. The question from Jesus is probably best understood as "Okay, who do you disciples say that I am." And Peter's response is probably better understood to be not just his response of who Peter personally thinks Jesus is, but more like "Well, we have decided that you are the Christ - the Messiah." Whether you want to see it as Peter's personal response for himself or you prefer to see it as Peter answering for the group, at least let us agree on this - to call Jesus the Messiah - or the Christ - or the anointed one - implies divine election and divine appointment of Jesus and it implies the recognition of his divine power.

From Old Testament prophecies - the Jews held to the prediction that one would come who would have a special relationship to God and a special relationship to the people of God. From all that the disciples had witnessed and heard - they had become convinced Jesus had this special relationship both with God and with God's people. They were convinced of his divine empowerment. It is apparent they had no fears or concerns that Jesus got his power from any relationship with demons or the devil. When the disciples were willing to call Jesus the Messiah - or the Christ - it says they were recognizing Jesus as the appointed agent from God.

We should acknowledge that they probably don't see the more costly dimension of what “being the Messiah” really means - but they do believe he is the One they have been waiting for.

Read Mark 8:30 and make notes:

In much the same fashion as they have heard Jesus tell some he has healed in a miraculous way - they now hear Jesus "warn them not to tell anyone about him." Isn't it interesting - now that the disciples have finally come to the place of recognizing Jesus for who he really is - he tells them not to tell anyone "about him."

Why would the Messiah come – the one they have been expecting for such a very long time now – and when he gets here – tell those who recognize him to be the Messiah – "sh-h-h, don't tell anyone that I am the Messiah?" Jesus clearly knew himself to be the Messiah – or the Christ – but we find Jesus making no effort to go about publicly declaring to people – "I am the Christ." Jesus knew he is the anointed and appointed one – and yet we find no record of him promoting himself as such. Isn't that really different from what we would do? When we recognize that we have become something important – We don't hesitate to tell everyone who will listen!

Jesus knew something else as well. The people had developed several different opinions and beliefs as to exactly what the Messiah would do and what he would be like when he did come. Jesus knows he is to fulfill this appointment of Messiah

along some lines that none of them are expecting. We don't find any record of Jesus saying, "well, all of these ideas of what the Messiah will do are wrong, but this group here, they have it right." Of all the expectations - even the most popular ones - Jesus is going about fulfilling the assignment of Messiah in a very different way.

While the disciples have come to the place where they acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah - they are most likely expecting Jesus to be and do according to the expectations of the Messiah that they have been taught. The disciples had no better idea and concept of the assignment of the Messiah than anyone else. It really was important that they not go out telling people Jesus is the Messiah at this time. Because the natural thing to do would be for them to begin to fill in what he is going to do - and maybe even how he will go about doing it.

It is only natural for people to fill in their dreams and expectations concerning people, positions, appointments, offices, etc. Have you ever known someone to begin talking about another person they know who has been assigned to some particular office or position. "I know this person, now that they have been put in charge, this is what you can expect to see happen." It is just natural for us to fill in around the little bit that we do know.

The words are technically correct as to who the disciples say Jesus is - but their concept of what this really meant was very likely wrong. Jesus had previously told people who had received a miracle from him - "don't tell anyone." These people were probably convinced Jesus was the Messiah - but their concept of who and what the Messiah would be were no better than what they had been taught.

Jesus didn't want the people to begin to put false expectations upon him. That really would interfere with Him accomplishing the mission given to him by the Heavenly Father. Jesus had previously told the demons who recognized him, "don't tell anyone." These demons while having significant power - had already proven that they don't have a whole lot of knowledge - even though they lived with God in heaven, they didn't know God well enough to realize what was going to happen when they challenged him. Why would you think the ignorant demons would have any better idea of who and what the Messiah would be and even if they did - they have proven themselves to be liars - you can't believe any report given by a liar. Jesus certainly didn't want the demons putting thoughts into peoples' minds about what the Messiah would do.

Now it comes the time when his disciples finally grasps who Jesus really is - but he knows they don't yet comprehend his mission. The Pharisees and the Sadducees have demonstrated how the organized religious leaders of that day had so confused God's Word and God's instructions to the people. They had the people straining to try to keep technical aspects of God's previous instructions - but none of them - or extremely few of them - appeared to be leading the people to a personal relationship with the Father. Jesus did not want any well intentioned but misguided expectations placed upon Him and the Ministry He was here to give.

The disciples are finally able to say with conviction who Jesus is - Jesus is the Messiah - Jesus is the Christ. But Jesus tells them - just because they have finally come to recognize his true divine identity - they are not yet ready to go about sharing the gospel with others.

To be sure, the disciples were expected to go out and share the gospel. A time was soon coming when Jesus would tell the disciples to go into all the world and make more disciples. However, the disciples needed to see the real ministry of the Messiah - the way God intended for it to be - BEFORE they begin to share it themselves.

From this point forward in the gospel of Mark, Jesus begins teaching his disciples some important kingdom principles. It was necessary for them to be able to recognize who Jesus truly is before they started hearing those kingdom principles.

What does this have to do with us today? Someone may be thinking, "well pastor, this is mildly interesting, but what does this have to do with us being Fishers of Men? I'm not offended at the question - the truth is this is a great question.

And this question is at the heart of why the Holy Spirit inspired Mark to write this down for us who are in training to be Fishers of Men today. In much the same way as the Pharisees and the other religious leaders of that day had misapplied the Word of God. So have many religious people in our day. God today, still desires for us to become personally acquainted with Jesus BEFORE we go out sharing the gospel with others.

It is one thing to have a head knowledge and a head understanding that we are all sinners and we need to be saved - AND that Jesus is the only means of salvation for mankind. It is entirely another thing to come to know Jesus personally - to have been in his presence personally - and to understand Jesus with our heart.

For those who are feeling a little foggy - let's bring this to where we live today. The gospel has never been about the way men or women wear their hair - for those who have hair. The gospel has never been about the kind of clothes we wear - just that we wear some clothes. The gospel has never been about how much paint we put on our faces or that we don't paint our faces. The gospel has never been about how many things we set on fire and then try to breathe through them. The gospel has never been about what we eat or drink.

And yet, well meaning people have time after time - come to a head knowledge of salvation in Jesus Christ and then added to the gospel message their own particular version of what is right and good to the gospel message as they try to share the message with others. And we wonder why the Church is having such a hard time reaching the lost people in America today.

Have ever sat down and wondered why we hear of so many people accepting Jesus in foreign countries? And its like getting people to let you pull their teeth just to tell them about Jesus in America? THIS IS WHY !

The gospel has always been about bringing the lost people into personal contact with Jesus Christ. That Jesus is the only means of salvation - and Jesus loves the person - and Jesus wants a personal everyday relationship with US. This is the gospel message.

As the person lives and experiences Jesus in their daily life, there will be some changes that will take place. But these changes in lifestyle, and wardrobe, and personal grooming, and eating and drinking will all come about as a result of their love affair with Jesus and will have nothing to do with religious laws.

When people spend personal time with Jesus - there will be some internal changes in their thinking, and in their heart, and in their attitude overall. And these internal changes will bring about some external changes. It is simply a natural result of internal change. And these external changes that are a result from internal changes will last - they will be permanent. Most people who make a concerted effort to change things in their external life - experience failure after failure because the internal has remained the same.

I will readily admit that most of the things people are pushing together with the need to accept Jesus as savior are healthy and beneficial things for our physical body. I will readily admit that most of these things would make the person a better person. The problem is - when the changes are due to the religious law they have accepted and they have made no change on the inside - the vast majority of these people are destined to failure in their external changes. And then they immediately begin to condemn themselves for failing - and often receive condemnation from others for backsliding.

The sad truth is that those who have not changed on the inside - are not backsliding when they begin to do the same old things again - for you see they never changed. They only tried to change the appearance of the outside when you put a new coat of paint on just about anything it looks better. But time and the elements wear away the paint. At some point, the pain begins to fade away - maybe even peels away. Paint jobs simply don't last - we all know painting is temporary.

If we are going to be the kind of Fishers of Men that God has designed us to be - and that he desires for us to be - then we need to get to know Jesus personally. We need to spend personal time with Jesus - we need to follow Jesus' instructions, "not to tell anyone who he is", until we get to know him personally. At least, we need to be careful about telling people more than we have experienced concerning Jesus.

Many people would be much more effective as witnesses for Jesus if they would only tell what Jesus has done for them. And stop telling people what they need to do or what they need to give up.

THEN we can share the gospel with those around us - simply leading them to find Jesus as Savior - and leading them to get to know Jesus personally - and to allow Jesus to be a part of their everyday life. And when they do - we will get the joy of watching them change from the inside to the outside and these changes will be more of a transforming than a paint job. Remember, Paint Jobs wear off but Transformations last!

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

In the previous lesson, we looked at the Scripture where the disciples of Jesus had finally come to the place where they could say from their heart that Jesus is the Messiah. Now, we see Jesus beginning to teach the disciples what this really means. I mentioned in the last lesson that it was crucial for the disciples to be able to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ at this time.

With the Scripture we are going to look at in this lesson, begins an entirely different orientation from the earlier part of the gospel of Mark. From this point through the remaining parts of Mark, we will see new teachings about the necessity of Jesus' suffering.

Read Mark 8:31 and make notes:

This is the first prophecy in Mark concerning the suffering of the Messiah. It is important for us to remind ourselves at this point - that the prophecies of the Old Testament as well as the prophecies of the New Testament - were never for the purpose of recording history before it took place. Prophecy was then - and is today - for the purpose of providing assurance for the believers that when these things take place, we can know these things are in accordance with God's plan and we do not need to walk in fear and anxiety.

The full impact and importance of these sufferings of the Messiah would not be grasped, and probably could not be fully grasped, until after the Messiah had completed his assignment. For a number of years, those who like to attack the Bible, claimed the phrase "Son of Man" was not a genuine Greek phrase in use in that era. They liked to use this as one of their examples of why you could not trust the Bible. In recent years, as more ancient text have been studied, it has been shown through conclusive evidence that this particular phrase was in very common use in that area at that time. It occurred very frequently in fact. It was most often used when the person was alluding to humiliation, some danger, or the threat of death concerning themselves.

It was used to indicate humility. Instead of saying "I" thus in so, they would say "the Son of Man" thus in so. In the thought patterns of that day, to speak of "I" in such situations would be like saying "recognize me as somebody," but to say "Son of Man" is like saying "I am but a son of my father."

We stated in a previous lesson that Jesus undoubtedly knew who he was by this time. And yet, here is Jesus using a well recognized phrase of humbleness when speaking of his assignment as the Messiah. The Messiah - The Savior - the very Son of God - without a doubt, the greatest person to ever live on this earth and we see him at this point in his life making sure all glory goes to his father.

Perhaps you will remember this phrase has been used earlier in Mark. It was used in 2:10 where we are told the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins. It was used in 2:28 where we are told the Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath. In our way of thinking - if he has the authority to forgive sins, then he is really something. And if he is Lord of the Sabbath, surely he is worthy of some recognition and honor - maybe even some glory. And yet when he spoke of himself in regard to these things, Jesus used a phrase of humility that was understood not to take any honor from the father.

That is the only 2 times this phrase was used in the entire first half of the gospel of Mark. But as we go through the second half, as Jesus teaches about the specifics of what it really means to be the Messiah, we will see this phrase used some 12 times. The Exalted One, lives out a life of humility, through it all, until he has accomplished all that the Father assigned him to do.

Look again at verse 31. In this first prophecy concerning the suffering of the Messiah, just look at the basics:

1. the Messiah will be rejected by the elders
2. the Messiah will be rejected by the chief priest
3. the Messiah will be rejected by the teachers of the law
4. the Messiah "must be killed"
5. BUT, the Messiah will rise again after 3 days !

Please note that Jesus' first prophecy about his rejection and being killed - does not end on that note - it ends with a note of victory! Disciples, when you see these painful things - the rejection and the killing - do not fall into anxiety – for this is not the end – I will rise again !

Read Mark 8:32 and make notes:

The words translated, "He spoke plainly about this" – means he spoke in terms that could not be misunderstood – they needed no interpretation – there was no question or confusion about what he said.

The phrase interpreted where Peter "began to rebuke him" - is the same phrase used where Jesus "rebuked" demons. Peter understood exactly what Jesus said - he was going to be rejected by all the people who were of any importance in the religious community. And then he was going to be killed.

How in the world could Peter reconcile this? He had just recognized Jesus is the Messiah, the one who had come to save all of mankind. How can it be that the Messiah of all people could allow himself to be killed?

Peter, known for his impetuous actions, simply could not stand quietly by and allow the Messiah to speak like this. So he took Jesus aside - a little ways away from the other disciples - and Peter rebuked Jesus - for saying he would be killed.

Can't you imagine some of the thoughts that were swirling around in Peter's mind? "Snap out of it Jesus - You are the Messiah - You can't afford to allow someone - anyone - to kill you - you are here to bring peace to the earth - you are here to set things right - you are here to bring real salvation to the people of God." How could a Jew, who had been taught from his earliest childhood about the coming Messiah, understand the Messiah would be rejected? It just can't be so!

Everyone had been looking forward to his coming for generations. It is just inconceivable that they would reject him now that he is here - don't even think about killing him.

Read Mark 8:33 and make notes:

Did you notice what this verse says? "When Jesus turned and looked at his disciples." Peter had taken Jesus aside - away from the other disciples to rebuke Jesus for what he had just said. But Jesus understood that the other disciples were having the same trouble accepting his prophetic word as Peter was having.

For the sake of all his disciples - in response to Peter's rebuke of Jesus - Jesus rebukes Peter - and Jesus rebukes Peter in front of the other disciples. It was very important that all of the disciples witness Jesus' absolute refusal of the temptation that was presented to him in Peter's words. God had appointed the Messiah to gain victory over all the sins of this world, by dying on a cross in our place! The suggestion that the Messiah should refuse this assignment was nothing more than a temptation straight from Satan himself and Jesus recognized it.

Jesus was well familiar with the efforts of Satan to thwart God's plan of salvation for mankind. The sharpness of Jesus' rebuke of Peter can appear extremely harsh until we consider Peter's rebuke of Jesus was a suggestion that Jesus disobey God's will and frustrate the plan of God for our salvation. Peter didn't understand it for what it was - but that is - what it was.

Jesus said Peter had in his mind the things of Man! The logic and reasoning of man would have the Messiah raise an army of committed Jews. He would overthrow the Roman government and put the world, as they know it, all under Jewish control. But that's not even close to the mind of God in this matter, is it?

God's people did not need physical redemption any where nearly as much as they needed spiritual redemption. Man's mind was upon the physical – the things of lesser value! God's mind was upon the spiritual – the things of greatest value!

The unregenerate heart of man just naturally finds the suggestions of Satan to make sense. They make so much sense in fact that it doesn't seem like something from Satan. It doesn't seem evil - after all it makes sense. How can something that makes sense be evil? There is a way that seems right to man, but the end of it is destruction.

Read Isaiah 55:9 and make notes:

The ways of God are so much higher than the ways of man that we can't understand them most of the time. Our thoughts are no where near the level of God's thoughts: Abram to leave his land and family; Abraham to sacrifice his son; Moses to stretch out his hand over the sea; Joshua to march silently around a city.

One thing we should note in this passage in Mark - Jesus makes no indication or effort to justify the ways of God to men. Jesus only affirms that they way of the cross is the will of God - and he will not be tempted from it, he will not be turned from it, and he will not be delayed to it.

Read Mark 8:34 and make notes:

When Jesus called the crowd over to hear what he was about to teach - it lets us know that what he was about to say was not just for a select few people - but rather applies to everyone who is a follower of Jesus Christ. So, this call to bear your cross and to deny yourself doesn't just apply to church leaders, preachers, and priest; but applies to every Christian. If we are going to be a follower of Christ then we have to shift the center of our focus away from ourselves and place the center of our focus upon God's will.

This is a true statement for everyone who is a Christian. Can you see how it would be impossible for us to be the kind of Fisher of Men God wants us to be as long as we keep the center of our focus upon ourselves? Anytime, and every time, there is a conflict between us and God's will, we need to choose God's will.

Read Mark 8:35 and make notes:

Jesus truly and personally understood the frailty of human physical life. He understood how precious to the individual their physical life was - and is to us today. However, Jesus understood something that most people then and most people today do not understand.

The physical aspect of our life is the smallest and shortest part of our life. The eternal life that goes beyond the boundaries of this earthly life is of far greater value than the short temporary physical life we have here.

Whoever among us is so concerned about making sure we do not lose our physical life, will most likely lose our eternal life as a result. For when our physical life is the most important thing we have and our physical life remains the center of our focus, this leaves no place for Christ in our life.

Read Mark 8:36-37 and make notes:

Trying to answer these questions is like trying to compare apples and oranges. No, it is more like comparing life giving food and sand. There is no way this ledger can ever be made to balance. What in this world - even the entire world itself - with all of its wealth - and all of its beauty - what of this world could be worth a person's soul? What do any of us have that could be given to redeem, or buy back, our soul that has fallen into the hands of the enemy?

Suppose you were a person of great wealth. Suppose you had millions of dollars in gold, jewels, and stocks. And someone came along and managed to steal all your finances. And even managed to take you home and all your other earthly possessions from you. You decide you want your stuff returned to you.

If you contacted the person who has taken possession of all that you own and you try to make them an offer of something in exchange for your finances, home, vehicles, and other worldly goods; would you say "I will bring you truckloads of Georgia Red Clay if you will give me my wealth back?" How much Georgia Red Clay do you think they would be willing to receive in order to give you back your millions? It is even more exaggerated than that for us to try to buy back our soul with earthly goods!

Read Mark 8:38 and make notes:

Verse 35 began a discussion over failing to obtain eternal life by striving to save the physical life. Verse 38 brings this discussion right into our heart. We can fail to obtain eternal life by striving to save our reputation in this world. Most of us have probably met someone who is open and willing to speak of God and Jesus Christ when they are in Church, or among Believers - but when they get among the world's people, they are ashamed to be known as a Believer in Jesus.

If we are going to be the kind of Fishers of Men God desires for us to be, then we cannot be ashamed of Jesus being our Lord. Even if it means being ridiculed and being made fun of by those in the world.

Read Mark 9:1 and make notes:

We are not going to spend a lot of time on this verse at this time - but we do need to address it briefly. There were those in that day who took this to mean that God was going to come and set up the Messianic Kingdom before all of the people present that day would die. There have been critics of the Bible in later generations who have pointed to this and said, see there, Jesus predicted the Kingdom would be set up on earth before all of those people died and yet they have all died and you people are still looking for him to come back.

What Jesus said was that some of the people standing there with him that day would "not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power." When the disciples saw Jesus after he had risen from the dead, did they see some kingdom power? (resurrection?)

When the Holy Spirit came to reside among men on the Day of Pentecost, did the disciples see the kingdom of God come in Power? All of the disciples except Judas saw the Kingdom of God come with power!

Oh no, the Millennium reign of Christ has not yet begun. But the Kingdom of God has indeed come to earth. And we may be physically upon earth - but we are without a doubt - IN The Kingdom Of God!

What should we take home with us from this passage today?

First - Fishers of Men need to live a life of humility! Not taking any glory from the Heavenly Father - but in fact making sure the Heavenly Father gets all the glory!

Second - Fishers of Men may in fact suffer at times. There certainly will be some victories and many blessings in following Christ Jesus. However, there may be some difficult days - some difficult tasks - some difficult paths. Sometimes our instruction may not make any sense. Our human logic and reasoning may tell us not to do the thing God has told us to do.

As Fishers of Men, we must take up our cross and follow Jesus daily! What is our cross today? What causes us pain or humility if we follow the way of Christ Jesus? The thing that causes one person pain may not be so for another. As Fishers of Men - it means we will bear whatever we must - in order to follow Jesus.

What is our worldly life? What is our reputation and how are we known within our community? Some people hold back from serving God for fear of losing what they perceive to be their reputation.

As Fishers of Men - it means we need to be more concerned with how we are known in the spiritual kingdom than we are concerned with how we are known in the earthly kingdom. It is one thing to be rejected of men, but an entirely different thing to be rejected by God!

What is our sense of Value? As Fishers of Men - it means we need to make sure we keep our sense of values correctly . What we have in the kingdom of God is worth so much more than anything or all of things on this earth.

As Fishers of Men – we need to live our daily lives in such a way that no one could ever honestly accuse us of being ashamed of the Gospel of Christ Jesus. And let us not forget sometimes Believers do in fact go through some painful situations. But so did Jesus. And if our Heavenly Father is allowing us to pass through this painful place, then we must remember that His ways are in deed much higher than our ways. And also remember that he ultimately has good plans for us. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge God and He will direct your paths!

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

The transfiguration is a wonderfully dramatic indicator of the glory which truly belongs to Jesus Christ. It's a terrific message from the Heavenly Father to these who have committed to following Jesus as the Messiah.

When we consider what we saw in the last message, these disciples were having a difficult time accepting the prophetic word that Jesus would suffer major rejection and even be killed. How can these things happen to the Messiah?

It would only be human nature for at least some of these disciples to begin to question themselves, "Maybe I am wrong - if this guy is going to be rejected by the religious leaders - and especially if he is going to be killed - maybe he's not the Messiah after all."

What these men see and hear in the transfiguration event is a divine confirmation that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. Have you ever been in a place of decision where it would have been much easier if God had given you some divine message or sign? At least consider this much before we go any further. These disciples were certainly blessed to receive such a divine message and sign. However, it is important to note that these disciples did not receive a divine confirmation UNTIL AFTER they were able to confess from their heart that Jesus is the Christ. Believing in the heart does not follow divine confirmation. Divine confirmation follows believing in the heart!

Read Mark 9:2 and make notes:

The very first words of this verse are notably different for the gospel of Mark. This gospel is filled with phrases such as "immediately", "suddenly", and the like. Even though we understand these phrases to indicate there wasn't a lot of time between one event and another - these kinds of phrases leave the time span open. Does "immediately" mean a few seconds, a few minutes, or maybe even a few days? Here Mark records "After six days" - so it is important for us to keep this event connected with the time when the disciples acknowledged the divine appointment of Jesus.

There is nothing in this text which tells us it had to be six days specifically, so we don't want to begin reading hidden messages into "six." It is interesting to note however, that in the Old Testament (Ex 24:16) - six days was the allotted time of preparation for receiving a revelation. Since Jesus said nothing about the disciples preparing themselves - it may not be a good interpretation of this text. It is at least an interesting note. But the precise measure of time does emphasize that we should keep this event in its proper chronological order. This divine revelation took place six days after the disciples were able to acknowledge Jesus is the Christ.

For a brief moment, the veil of humanity was pulled back - and these three disciples were able to see Jesus' body and appearance altered in accordance with the splendor and glory which is truly his. As long as they could only see with the natural physical eyes - they saw nothing more than another human being. But when they were privileged to see beyond the human eye's ability - they were able to witness that Jesus was much more than a human being.

Read Mark 9:3 and make notes:

In the Old Testament the glory of God is usually perceived to be a "shining brilliance" or a "bright light." Here the disciples are shown the glory of the Messiah as if it were a "dazzling white." In fact, a white that was beyond the ability of anything on earth to achieve. The dazzling white aspect of this transfiguration is important. The glory of Jesus was more than "very white" – it was more than "extra white" – it was more than "super white" – it was so white that it had to be the way it is due to something beyond this earth's ability. The message conveyed by this transfiguration was of higher importance than any message could possibly be from anyone on this earth.

Read Mark 9:4 and make notes:

Moses was the name the Jews associated with what we know as the Old Covenant. Moses was also the name associated with the Exodus of God's people from bondage and slavery. Moses was the name the Jews associated with the Law.

Elijah was the name the Jews associated with the Prophets and specifically the restoring of all things. No, they didn't have pictures of Moses and Elijah and it is understandable that critics of God's Word want to use this passage to say there was no way the disciples could recognize who these other two people were. The God who can present such a revelation - or such a transfiguration - certainly is capable of transmitting a divine knowledge into the minds of the people present as to who these two people are.

And the text does say they were talking to Jesus. Don't ignore the simple fact that the disciples could have overheard Jesus calling their names as they began the discussion - "Hey Moses, its good to see you again" - "Elijah, it's always a joy to see you" – etc. Don't let someone get you so bogged down with this kind of argument that you fail to hear the message.

The disciples present probably did not grasp the full impact of these two figures at this time - but don't you know that what they have seen here is going to really be meaningful when they get the rest of the message from the Messiah? As important as the Old Covenant was to God's people, represented by Moses, - the importance of the New Covenant, represented by Jesus, is so much greater.

As liberating as the first Exodus was for God's people - it was a temporary liberation - as many of them would again go into bondage of one sort or another. The liberation brought to God's people by the Exodus led by Jesus is complete. As helpful as the Law was to serve as a guide to the people, as to how they should live their lives – Jesus is going to be a better guide! As reassuring as it was to have restoration available as represented by Elijah - the one from whom Elijah received his power - the True Restorer is being made available to God's people - Jesus Christ.

Read Mark 9:5-6 and make notes:

This is one of the really sad places in the gospel of Mark! Let me explain - it is sad because it strikes a chord of reality of where so many of us are today. Peter didn't know what to say because he was so frightened! But bless his heart, it was his nature that he had to either say something or do something - even if he didn't know what to do. Peter, along with James and John, had just experienced the glory of God in this transfiguration.

Okay, we have come to the place where we realize Jesus is the Christ - now we see him with the symbol of the Exodus and The Law - and we see him with the prophet of restoration - the one who is to come before the end - this has to mean "this is it" - what we have been waiting for – is here!

So, let's make a shelter for Jesus, a shelter for Moses, and a shelter for Elijah. "We are going to stay right here where the glory of God has come forth." Peter didn't understand - this wasn't the end of the Messiah's work - this was no where near the end - there was so much more to be done - and this wasn't the place to stay - the rest of the Messiah's work was to be done some other place – even to the ends of the earth.

What makes this so sad? Because the events of this whole account are still taking place among Believers today! God's glory will come forth and bless his people - maybe even encourage his people. And what do we do? We decide "this is it" - "this is what being a Believer is all about." We then begin to make an effort to stay "right here" where the glory came forth. Just like it was necessary for these three very blessed disciples to come off of that high place where the glory had come forth. It is necessary for God's people today to come off of our "spiritual high place" and go forth to where the people are.

God's glory is shone forth in divine healing - then we do nothing but try to get back to that place so we can see another healing. God's glory is shone forth in a prophetic word - then we do nothing but try to get back to that place so we can hear another word of prophecy. God's glory is shone forth in a word of knowledge - then we do nothing but try to get back to that place so we can hear another word of knowledge. We want to "stay" at that place where the glory came forth. This transfiguration was not meant to be an end - but was intended to be an encouragement for the disciples.

The divine revelations and the divine demonstrations of God's glory today are never intended to be the end - never intended to become the thing for which God's people strive - but are intended to be an encouragement for God's people so that we can in fact go out among the people where we live and work - and we can share the gospel of Jesus Christ in our lifestyle as much as in our words. The work of the Messiah is not finished just because a divine affirmation takes place. The work of the disciples was not finished just because they witnessed a divine revelation.

Read Mark 9:7 and make notes:

The presence of the cloud is certainly reminiscent of the appearances of God's glory in the Old Testament – upon the mountain – in the tabernacle – and in the temple. There are a number of Bible scholars who interpret the purpose of the cloud to be for the veiling or hiding of God.

I believe there is a better interpretation of this. God is not a material substance, so any material thing more solid than a cloud would be completely inadequate to represent God. Look at what this Scripture says - the cloud enveloped them.

It wasn't just one person that was being touched by the presence of God. The presence of God was touching all of them at the very same moment. God did not show up wearing a mask to hide himself from them. God showed up and "enveloped" all of them. God reached out and included them all into his presence.

God's glory "includes" and encompasses the Law, the prophets, and the Messiah. A voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

From this cloud that is indicating "all are included" - a verbal message comes forth. This tells us the transfiguration is something more than a prophecy of some future glory on the part of Jesus. He is right now - even at this time - the Son of God - and God loves him.

When God's voice said "Listen to Him" - was it a type of calling them to attention - "now listen up" - "can I have your attention please?" Was it warning - "you had better do what he tells you?" Was it a way of saying "don't listen to others - only listen to him?" Probably some of all of these rather than just one.

There is no need to build a shelter for Moses - he isn't going to remain. There is no need to build a shelter for Elijah - he isn't going to remain. If we were going to build a shelter for anyone - it would only be one shelter and it would be for Jesus. But, there is no need to build a shelter for Jesus in this particular place - he isn't going to stay here - he has work to do in other places.

Read Mark 9:8 and make notes:

Moses and Elijah had lived their lives and ministry in an attitude of obedience - maybe not at all times and in every way - but overall they were obedient to their calling. Now Moses and Elijah could do nothing more - their ministries - as important as they were - must now be submitted to the ministry of the Messiah. The message to the disciples was they were no longer to be looking to Moses and what he symbolized - they were no longer to be looking to Elijah and what he symbolized .

They needed from this point forward to be looking to none other than Jesus Christ. No more looking back! Whatever it is that Jesus says and instructs - this is what they are to keep in view from now on.

Read Mark 9:9-10 and make notes:

Unlike the instructions earlier to the various people - “ not to tell anyone” - this time Jesus puts a time limit on how long they are not to tell anyone - this time, they are not to tell anyone what they have seen UNTIL he has risen from the dead.

It is understandable that they would have trouble with the concept of rising from the dead and how this could possibly have any relevance to Jesus - since he is the Son of God. As the Son of God, how could he die? If he can't die, how can he rise from the dead? Natural questions to human mind - but it tells us they "kept the matter to themselves." However, there is something else they just have to ask about.

Read Mark 9:11-13 and make notes:

Jesus says the prophecy that Elijah would come before the end was a true prophecy. Jesus, in essence, confirms that John the Baptist was the return of Elijah. This is another place where we find Biblical evidence that man has the tendency to "over interpret" prophetic words from God.

No doubt very wise men had discussed the return of Elijah and what it could mean for him to restore all things. And yet they had sorely missed what the return of Elijah would actually be like. Doesn't it make you wonder what else have we messed up in our human wisdom as we interpret prophecy?

What should we take home with us from this message?

First - Don't see the manifestation as the end goal. Just like prophecy is not given simply to have history written before it happens. Prophecy is not given just to impress, or wow, the crowds. Prophecy, as well as every other manifestation of God's glory - is given to man to encourage man - to inspire man - to affirm man - in his walk with the Lord Jesus.

Some years ago, a young teenage man began attending our church services. He came from a rather messed up family situation. One Sunday after attending for a few months, he accepted Jesus as his Savior. It was not a small deal - it changed his heart, it changed his mind, and it changed his life.

For several weeks - either before or after a service - this young man would walk over to the specific spot on the floor where he was when he was saved. With tears in his eyes and great excitement in his voice - he told those who would listen - "it happened right here" - "this is the very spot where Jesus cleaned me up."

When he would come to pray for someone, he always wanted to go and stand on that very spot to pray. He did later come to realize that particular spot wasn't the only place God would talk to him – or others.

To be the kind of Fishers of Men God wants us to be - we need to be careful that we don't restrict God to a particular location. He is with us always – where ever we go – even to the ends of the earth – He is with us. And we need to be careful we don't restrict God to one or even two manifestations of His glory; such as prophecy, healing, etc.

Second - Don't look back - but look forward. We find a great number of people today, who are committed to "doing church" in a specific way – because that is the way grandpa did it – and when grandpa did it this way, wow, the glory of God came down.

There are those who can't depart from a specific set of songs, because the glory of God came down some years ago when those specific songs were being used. There is great beauty and depth of meaning in the symbolism of the Jewish faith. There is a tremendous explanation of what kind of relationship God wants to have with his people in the laws of the Old Covenant; but the Old Covenant and the Prophets were all intended to point God's people toward the Messiah. They were never intended to become something we worship.

It is very common today to find people who have accepted Jesus as their Savior - then have a church take them back into most of the practices of Judaism under the Old Covenant. They don't feel like they are properly dressed to worship God unless they put on so part of the Old Covenant Jewish wardrobe. They don't feel like they can properly worship God without the blowing of the shofar. They don't feel like they are properly worshipping God unless they dance in a Hebrew manner.

Study the symbols - learn from the methods and prescriptions of the Old Covenant. But go on forward with the Lord in the New Covenant. If you think a beanie is attractive - then wear one - and feel good about how you look - but don't bring others back under the law. If you feel more worshipful wearing a shawl - then wear one - but don't bring others back under the law. Wear it because you enjoy it not because it is required.

If you are inspired or gifted to dance before the Lord - dance in the way the Lord is moving in your heart today. Don't think the only way you can legitimately dance before the Lord is the way the Hebrews of old did so. And it is not just limited to the arena of Jewish traditions. Let us not look back at some previous era - or previous experience - and make that the standard for what we must do today. Let us "Listen to" the Son of God - and go where he leads - do what he says - and do so in the manner he leads.

Maybe, just maybe, the biggest reason God keeps changing the method, is because we have proven that we have a tendency to worship the method, instead of the one who met us there. Most of the methods and practices of the Jews were part of the Law. To “go back” to these things is a type of going back under the Law. Let us stay with Jesus.

To be the kind of Fishers of Men God desires for us to be – we need to be going Forward with Jesus and not Back to anything!

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

The passage we are going to examine in this lesson, is bypassed by most church people and by a high percentage of believers. Because they basically don't see the casting out of demons as being relevant for today. So without even asking God if there is something in this passage for us, they just skip over it and move on.

While the passage is an account of demon possession; the message for us as Fishers of Men today - is first of all not about demon possession; and secondly it is very relevant and important to us. While most of the gospel of Mark is written in summary fashion – and often times with the least amount of details – part of the account we are going to look at in this lesson is written in very specific detail.

We go from the glory of the transfiguration to the reality of demon possession. The healing of the demon possessed boy could have happened even though Jesus was not physically present. So it is not at all about Jesus being physically present or being somewhere else.

Read Mark 9:14 and make notes:

When Jesus, Peter, James, and John return from the mountain where the transfiguration took place, they find a large crowd gathered around the other disciples - and this large crowd of people is watching and listening to the argument that is taking place between the disciples of Jesus and the teachers of the law. The text doesn't tell us what they were arguing about, but we can make some pretty good guesses due to the presence of those called "teachers of the law.

The teachers of the law were probably less concerned with the failure of the disciples to cast out a demon. After all that is something these teachers of the law could not do. They were probably arguing about the disciples "right or authority" to be ministering and teaching.

When someone began teaching and ministering anywhere within the Jewish region, it was the normal thing for the Sanhedrin to send a delegation of teachers of the law to investigate what was going on and investigate the person or persons who was doing the teaching. We can just imagine how these teachers of the law might challenge Jesus' disciples regarding their authority to teach. These disciples hadn't been trained by the proper Jewish authorities. These disciples hadn't passed the test of the Sanhedrin. In short, these disciples simply didn't have the proper religious credentials.

Read Mark 9:15 and make notes:

This lets us know, while the crowd had probably been enjoying watching the big arguing match that had been going on - the crowd had most likely come out to see and hear Jesus. When they arrived, Jesus was gone, and all they found were his disciples. It would appear the disciples were ministering while Jesus was away, and this probably was what caused the teachers of the law to begin arguing with them. As much as they probably were enjoying the argument when the crowd saw Jesus, they left the arena of the argument and they ran over to greet Jesus.

Read Mark 9:16-18 and make notes:

There is certainly room for some difference of opinion here - but I do believe the better interpretation is Jesus' question was directed to the teachers of the law: "What are you arguing with them about?"

The man who spoke up was neither a disciple nor was he one of the teachers of the law. The disciples were probably feeling a little frustrated and embarrassed in front of the crowd. The teachers of the law had already learned that they needed to be very careful in their challenges to Jesus. So it would seem natural that both the disciples and the teachers of the law were a little slow in answering Jesus' question.

There was one in the crowd who was very concerned - that is the father of a young boy who had been brought here for Jesus to heal. Since Jesus was away when he arrived, he asked Jesus' disciples to heal his son. His son had not been healed. This father was very concerned for his son's life.

It would be a very natural thing for this concerned father to take advantage of this brief silence and make his petition known to Jesus. This father didn't try to answer the question that had been asked - he had obviously been there,- he could have told Jesus what they were arguing about. But it would appear this man could care less about the argument between the disciples and the teachers of the law. He went right to his desire and that is that son would be delivered from the torment and destruction of the demon.

The description of this boys condition is not so unlike a severe epileptic condition. However, unexpected intervals of epileptic seizures would not have likely taken away the boys ability to speak. And we are told it was the work of a demon. Reference is given to the many times the boy has been thrown into the fire or into the water during these episodes. It was the father's belief that this demon was trying to destroy his son.

A whole sermon could be taught from the symbolism of Satan trying to destroy the image of God in man. But we are sticking with the message of believers becoming the Fishers of Men God has called us to become. It was reasonable for the father to ask the disciples to cast this demon out of his son when he found Jesus was not there.

In that day and culture, it was understood the disciples of a teacher or minister would be doing the things the teacher was doing. It was also reasonable that the disciples minister to this young boy. The disciples had earlier been sent out by Jesus, and they had not only taught what Jesus taught, but they had in fact cast out demons as well. Jesus' disciples were probably as surprised as this father was disappointed when they had failed to cast out the demon.

Read Mark 9:19 and make notes:

"Oh unbelieving generation" - "how long shall I stay with you?" - "How long shall I put up with you?" You can almost hear the heartbreak in the tone of voice Jesus probably used in asking these questions.

Jesus had on more than one occasion prior to this - rebuked, chastised, and reproved the disciples for their hardness of heart and their lack of faith. Even feeling such heartbreak on Jesus' part, we see yet another example of his infinite patience as he continues to instruct those given to him to teach. A little later, Jesus will take these who have failed in their faith and give them some more private instructions and encouragement.

Read Mark 9:20-22 and make notes:

We see Jesus' humanity and concern as he looks upon this boy's pitiful situation and asks the father the length of time this has been happening to the boy. While Jesus is feeling compassion toward the son - the father is most likely feeling desperate - for once again, here is his son being thrashed around helplessly upon the ground.

We don't know how much faith this father had when he brought his son to Jesus for healing. But we can tell his faith is wavering at this point - he says "if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

Now this is something for us Fishers of Men in Training to take note of. This father is asking for help from Jesus - and he is expressing a faltering faith when he says "if you can do anything"

Read Mark 9:23 and make notes:

Jesus' response to this wavering faith on the part of the father is very different from his response to the wavering faith of his disciples. Most believers today who claim to have faith, are pretty quick to chastise and rebuke everyone who expresses any wavering of faith or weakness of faith - both believers and unbelievers.

Jesus only rebuked those believers who had been taught - and should have known better. Jesus did not rebuke those who had not been taught. Jesus did not rebuke those who did not know any better than to just hope - and had not yet reached the place of faith.

I know there are some who prefer to read Jesus' response as being in a tone of voice that is somewhat indignant: "If you can'?" And then a chastising tone of voice when he says, "Everything is possible for him who believes." But I see Jesus' tone of voice a little more tender at this point when he is dealing with this concerned father.

Jesus keyed in on the words spoken in desperation, "If you can?" And then Jesus uses this as a way to teach the father something important; "Everything is possible for him who believes." You, father of the boy, may not believe – but I do believe – and everything is possible for me."

Read Mark 9:24 and make notes:

The response of the father does sound more like one who has been corrected but not necessarily rebuked. The boy's father isn't apologizing – he is acknowledging that what Jesus said is true. There is some “unbelief” in his heart, and life. “Jesus, I do believe, at least some, but I also find myself with unbelief in some areas, please help me overcome my unbelief.”

Read Mark 9:25-27 and make notes:

Jesus noticed a crowd was hurrying over to watch. Once again we see Jesus making an effort to minister some things away from the large crowds. So he cast out the demon before the crowd arrives to see him do it. The affect of the demon upon the boy was such that it took all the strength out of the boy. He was lying there looking like he was dead. His physical strength was completely spent.

Jesus, once again, restores that which Satan has taken away from someone. This time it is physical strength and energy. When Jesus takes the boy by the hand, the boy has plenty of strength to stand up. Doesn't that encourage you to put your hand into the hand of the Lord?

Read Mark 9:28-29 and make notes:

Some translations say “prayer and fasting.” This account is written more like the rest of Mark. After this ministry, they have withdrawn to a house. We are not told which house or where the house is located.

We have seen Jesus take his disciples inside a house following ministry before: 4:10, 7:17, and now in 9:28; and we will see it again in chapter 10. In each case Jesus gives his disciples some supplementary teaching and explanations to accompany the ministry they have just witnessed.

In this account, the disciples wanted to know why they had not been able to cast out this demon. If you remember, a little earlier I stated that it was reasonable for the disciples to think they could cast out this demon. After all they had cast out demons before.

It is likely these disciples made a mistake that far too many disciples make today. They probably began to think – even if only subconsciously – that the power given to them by Jesus to cast out demons was now “their power.”

Here is a subtle concept, but a very important one for Fishers of Men. When we begin to believe in our ability and power – it is a type of “unbelief.” To believe in me is failing to believe in Jesus. Having faith in men is failing to have faith in Jesus.

The disciples had not yet learned what would be recorded later in the New Testament; “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (do you know where this is recorded?) When Jesus told his disciples that this kind just can't be cast out except through prayer; it was a way of saying that we “must stay connected with the source of power.”

Let's be practical and real for a moment. Most of us DO NOT pray as long as things are going well and everything is apparently within our control. Most of us only pray when things appear to be out of our control and we want God to bring things back under “our” control.

When we are continuously praying to the Heavenly Father about everything – it is our way of continuing to acknowledge; that we can't do anything without Him – and it helps us to continue in our faith that we can do “all things” through Him.

Here are some things to take home with us from this lesson:

First -

Don't be so quick to rebuke those who are wavering in their faith.

To be the Fishers of Men God wants us to be, let's not be so quick to rebuke those of little faith. Instead, let's use our faith on their behalf.

Please consider Fishers of Men: Are we going to get unbelievers to become believers by chewing them out real good every time they express their unbelief? Or will we have a better success by showing them what can happen as we express and use our faith?

Second -

Don't worry about Satan stealing our strength and energy.

Fishers of Men – I don't want Satan to take anything from me. But I know that even if he does zap me of my strength and energy – Jesus is more than able to restore it to me. It just isn't worth one moment of our time to worry about Satan robbing us of our strength. Or anything else for that matter.

Third -

Don't minister without praying.

It is important for us to remember; when we begin to believe in our ability and power – it is a type of “unbelief.” Let's not fall into the trap of believing in our own ability and power. That is failing to have faith in Jesus. As Fishers of Men, we can indeed do all things as needed. But let us remember that it is “In Jesus” that we can do all things.

By continually praying as we minister, it is a way of staying connected to the very source of power. The source of power that cast out demons. The source of power that restores stolen strength and energy. The source of power that can withstand the challenges and arguments of those sent by Satan to distract us and to discourage us.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Every Believer needs to know the message we are going to study in this lesson. But Believers who believe in the modern day use of Spiritual Gifts particularly need to hear this message. The fact is, it will be highly unlikely that we will be able to be the Fishers of Men God has called us to be, if we don't know the principles revealed in this message.

Read Mark 9:30 and make notes:

Entering again into Galilee, Jesus and his disciples have returned to familiar territory. This verse lets us know the public ministry that had so stirred the territory before, is not going to be resumed; "Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were."

Read Mark 9:31 and make notes:

The reason Jesus didn't want anyone to know where they were is - He wanted to teach his disciples. There is an urgency arising in the ministry of Jesus. It is important that he be able to communicate some things to his disciples without being interrupted. With all the many people who need ministry – Jesus is avoiding some of them in order to teach His disciples.

I know some people will object to even suggesting; "Oh my goodness Pastor, are you trying to say teaching somebody something could be more important than healing the sick, casting out demons, and giving words of prophecy? - tell me it ain't so!" Here is one instance where Jesus felt this is true.

Jesus made no apologies about healing the sick, casting out demons, or giving people Words of Knowledge. But it is very apparent Jesus felt it was more important for his disciples to know certain things than it was for the people of the community to receive physical healing, deliverance from demonic control, or other personal ministry.

In this verse we find the Second Major Prophecy of the Passion of Christ. "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." The first prophecy of the passion was in 8:31 – where Jesus said, "the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again."

In the first prophecy concerning the passion, Jesus said these things "must" take place – He must suffer – he must be rejected – he must be killed – he must rise again. This is saying that these things are more important! In the second prophecy concerning the passion, Jesus said he is going to be betrayed – they will kill him - and he will rise. This is saying these things are set – they are going to happen. These events are more than just important - they are more than just necessary - these events are going to take place.

Read Mark 9:32 and make notes:

This verse helps us understand the loneliness Jesus experiences along the way to Jerusalem. The disciples not understanding what Jesus is telling them - and their reluctance to ask him - probably leads the disciples to avoid Jesus to a certain degree.

Many of us know what it is like to have something happen and we don't want to talk about it with a certain person, so we avoid them. If we can't avoid them physically - and we have to be around them - we might not talk to them at all - or we might make sure every topic in the world is brought up except the one we don't want to talk about.

And the person being avoided — can almost always tell we are avoiding them. Even though we may be physically near them - we are certainly not near them emotionally or spiritually. The disciples don't know what Jesus means by what he has said and they are probably afraid to ask him to explain it - because something just tells them it might be painful to know.

Read Mark 9:33-34 and make notes:

The previous verse left us with the idea that the disciples had probably avoided Jesus. So when they arrive at Capernaum, Jesus asked them what they had been arguing about on the trip. Anyone who has taken a trip with children can get a pretty good visual of the facial expressions that probably took place about this time.

A number of the disciples probably wanted to look innocent - whatever that might look like. Several others probably tried to move their heads slowly from side to side trying to indicate they weren't arguing and hopefully he will think they don't know what he is talking about. One or two others may have even gone so far as to try and lie - only a little of course - "arguing?" - "oh, we weren't arguing."

Now come on - if you had been one of the disciples in that situation, would you have just stepped forward and said, "Oh well, Jesus, we were just arguing about which one of us is the greatest." These men, just like us today, were greatly influenced by the society in which they lived. In that society rank, position, title, and some degree of authority were very important.

For the person who is new on the job today – they don't think much about these things. They know they are the lowest person on the ladder - like the private who just joined the military - they they realize "everybody" out ranks them. But let them work there for a little while - it becomes much more important to them – they want to know just where you are on this authority ladder.

Do you have more authority than me? – or maybe you're on the same level with me. Do I have authority over you? It feels really good to discover you have the authority to tell someone else what to do. In the military, it's fairly easy. Everyone wears some insignia that shows their rank. But what happens when two soldiers meet who are wearing the signs of the same rank? They ask, “how much time in grade to you have?” The one who has held that position the longest time, has some level of authority over the other.

Read Mark 9:35 and make notes:

Even though they wouldn't confess up - Jesus knew the argument that was going on among them. Jesus calls the Twelve - this means he gets their attention and they all come closer. Jesus then begins to resolve the issue of precedence and authority in a manner that none of them could probably have even imagined. If you want to be No. 1 in the kingdom of God, then you must become the "servant of all."

This is very much a reversal of all human ideas of greatness and rank. But it lines up so good with "Love your neighbor as yourself" which they will learn later.

The order of life for disciples of Jesus Christ in their relationship to each other is to be one of love. Jesus transformed the question of greatness into a task of orientation of service. Jesus transformed the pattern of human relationships into one which leaves no practical place for strife or opposition for one another. The disciple's thoughts were more upon personal glory where rank has importance. Jesus turned the thoughts of glory and greatness to be the way of serving others.

This concept immediately becomes a problem in the church where men and women are fighting and competing for a certain number of titles and positions of authority. And sometimes, we find it necessary to give ourselves a title which sounds like it has authority because no one else has given us one.

Read Mark 9:36-37 and make notes:

Jesus understands the human mind. He knew how difficult this concept was going to be for his disciples. So, Jesus took an illustration right from life to help them, and us, to understand. Jesus brought a young child, with no ambitions of greatness or lordship, and placed him before these ambitious disciples. "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me."

Which one of these children had performed miracles? All of the disciples had done this. Which one of these children had cast out demons? All of the disciples had done this. Which one of these children had taught the kingdom of God is near? All of the disciples had done this. Which one of these children had abandoned earthly things to follow Jesus? All of the disciples had done this.

To our fleshly mind, the only logical argument is which of these disciples had given up the most to follow Jesus - or perhaps which of these disciples had performed the most miracles - or cast out the most demons - or had done the most effective job of preaching the good news. And yet, Jesus says it is the one who welcomes the child in his name?

Some want to teach this only applies to the children that are "sent in Jesus name." That's stretching the text a little too far and that is keeping the discussion in the arena of precedence and rank. Let's keep this text in the arena of who is the greatest in the kingdom of God.

Jesus is trying to communicate to his disciples a very important principle. It isn't a matter of how many miracles you perform. It isn't a matter of how big the miracles are that you perform. It isn't a matter of how many demons you cast out. It isn't a matter of who can cast out the demons the quickest. It isn't a matter of who is more eloquent or more effective at preaching the good news. It isn't a matter of just how much we give up to follow Christ. It is clearly and simply a matter of who is "serving all." So how does the child fit into all of this? What is the likely benefit to serving children?

People sometimes serve adults in hope of getting a reward - or at least paid. People sometimes serve adults in hope of getting some inheritance. People who serve for reasons like these probably are not going to serve children! And yet Jesus said the one who is the greatest in the kingdom of God is the one who is the servant of all. And then, Jesus said - the one who receives the children - it is as though they are receiving me. This person is not only receiving the child, but receiving Jesus, AND receiving the one who sent Jesus as well.

Here are a couple of things take home from this lesson:

First -

There are some lessons for disciples to learn that are more important than performing miracles, casting out demons, and giving words of knowledge or prophecy.

This does not mean we should not be doing these things as part of the ministry. Because we most definitely should! What it does mean - is we need to be careful that we don't get so caught up in the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we fail to learn the rest of God's Word.

Some of us should speak in tongues more. But the Word of God does not say - "speak in tongues to show yourself approved."

Some of us should be using our Gifts more. But the Word of God does not say - “perform miracles to show yourself approved.”

The Word of God says, “Study to show yourself approved.” It is important for Fishers of Men to know God's Word!

Second -

The greatest in the kingdom of God is the one who serves the most.

Not the one who leads the most - Not the one who entertains the most - Not the one who goes to the most places! But the one who serves the most.

That might mean the greatest in the kingdom of God just may not have any title. In order for us to be the kind of Fishers of Men we have been called to be - We must keep these two things in mind. And we must incorporate these two things into our daily lifestyle.

If you haven't been baptized in the Holy Spirit, by all means pray and ask God to do this for you. If you haven't identified what or which Spiritual Gifts you have been given by God, by all means pray and ask him to reveal these to you. If you have Spiritual Gifts, by all means use them to minister to those around you. But let us never lose sight of the fact that it is "our serving others" that brings greatness in the kingdom !

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

In the book of Proverbs we are told - *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."* This is recorded twice in Proverbs - in chapter 14 and again in chapter 16. Anytime something is repeated by the teacher - it is important – and we should take note of it.

As Fishers of Men - we must be careful to evaluate "what seems right" to us before we jump in and start doing some things - or jump in and start saying some things. This lesson is primarily for Believers - those who are to be Fishers of Men.

While there is an element of today's lesson that can be applied to the non-believer. This message has a pointed spear-head that is directed to those of us who would be Fishers of Men.

Read Mark 9:38 and make notes:

John, brings to Jesus' attention - what he sees as an “un-authorized” use of the power of Jesus' name. And the way this text reads, we get the impression it wasn't just John, but at least several of the disciples - For he says "we saw" and "we told him."

It appears to have disturbed the disciples that someone who was not part of the "twelve" was exercising the power that is in Jesus' name. Can't you just hear these disciples: "Now wait just a minute - we have a special and intimate relationship with Jesus - we have his permission to use his name - you don't - so just stop driving out demons in Jesus' name until you receive authorization to do so."

The disciples seem to believe they are the only ones who have been authorized to exercise the power of Jesus' name to minister to those in need. It is important to recognize this attitude and this way of thinking goes all the way back to the original twelve disciples - in fact it goes back to those who were the closest to Jesus.

In the generations since that time - right up to today - there have been those who will come into town from time to time - and begin to teach people - "only certain people are authorized" to minister. Some will teach - you should not preach until you receive official authorization - you should not baptize until you receive official authorization - you should not serve communion until you receive official authorization. And there are a number of other things various groups will throw out there. This is not a teaching that has gone astray in recent times - it has been a misguided way of thinking right from the beginning of the formation of the New Testament Church.

And we can see in today's text - it existed in the foundation of the Church – as the Twelve apostles struggled with this way of thinking. Now I ask you to read this verse carefully again before we move on – Do you notice it says, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name."? This indicates this man was being successful at driving out demons – "we saw a man driving out demons." I cannot help but wonder if the disciples were not affected to some degree by the fact that just shortly before this – the disciples themselves had failed to drive a demon out of a young boy!

We can see the disciples might think they are the only ones Jesus has authorized to use his name. And to see someone they recognize as a stranger - not one of them - using Jesus' name - could be disturbing to them. But to see this stranger actually being successful at something where they had failed - well, do you think a little fleshly jealousy might have begin to bubble to the surface?

It is entirely possible there is something those first disciples didn't know. When Jesus commissioned the Twelve to go out and preach the good news and to cast out demons and to heal the sick - during that time they were away from him ministering in the authority of his name - isn't it possible Jesus might have authorized one or two others to go out and do the very same thing?

Whether this man had received first hand personal authorization from Jesus or not - might be a point that could be argued. But it does appear this man - whoever he was - had grasped the simple truth that one of the essential parts of Jesus ministry was to confront and to defeat the works of Satan. It also appears this man was giving Jesus the credit for the ministry he was performing. He was casting out demons "in Jesus' name" and not his own personal name or authority.

Perhaps one of the first questions we should ask might be - "could this man successfully minister "in Jesus' name" without the permission or authority of Jesus?" There is an account in Acts 19 where 7 sons of Sceva - tried to cast out demons in Jesus name and the demon possessed man hurt all seven of them.

That account leads us to believe it isn't a safe thing to pretend to have something you don't – such as authority. So when I consider the account where things didn't go so well and then consider this account where the man was apparently successful - I cannot help but conclude this man was ministering in the name of Jesus by permission and by authority to do so. When did he get this authority? I don't know.

The simple fact the power of Jesus' name was active in this man - bringing release to those who were being enslaved by the work of Satan - tells us this man was a believer. At least make a little asterisk in the margin of your bible. Here is a believer - who is not part of the original twelve - who is ministering in the name of Jesus - and miraculous things are taking place. Not part of the original twelve, not ordained by any one of the original twelve, and he is performing miracles “in Jesus name.” Surely something to think about.

Read Mark 9:39 and make notes:

Jesus did not accept or excuse the narrow minded exclusivism that was beginning to develop in the Twelve. These very first disciples - the ones we will later call the apostles - were in fact abusing the authority they had been given. They were presuming to speak for Jesus in regards to who could minister and in what way. And Jesus never gave them this authority. Jesus gave them the authority to preach the kingdom of God has come "in his name." Jesus gave them the authority to heal the sick "in his name." Jesus gave them the authority to cast out demons "in his name."

But Jesus never gave them the authority to decide who could minister and who could not minister in his name. Jesus never gave them the authority to decide who could use his name and who could not. Jesus told the Twelve, "Do not stop him."

What Jesus says next is very important: "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me." Jesus did not say "anyone who speaks in my name" - or "anyone who tries to do something in my name." Jesus said "anyone who does a miracle in my name."

If they are able to do a miracle in the name of Jesus - then this person is not going to be able to turn right around and misuse, blaspheme, or say anything bad about Jesus. With this rather gentle rebuke - Jesus contrast the effectiveness of this unknown minister - with the in-effectiveness of the Twelve in a recent ministry situation.

This also points out to them – and to us today – the effective and successful use of Jesus' name - indicates “divine recognition” of that person's authority - whether there is recognition among men or not.

Read Mark 9:40 and make notes:

This statement by Jesus is one that many people would prefer to leave out of the Bible. This little statement makes a rather radical recognition that there really is only two sides. Those who are for Jesus - and those who are against Jesus!

Please don't ever accept the little - but devastating lie that there is a place of being neutral concerning Jesus. If you don't choose to be with Jesus - you are automatically against Jesus. And being an enemy of Jesus is a very dangerous place to be. So, if we have not purposefully and personally chosen Jesus to be our Savior, we are against Jesus! Again - This is a dangerous place to be!

Read Mark 9:41 and make notes:

First let me state clearly - to say a person will "not lose his reward" is not the same as saying they are saved. He "will certainly not lose his reward" says only that the reward for this will not be lost. As surely as there is only two sides - either with Jesus or against Jesus - there is also rewards for those who offer help and assistance to the disciples of Jesus "because you belong to Christ."

If a person offers refreshment, comfort, assistance in any way "because you belong to Christ" - this person will not lose the reward for this action. No one can successfully minister "in the name of Jesus" – unless they are a member of the Kingdom of God. And whether they are a member of the kingdom of God or not – every person who refreshes or blesses a member of the kingdom of God will be rewarded. Nothing - and no one - can steal that reward from them. And this is talking about rewards here in this world. It is a special and blessed thing to be a member of the kingdom of God.

Read Mark 9:42 and make notes:

This verse reinforces the thought that the reward has to do with this life. For being thrown into the sea with a millstone around your neck will not affect your situation after this life. It only affects this life. Those who bless and refresh a member of the kingdom of God will have a reward in this life that cannot be taken from them. And those who "causes a believer to sin" is going to suffer so much in this life that they would be better off to end it all right now.

We must not allow this to be overlooked. This is a warning to the disciples! What had they tried to do where this stranger was concerned? They had actually tried to stop him from ministering in Jesus' name. Later in the New Testament we are told that to "know to do good and not to do it is sin."

If this man had in fact been commissioned by Jesus to minister in his name - and he stopped ministering in Jesus name - this man would be sinning. And who would have caused this man to sin? It would have been the disciples of Jesus who made him quit – or convinced him to quit ministering in Jesus name. This warning was more of a warning to the disciples than it was to the world at large.

What are we to take home with us from this lesson?

**First -
It is God who authorizes ministers.**

It isn't man made organizations - and certainly not man made civil governments. Be very careful of those who make a big deal out of their claims to have a continuous line of authority from the first apostles right down to today!

Be careful of those who make a big deal out of only authorized people performing ministry. If we see someone ministering successfully and effectively in Jesus' name - we will do well to accept the fact that they are a disciple of Jesus. Even if they are doing something different from us.

Second -

There are earthly rewards for those who refresh the saints and earthly punishments for those who cause the saints to sin.

When someone claims to have come in Jesus name - we need to be very careful “to do no harm.” If we are unsure - at the most we might withhold what we have - but we need to be very careful we do not cause them to sin. As Fishers of Men, let us be careful “to Fish” – and not be guilty of stopping others from ministering.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Have you ever heard anyone state something like this: "God knows me - and he understands - and he won't punish me for my little indulgence into this sin"? Or maybe you heard someone say, "God made me the way I am and He isn't going to punish me for this activity"?

I want to ask - is there some sinful activity you are engaging in? If so, are you telling yourself that for some reason or the other - God is just ignoring your sin?

The first thing I must say when I hear the kinds of statements listed above: we are not the way God made us - we are the way sin has made us! And Yes, God does understand - and that is exactly why God says "Stop doing That!"

Let's continue our series on becoming Fishers of Men. God has an important message for us in this lesson regarding this issue.

Read Mark 9:43-48 and make notes:

Wow! These verses call for a level of obedience that sounds pretty radical to the average American today! In the last lesson, we looked at Jesus' comments about someone causing another person to sin. But here Jesus is talking about someone allowing themselves to enter into sin. If you stop and think about it, the issue is pretty much the same in both cases.

When talking about someone causing another person to sin – Jesus said it would be better for that person to have a mill stone tied around their neck and to be thrown into the sea. When talking about someone allowing themselves to enter into sin - he said it would be better to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, or one leg, or one hand - than it would to be thrown into hell with all your body parts in place.

Fishers of Men - is there anything in these few verses that you think would support the idea that God is okay with us continuing in some sins? I can't tell you how many times I have listened to a believer say something like - "well God understands, and he loves me, God isn't going to punish me for this little sin." We need this message today, at least as much as those first disciples did!

In these verses we see the phrase "enter into life." Most Bible scholars agree this is referring to "life with God." To be with God is to have life - to be separated from God is to not have life.

While the concept was not developed to the point we have today - of what it might be like to be in heaven - for the people of that day - to "enter into life" with God had the concept of blessings, pleasure, and comfort. To be thrown into hell conveyed an image of extreme horror and suffering.

The people of that area, in the years Jesus was walking about and ministering in his fleshly body – did not refer to things in abstract terms – or they didn't refer to an abstract activity. It was customary in those days to speak of a specific member of a person's body as being responsible for activity. So when Jesus began speaking about the offending hand, or the offending foot, or the offending eye - Jesus was speaking to the people in the manner of their usual conversation.

There are several things worth noting here in this text:

The first is these particular members of the body are easily identified with specific functions of our body. Had Jesus referred to internal body part and its function - there might be room for disagreement. Through the years, several philosophical views had developed. Some people had come to think the internal organs of the body actually caused certain types of activities within one's life. The problem was that some of these philosophical views actually contradicted one another. There wasn't any argument about what function the hand plays, or the foot, or the eye.

The second thing worth noting in this text is Jesus is talking as though a person is responsible for the actions they take. "If your hand causes you to sin" - Jesus did not say "if the Devil causes you to sin", etc.

The third thing worth noting in this text is the radical demand for action. If one of your body parts causes you to sin - you should cut it off! Or you should pluck it out! Better to be without a body part than to be thrown into hell!

There is no other way to read this passage than to see it as Jesus calling for the complete sacrifice of sinful activity in the lives of Believers. This is not a demand for physical self-mutilation! But it is speaking of the most costly sacrifice - if that is what it takes to get sin out of our lifestyles.

If you were seriously injured and unconscious so that you could not speak for yourself - would you want the surgeon to amputate a limb - or remove a crucial internal organ - if that is what it takes to save your life? Most of us wouldn't even hesitate to say yes to this situation. Now remember, Jesus is speaking to these people in the manner to which they are accustomed. We know from other Scriptures in the New Testament that it is NOT our hand, or foot, or eye, or even our mouth that causes us to sin. We may sin - by what we do with a particular body part - but it isn't that body part that causes us to sin is it?

Because we have the benefit of the rest of the New Testament - we know it is the condition of our heart that causes us to sin. So the analogy Jesus is using about the sinful member of our body being removed rather than to be cast into hell - is telling us that regardless of how important we might consider this particular thing in our life - NO thing in our life should be held onto so strongly that we allow it to cause us to be thrown into hell.

Whatever it is in one's life that tempts us to be untrue to God - Whatever it is in one's life that tempts us to sin - it should be promptly discarded so that we hold onto nothing that interferes with us fully entering into the kingdom of God.

Read Mark 9:49 and make notes:

This little verse is overlooked by so many who teach on these Scriptures. In Luke 3 – we have the account of John the Baptist saying that one was coming after him who will baptize Believers with the Holy Spirit – AND WITH FIRE !

The "salted with fire" that everyone will experience of which Mark 9:49 is speaking – is a fire for purification rather than fire for destruction. When we think of being "baptized with fire" it can cause some alarm or concern. The picture of being completely covered over with fire sounds rather destructive doesn't it?

Jesus knew these people had not heard - or read - all the things we have now read in the New Testament. So he spoke to them about being "salted with fire." The image of being salted with fire is not as scary as being baptized with fire. If you study the sacrifices of the Old Testament - many of them had to be accompanied with salt to be an acceptable sacrifice.

In 1 Peter 1 — we are told that Believers will suffer trials - fiery trials. And we are told that God will use these trials to purify us much like the refiner's fire purifies the gold and silver. God desires for the Believer to be pure - pure in every aspect of our life - or lifestyle. This is simply “a must” in order for us to be Fishers of Men!

Read Mark 9:50 and make notes:

In that culture and time - salt was not only good - it was very important. There was no refrigeration. Salt was used not only to enhance the flavor of a meal; but salt was used to preserve meats to keep them from going bad. Salt was Good!

From writings of that era, we have discovered many people obtained salt from the sea. They used sea salt - and we read they had discovered salt can "go bad." Salt can lose its saltiness and become insipid.

What good is the salt that has lost its saltiness? Once the salt has lost its saltiness - it can't enhance the flavor of anything. And it certainly can't preserve anything to keep it from going bad! Jesus was speaking to his disciples when he says in Verse 50, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

Jesus desired for his disciples to be "salt" to the rest of the world. Fishers of Men — we are to have salt within us The world needs us to be salt. The salt that is within us can preserve and protect this world.

As Fishers of Men - if we maintain the "salt within us" - we can perhaps keep some brother or sister "from going bad." As Fishers of Men – if we maintain the "salt within us" - we can enhance the flavor of the gospel to those who are hungry for salvation and deliverance from their way of life.

Most of us are old enough to have experienced or at least to have witnessed – some people who have lost their saltiness concerning God's kingdom. They are usually very sincere people who are probably trying to witness for Jesus out of duty more so than out love for God. The way they present the Gospel is not only "not enhanced in flavor" – it is very distasteful – and the people they are trying to reach with the gospel are repulsed and chased away by the gospel message as it is presented.

As Fishers of Men – the way we conduct ourselves in everyday life – should be with the saltiness of having Jesus alive and well in our hearts. With the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us and through us and that isn't going to happen if we are continuing to participate in sin. One truth is this – if Believers shut themselves up and cut themselves off from the world – they might have salt - but no one benefits from it.

The message of this lesson is not warning us about keeping ourselves and our message from the world. This lesson is warning us about losing our saltiness!

Fishers of Men - we must be very conscious of the things we have in our life:
Is there anything that is keeping us from God ?
Is there anything that is keeping us from serving God ?
Is there anything that is keeping us from worshiping and praising God ?
Is there anything that is keeping us from being salt to those around us ?

This is such a serious issue with God - the analogy He gives us is that we would be better off giving up an important body part - if that is what is standing in our way of being obedient to God!

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group: