

Mark

Section 5 – 11 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.

Mark's recording of Jesus' Galilean ministry stops with chapter 9. In Chapter 10 - and for the rest of the gospel of Mark - it reads like a swift moving series of events and teachings that come to a peak in Jerusalem. The first teaching of Jesus recorded in Mark 10 is one of those that you just can't teach on without disappointing somebody.

Jesus had something to say to his disciples to help them become the right kind of Fishers of Men. He said it to the disciples in response to a question from the Pharisees about DIVORCE. And today in our country - it is very difficult to find a family that has not been touched by divorce. No matter how you approach the subject of Divorce in church - there is likely to be someone who gets angry at you for what you say. There is likely to be someone who becomes annoyed at you. There is likely to be someone who becomes very disappointed with you. And several other variations of these emotions.

If you ask around - you will hear a number of ministers giving advice that says basically - Don't teach or preach on divorce - you can't win - you are always going to make somebody unhappy. This advice is very similar to that given concerning abortion isn't it? If we begin to avoid teaching and preaching on sins that have probably been committed by people in our congregations - it wouldn't leave any sin on which the minister could teach or preach. I made a commitment to God some time ago that I would be faithful to teach and preach what he told me to do.

I realize that no matter how I approach this subject in this lesson - that there will be someone who is going to be unhappy with me about it. I don't want any of you mad at me - BUT - I am more concerned that I am faithful to God's Word AND that I am obedient to God. I ask you to remember - this series of messages is about us becoming Fishers of Men. So the message has something to say about us becoming Fishers of Men.

Why is this account of what Jesus said about Divorce included in the passages of Scriptures that teach us how to become Fishers of Men? Some might be tempted to say it is because the Pharisees brought up the subject. It is true the Pharisees brought it up - but Jesus could have answered the Pharisees. Jesus could have even taught the disciples more detail about it in private. And the Holy Spirit did not have had to inspire Mark to write this down. There are many things Jesus did and many things Jesus taught - that are not recorded in Mark.

We stated at the outset of this series - that everything recorded in Mark - is for the purpose of teaching us how to become the Fishers of Men God has called us to be. Since the Holy Spirit inspired Mark to record this response to the question about Divorce - it must have something to say to us as Fishers of Men. We should seek to find and focus on that - rather than what is or is not said about divorce specifically.

Read Mark 10:1 and make notes:

If you will remember, just a few lessons back - we stated Jesus put aside his public ministry - in order to teach his disciples some important things. Verse 1 is one of those summary passages Mark is famous for - and it tells us the public ministry of Jesus has started again. When Jesus returned to the region in which John the Baptist had ministered - it didn't take long for crowds of people to once again make their way to where Jesus was.

Read Mark 10:2 and make notes:

From writings of that era - it would appear the Jewish people, including the Pharisees and their Scribes - were in agreement concerning divorce. If they are in agreement then why ask Jesus this question?

Divorce was permitted and legal - Deuteronomy 24. There was however, some disagreement over the phrase "something shameful" or "something indecent" in the passage in Deuteronomy.

By the time Jesus came in the fleshly body - the Jews had divided into two major viewpoints on this topic. One group believed this phrase had to do with something morally shameful - particularly adultery - and perhaps even the wife's failure to observe the Jewish law.

The other group believed this phrase included anything that caused the husband to be embarrassed. There are a number of people who believe this is what the Pharisees were testing Jesus on. I suggest to you that their testing had more to do with the basic lawfulness of divorce in general.

Do you remember John the Baptist had denounced the divorce and the remarriage concerning Herod Antipas and Herodias? John the Baptist called things like he saw them and when he did so concerning this divorce and remarriage - it led to his death. That kind of preaching today still sometimes leads to a minister being given the left foot of fellowship from churches.

Jesus has returned to the region in which John the Baptist had ministered. It is very likely these Pharisees had every intention of compromising Jesus in the eyes of Herod. It would be reasonable to think they even hoped Herod would seize Jesus and kill him just like he had killed John the Baptist. If they could just get Jesus to take the position John the Baptist had taken.

If you will remember back in chapter 3 - it told us of the cooperation between the Pharisees and the Herodians. We will see that mentioned again in chapter 12. So there is every reason to think these two groups are still cooperating with one another at this time in chapter 10.

Read Mark 10:3-4 and make notes:

Jesus made it clear he wasn't going to get into the specifics of either of the two major views of what constitutes "shameful" or "indecent." Jesus made a direct appeal to “what did Moses say?” The Pharisees answered with a summary of Deuteronomy 24 - "Moses permitted divorce."

If you study carefully the Old Testament - you are hard pressed to find Scriptures that say divorce is okay. In fact Moses didn't even say divorce was okay. The provision for divorce by Moses did not in itself determine that divorce was right or wrong. The provision for divorce by Moses had the primary purpose of protecting the woman who was being put aside by her husband.

The decrees of Moses concerning divorce describes a right the wife – or ex-wife – is to be given. If the husband is going to discard her – then he is to give her a certificate of divorce which authenticates her release from their marriage contract. This would give her the right to marry another. And no where in Moses' writings do we find anything that says, “divorce is okay with God” or that “God approves of divorce.”

Do you remember the penalty for a married woman having sex with a man other than her husband? She was to be stoned to death! If Moses had not made this provision, how many women would have been stoned to death?

In the days of Moses, women did not have the ability or the freedom to make a living like women today. The only real hope a woman had of surviving in that heavily male oriented society was to be aligned with some man. Preferably a husband after she leaves her father.

We can see how a compassionate civil leader would work to come up with some provision to save the lives of a large segment of his constituents. Please, before you set out to stone me over taking this position concerning Moses' intention, just look at what Jesus said:

Read Mark 10:5 and make notes:

Jesus makes a rather forceful response. The provision in Deuteronomy 24 was made ONLY because the hearts of the people were hard.

There was another philosophical view that had come to be accepted by the majority of the Jewish people in that day. It was the “lesser of two evils” philosophy. If a person had clearly committed a violation of the law – if they had sinned – and they were not arguing that point – but they were able to convince the people that they had only two choices – and either would have been sin – as long as they chose the least sinful of the only two choices – then it would be acceptable to have sinned. “We have to accept them – because they took the lesser of two evils.”

Jesus indicates in Mark 10:5 that Moses had chosen the lesser of two evils. Moses had a situation where men were putting their wives out. This automatically put the woman in a position of shamefulness – just by the fact that her husband had put her out. The provision of Moses was not saying divorce had become acceptable to God. The provision of Moses only attempted to limit the shamefulness – limit the sinfulness in the eyes of the people – and hopefully control the consequences.

One way of looking at the decree of Moses concerning divorce – it is a testimony – or a witness – of the gross evil that had arisen in the people of God.

Read Mark 10:6-8 and make notes:

Jesus' reference to the creation account lifts the discussion of divorce to a higher level. Jesus brings the discussion to a place of relating to the purpose God had for marriage. The reference to Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 – gives in simple language the view God had for marriage in the very beginning. What legislation of mankind could change this original purpose?

The Mosaic provision was a “departure” from the divine purpose. The original constitution of the human race was on the basis of male and female in a marriage relationship. The creation of the two genders is resolved in a unity that is found in marriage – and it was instituted by God. Jesus' statement that “the two will become one flesh – they are no longer two, but one” - affirms the indissolubility that was God's intention for marriage.

When Moses made the decree that provided for divorce - husbands didn't suddenly begin to put their wives aside. Husbands were already putting their wives out - and this was leaving women in a social and civil position to have no place to live. In many cases these women were in a position to have no food - and have no protection.

Moses' decree delivered these women from social disgrace and shame. And Moses' decree gave these women the civil permission to become the wife of another man. One important note to make here – Moses' decree was a response to the current sinful activity among the people. Moses' decree did not remove the sinful activity from among the people!

Read Mark 10:9 and make notes:

This pronouncement by Jesus, grounds marriage in the authority of God rather than civil governments. This verse has notable significance in the discussion of this topic today. First, this verse can be used to say that the person who separates a marriage into two separate persons will have to answer to God. Secondly, this verse brings about the question "are some joined together that God did not join."

This hinges on the "what God has joined together" phrase . In other words - are some people claiming to be married - and yet God has not joined them together. Or is it that if any man and woman claims to be married, then God joins them together. If God has not joined these two people together - is it okay to separate them?

If you are one who holds all marriages are joined by God – then this statement by Jesus would be all the Pharisees needed to say Jesus was also condemning the divorce and remarriage of Herod Antipas and Herodias. If they could get this to Herod – then it would be “goodbye Jesus!”

If you are one of those who says this only applies to marriages God has joined together - then the divorce and remarriage of Herod Antipas and Herodias just really doesn't matter. These two people were in sin regardless of what they did. And if this is the way you take Jesus' response - well, that kind of leaves the Pharisees without anything to take to Herod! Because this isn't the point of this lesson - I'll leave it to you to decide for yourself which of these two views is the better view.

Read Mark 10:10-11 and make notes:

This is a significant statement by Jesus! We see a familiar pattern recorded in Mark. When Jesus and his disciples go inside a house following Jesus' public teaching - the disciples get clarification. This particular text is used frequently by today's church people. And the way they use it is not altogether wrong. But they do use it for the primary purpose of condemnation. Jesus used it here for a very different purpose.

Please listen closely to this next part - it can be a little confusing if you don't pay attention. According to the teachings of the Rabbis in that day - a husband could NOT commit adultery against his wife! A husband could commit adultery against another man by seducing that other man's wife. A wife could commit adultery against her husband by being with another man. But the wife was held in such low esteem that her husband was never guilty of adultery against her.

Now, look again at Verse 11. Jesus stated that a man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against his now ex-wife. Jesus is elevating the wife to the same status as the husband. Jesus is saying the wife deserves the same dignity as does the husband. Jesus is saying the husband has the same obligation of fidelity as does the wife.

This kind of statement should not surprise us. When we consider Jesus has already stated God views those He has joined as being one. If in fact the husband and the wife are considered one – then you can't legitimately say only "one particular part of one" is somehow less than the "all of one." If the husband and wife are one – the value of the husband is the value of the wife – and the value of the wife is the value of the husband.

Read Mark 10:12 and make notes:

This too – is a rather significant statement! The right of the wife to divorce her husband was not recognized in Jewish law. It had only become recognized in Roman law in the last 40 years or so before Christ.

Some people see this verse as Jesus denouncing this particular aspect of Roman law. But Jesus wasn't really concerned about Roman law – Jesus was concerned about people being saved from their sins. And in this particular situation Jesus was concerned about his disciples becoming Fishers of Men. So let's not separate this verse from the rest of the text. Let's keep Verse 11 and Verse 12 connected.

In Verse 11, Jesus broke with Rabbinic tradition and said the wife is of the same value as the husband. The husband has the same obligation of fidelity that the wife has. Consider Jesus has already indicated He prefers to see marriage the way God intended marriage to be. So this would mean Jesus doesn't see divorce as being an okay thing. Verse 11 and verse 12 are both saying the same thing - just using the other gender.

When we keep verse 11 and verse 12 together - what we see is that if any married person leaves their spouse and marries another person – they commit adultery against their spouse. To hold the wife and the husband as having equal status means we cannot have first and second class citizens in the Kingdom of God.

To hold the wife and the husband as having equal status may mean that we have misinterpreted some of the Scriptures. Such as the wife being "subject to her husband" and the husband being the head of the wife. I am not saying these things are not true – because they are true! What I am saying is that it would appear that many Christians have misinterpreted and misapplied these Scriptures.

Before you get angry and demand that I explain “in what way?” - Jesus felt this seed was all that needed to be planted at this time - or else he would have taught more. We find more detail later in the New Testament but for now let's stay with what Jesus did say. At some future time, I'm sure the Lord will lead us to study this subject in more detail.

Let's consider for a few minutes – What should we take home with us from this lesson?

God could have provided any number of partners for Adam – but he gave Adam only one partner. Marriage is not burden at all when the man and the woman truly come together as one in marriage – the way God intended. This kind of marriage means each one surrenders all – and both share in all.

When a man and a woman come together – in what they call a marriage – and they do not become one – they have different values – or they have different goals – or one believes they are of some greater value than their spouse - This type of relationship is far more than a burden. Great pain and suffering will be the result. Often this kind of pain and suffering leaves scars that last a lifetime.

The mystery of the kind of joining man and woman into one flesh – can be seen in the analogy of the joining of God and humanity in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The divine purpose of the one flesh can be seen in the relationship of Jesus and the Church.

On the basis of the Scriptures in this lesson – we have a great number of people in the churches today who have committed adultery. There are two statements I must make regarding this:

First – Adultery is no greater a sin and no less a sin than any other sin.

We must not dismiss adultery as acceptable. But neither should be elevate it to the highest place of offenses.

Second – Adultery is not the unforgivable sin.

For those who have committed adultery by way of divorce and re-marriage – it is important that you confess your sin to God and accept his forgiveness. For the rest of us – who by God's grace have not experienced divorce – it is important that we accept those who are forgiven - as being “forgiven.”

Many sermons can be preached from what the rest of the New Testament has to say about divorce and marriage. And a number of sermons can be preached on the topic of whether “all are joined” together by God or whether “some are joined” together by man. But we will stick with the passage from Mark – and it's purpose of guiding us toward becoming the Fishers of Men God wants us to be.

That day when Jesus talked privately with his disciples in that home - Jesus shattered some long held traditional teachings concerning man and woman. So that we can become the Fishers of Men God wants us to be; here is what we need to take home with us from this lesson:

Regardless of the traditions that have been passed down to us – we must view the wife and the husband to be equal. We must treat them equally. And husbands and wives are both expected to live wholesome and righteous lives. Both are expected to be faithful to their spouse and to God.

Have you ever wondered, how many people have turned away from accepting the Gospel, because they witnessed some Believer disrespecting their spouse?

How many have turned away from the Gospel because they witnessed a Believer belittling their spouse?

Do we as Fishers of Men go around mistreating our arm or our leg? Don't we realize that every body part is valuable and important to us? If the husband and the wife are “one” - how can one part of the “one” be of less value? How can one part of the “one” be deserving of less respect – or be deserving of less consideration – than the other part of the “one”?

To be the kind of Fishers of Men that God wants us to be – we **MUST** treat men and women with equal respect. We must see men and women as having equal value.

For husbands and wives to be Fishers of Men – it is imperative that we see our spouse as being of equal value.

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

In the last lesson in becoming Fishers of Men, we saw the importance of holding both genders in equal value - both genders are to be held in high esteem - both genders are expected to live honorably. Jesus shattered a long held traditional belief.

In this lesson, Jesus corrects another misguided belief among the people of that day. And it is one that needs some adjustment in our day as well.

Read Mark 10:13 and make notes:

This account of Jesus blessing the children is an excellent and appropriate thing to follow the sanctity of marriage - and the pronouncement of equality of the genders. Due to the brief descriptions given by Mark, there is room for some to argue this event did not follow right behind the event of chapter 10:1-12; as some scholars like to argue. However, I still give the Holy Spirit credit for inspiring Mark to write these events - and inspiring Mark as to which events to record before or after other events. So, whenever in actual chronology this took place – the Holy Spirit had it recorded here in the gospel of Mark – and I prefer to address it in accordance with where it is recorded; rather than trying to find some other time in which to place it and give it some meaning.

People are bringing their children to Jesus wanting Jesus to at least "touch" their child. The disciples rebuke the people who bringing their children to Jesus wanting Jesus to touch their child. It doesn't tell us why the disciples rebuked the people – but the response of Jesus indicates the disciples were abusing their authority again, much like they had done when they wanted to rebuke a person who was casting out demons and they didn't think he should be doing that – since they didn't think he was authorized.

The disciples' rebuking the people for bringing their children, is probably a result of the same kind of lack of perception on their part - as with the unknown minister casting out demons. "If you ain't one of us - then don't be doing that!" "We are the special ones – we're the only ones allowed to touch Jesus." For crying out loud folks — can't you see Jesus is an important man?" "Can't you see he is here with the power to heal and to cast out demons?" "Jesus can't be wasting time touching - playing - holding babies and small children!"

Read Mark 10:14 and make notes:

When Jesus noticed what the disciples were doing, it says Jesus was "indignant." This is a strong statement. It doesn't say "Jesus was disappointed with his disciples." It doesn't say he was "irritated at his disciples." It says Jesus was "indignant!"

So when we read where Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them;" we need to understand it was said by one who was "indignant." It wasn't "ah, go ahead, let the children come to me." It was more like, "you disciples stop that right now - you let those children come to me." "I never told you to keep the children away from me - so stop it - and don't you do anything like that unless you are told to do so."

Now I can't tell you it was these words. I am just saying it was more in this manner. And Jesus tells the disciples why they should allow the children to come to him; "because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." What do you think it means to say "the kingdom of God belongs to such as these"?

Adults, are very unlikely to walk up to you and ask you to give them something. Children are more straightforward and don't seem to hesitate to ask you to give them something. Adults are really hung up on the concept of "earning" or "deserving" their place in the kingdom of God. Children don't have any problem with accepting a place in the kingdom of God as a gift from God. God wills to give the kingdom to those who have no claim upon it.

Read Mark 10:15 and make notes:

This statement was directed at the disciples – and it still is today. A place in the kingdom of God is something that only God can give. A place in the kingdom of God is something that man desperately needs. It is only when a person realizes they are as helpless and as small as a child when it comes to attaining a place in the kingdom of God. Do we have any hope of receiving a place in the kingdom of God? To "receive the kingdom of God LIKE A CHILD" - magnifies the point here.

How many children do you know who sit around hesitating to receive anything from their parents - wondering if they have been good enough - wondering if they deserve? No! Children gladly receive the blessing from their parents - and many don't even take the time to say "thank you" - but that's another message for another day. The point here is a loud point. If a person will not receive the kingdom of God - simply as children receive - then they are not going to receive!

Read Mark 10:16 and make notes:

The parents had brought their children hoping simply to have Jesus TOUCH their child. Look at what Jesus does. He holds the smaller children in his arms - he puts his hands on the older children - and he blesses them! - WOW ! The laying on of hands and the pronouncement of blessings were usually reserved for adults. Children were not seen as having much of a place in that society.

In a papyrus from Alexandria, which dates approximately June 17, 1 B.C. – we read a letter sent by a man who was away from his wife for a period of time. While he is away, his wife is expecting a child. He writes this letter when he thinks it is time for her to have given birth – and in his letter he says, "if it was a male child, let it live; if it was a female, cast it out."

It sounds to us today more like someone is talking about puppies or kittens. This is somewhere between 31-37 years before the event recorded in Mark. While the man who wrote this letter was not a Jew – it does give us some insight on the value placed upon children by that society.

Now before we think too harshly about "those folks" - haven't many of us been guilty of similar thinking? My wife and I served in a church for a very short time - where the Pastor minced no words - and made it very clear to the other church workers - the children and the teenagers were to be kept away from him at all times. Doesn't that sound like the same attitude as that man from the first century? It just had a Christian dress put on it — but it's the same attitude.

If the children are not around us - to watch and see how we live our lives and handle things that come up - Then who are they going to pattern their life after? If we leave the children to be raised by animals – we have to know they are going to grow up acting like animals.

If the children have any hope of growing up and acting like Christians - then we need the children to be with us – to watch and learn from us. And we need to be careful to be the right kind of example to them.

How often have we met people who say things like "children should be seen but not heard?" Anyone who is the parent of an older child is likely to feel this way sometimes – but when you are the parent of a toddler or pre-schooler – this is not the way you feel. If you are the parent of a pre-schooler – even if you are home sick and the noises they are making is causing your head to pound - the most frightening sound to hear – is when you hear nothing!

So, while it may sound cute to say – we know children are not only to be seen, but they are to be heard as well. We also know from the rest of the New Testament that children are a blessing from God.

The disciples couldn't imagine anyone being more important than Jesus – just look, the power of God works through him! They couldn't imagine anyone being less important than children. It was only natural to their fleshly understanding to keep these kids from pestering Jesus!

Jesus wanted his disciples to come to a new understanding and a new value system. Jesus didn't "just touch the children" - Jesus embraced the children. Jesus didn't just touch the children and then send them on their way. Jesus blessed the children before dismissing them.

What should we take home with us from this lesson?

If we are going to be the kind of Fishers of Men God has called us to be – then we must recognize the value of the children to the kingdom of God. First, Children are the Church Of Today. Second, We need to teach the children and learn from the children.

The children have not sinned after the flesh the way adults have. The children don't bear the consequences of their sinful actions like many of us adults do. The children don't struggle with the "am I worth it yet" kind of thinking. The children can so easily enter into the kingdom of God – while so many of us adults struggle and fight and strain. And still never enter into the kingdom of God.

Adults, who have sinned, - and have confessed their sins – and have been forgiven of their sins - don't know how to live their life as if they are forgiven of their sins. Once we have confessed our sins – as being sin – and have asked God to forgive us – would you like to know how to live your life after that?

Just look at the children – and follow their example! I am not talking about playing all the time and not taking responsibility for work and provision for our families. When God says "if you will accept my son as your savior, then I will give you a place in the kingdom of God." I am talking about us as adults being able to recognize "we don't deserve it" and we never will – but we accept the gracious gift of God – and we don't run around scared to death that God is going to wake up – and figure out that we don't deserve to be in his kingdom and take our place away from us. I am talking about us as adults stopping all that we do in hopes of earning our way into God's kingdom and do what we do - only because we love God – AND Accepting the Gracious Gift of Salvation as just that – God's gracious gift!

We need to learn to Worship and Praise God as freely as children do. The most important ministry in any local church – is to the Children. They are both an important part of the local mission AND they are an important “example” to all of us!

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

This section in Mark follows the teaching that entrance into the Kingdom of God is a gift of grace which is bestowed upon those who acknowledge they are helpless without God's help – like children. This familiar passage contains an important message for us who wish to be Fishers of Men.

Read Mark 10:17 and make notes:

Did you notice in this verse - the "man ran up to" Jesus - "the man fell on his knees" in front of Jesus - and he addressed Jesus respectfully "Good Teacher" - before he asked this very heavy question? This indicates the man had a deep respect for Jesus and indicates this man had a sincere desire - and the fact that he "ran up to" Jesus - suggest he had a eager desire to be able to "inherit eternal life."

This man wasn't the kind who attends church just because it is the thing to do. This man was serious and earnest in his question; "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The way he has asked the question shows us this man held to the predominant idea of that day. That there was a way of piety toward achievement; "What must I do to earn" - "What must I do to deserve" - "What must I do to be awarded." This simple detail in itself is in stark contrast to what Jesus has taught on this matter – just a little earlier.

Jesus had taught to receive a place in the Kingdom was a matter of a gracious gift from God. This man seems to think there must be some conditions to be fulfilled that are somehow beyond the requirements of the Law.

Read Mark 10:18-19 and make notes:

Jesus begins his response to this man by what many people see as Jesus directing attention away from himself and back toward God. Was Jesus telling the man not to call him "good" or was Jesus challenging the man to rethink "what" he had just called Jesus?

Certainly, in the eyes of man, Jesus was Good! Just look at the sinless life he lived and look at the continual good works he does. And we have the benefit of the rest of the New Testament which tells us Jesus was God - so Jesus was good! "Why are you calling me good" - "surely you know there isn't anyone good except God!"

Then Jesus pointed out that this man knew the commandments and mentioned six of them. I believe Jesus took seriously the concept this man had of being a "good man." Jesus was setting the stage to get this man to look beyond his good works. When Jesus appealed to the commandments, he was reinforcing the idea this man had done all that a man could do - and yet, as this man had discovered, this still left a person somewhere short of having eternal life.

Read Mark 10:20-21 and make notes:

This man undoubtedly recognized Jesus' good character and lifestyle. This man undoubtedly recognized Jesus' many good works. This man considered himself a "good" person because he believed he had obeyed the Law. He was now interested in finding out from this other "good man" he had encountered – Jesus. What else must he do to inherit some of this eternal life Jesus has spoken about? When Jesus referred to the commandments - this man expressed his discovery; "I have kept these since I was a boy" - "and I still do not have eternal life."

Please notice Jesus did not start correcting this man or debating with him - like most of us would do. You know if someone we met told us that they have never done anything wrong. Within a second or two of us jumping on them to beat them to a spiritual frazzle - we would start telling them "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" - "there is no one righteous - no not one." And that would just be the beginning wouldn't it?

Jesus accepted this man as where he was - according to this man's understanding. He didn't see where he had done wrong, but at least this man realized that he didn't have what Jesus and the disciples did appear to have. This man no doubt had the satisfaction of believing he had obeyed all the law. And you would think that would give a person a sense of security.

While this man had attained some level of piety - as best he understood it - he realized he didn't have a personal approval of God. Some see Jesus' response here as a means of shaming this man by exposing his lack of depth in understanding the commandments. I believe that misses the intention of the passage and the intended message. What Jesus wanted to do - and no intention of bringing shame - was to help this man realize there was a deeper level of sacrifice.

If this man had indeed kept the law since his youth - then he had made many sacrifices as an adult. But he had not yet realized the level of sacrifice that one reaches when they get to the place of "self-sacrificing devotion." And by the way – "self-sacrificing devotion" would be a good way to characterize the earthly life of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus finally got this man to admit that keeping the Law still fell short of attaining eternal life - then Jesus explains - you lack this one thing. Complete physical obedience to the Law only prepared you for real surrender. Physical obedience to the Law helped teach people to give the best they had – to give the first they receive. Jesus was now explaining to this man - this was all just a practice run for the real thing

The real thing is when we realize we don't own any thing and we are willing to give it all. Not just the first - not just the best - but all! Through the years, there have been those who have taken this passage and tried to make a new law out of it. And they have tricked people into giving up every material possession in order to be accepted into the Kingdom of God. That has always been - and is today - a grievous error!

Others have made this a law that only applies to those who would be ministers. Ministers should give up all earthly possessions and finances. This too has been and is an error. This command to sell all earthly possessions and to give the money to help the poor; was an instruction to this man individually. God still does give similar instructions to some. But this is not a blanket instruction to all believers or to all ministers.

This is a bigger thing than most of us today realize - because we don't know the setting in which this took place. The Scribes taught and encouraged people to give generously. Those who gave generously to the poor were believed to be a little more godly. However, there was a Scribal Law that actually prohibited a person from giving away everything they had - because this would reduce the person to being in a state of poverty - and poverty was seen as - at the very least - "not blessed."

So when Jesus told this man to sell everything - and to give all the money away - He was telling this man to do something that was exactly opposite to what the Scribes had taught him all of his life. And this is where so many people miss the point. And when we do this - Jesus said - we will have a treasure in Heaven. At this point most people are missing the answer to the man's question because they are so fixed on the instruction to sell everything.

The answer to this man's question is not found in the instruction to go and sell everything and give the money to the poor. The answer to this man's question was to "come and follow me" – then you will have a treasure in Heaven. Let me say – that is still the invitation that is being given today – by Jesus - "come and follow me."

Read Mark 10:22 and make notes:

Could there be a more vivid picture as to how this man responded? It wasn't until we get to this point in the account that we find out this man was rich. This man sincerely wanted to receive eternal life - but not sincerely enough to give up his earthly riches.

The Law that this man had been so faithful to follow had failed to fulfill its function in this man's life. This man turned away from the invitation to follow Jesus - because he just couldn't stand the thought of giving up his pieces of this earth. He had rather hold onto dirt than to accept a piece of heaven.

Read Mark 10:23-24 and make notes:

This is a good place to remember the earnestness this man had when he came and asked Jesus what he must do to receive eternal life. Even if a person is earnest and very sincere in their desire to follow Jesus - if they allow themselves to get too attached to earthly things - they are likely to turn back. Please notice the words in Verse 23; "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

Verse 24 tells us the disciples were amazed - and obviously Jesus recognizes their amazement. So he repeats the statement - but this time he addresses them a little differently. The difference is slight - and yet it is a very big difference at the same time. This is one of those places where it is very important that we not disconnect this message from the previous lesson.

In the previous lesson - do you remember - we were cautioned to make sure we approach the kingdom of God as a child? When Jesus repeats his statement in Verse 24, he addresses the disciples with an important but significant difference - "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God." And He left out the words, "for the rich"!

These disciples were all grown men. Several of them had families. They all had jobs when Jesus called them to follow him. And here he calls them "Children."

Were they insulted - or did he get their attention? I think he got their attention! Contrary to teachings of some religious groups - there is no guaranteed mark of God upon those who have great riches. Neither is there any guaranteed mark of God upon those who live in poverty. There is nothing inherently holy about being poor. And there is nothing inherently holy about being rich.

There is a danger of becoming attached to "the stuff for those who have it. And this attachment can prevent a person from being able to follow Jesus. The problem with riches is the danger of becoming attached to it and worrying about Not having it.

If a person can control their riches - they can be a real asset to the kingdom of God on earth. However, if a person's riches controls them - they are no good to the kingdom of God on earth - and to no one else on earth either.

Read Mark 10:25-27 and make notes:

There has been an accepted teaching for years that the "eye of the needle" referred to in this passage - was a small gate used to enter the city late at night. Difficult for a camel to get through but not impossible. I confess - in years past - I have used that analogy; since that was what I was taught. However, in more recent years, I'm willing to say that I don't believe his the appropriate analogy.

I do believe there was such a gate - and it was called the "eye of the needle." But let's look closely at this text. Just look at Verse 26 where the disciples said "Who then, can be saved?" And Verse 27 where Jesus responded "With man this is impossible." If the reference was to this late night "check-in" gate – it would not be impossible – it would only be slow and difficult.

After carefully considering the text – I believe we will better understand this passage by taking it at face value. Jesus is referring to the largest animal in that region - the camel - And to the smallest opening these people knew of – the eye in the sewing needle. *"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*

Because human beings just naturally get so attached to their pieces of earth - it is easier for the largest animal to go through the eye of a sewing needle than for a person with a great deal of this world's goods to enter into the kingdom of God.

It is very important that we don't stop here. It is imperative that we hear - read - and realize what Jesus said next; *"With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."* As impossible as this is for man - it is not impossible with God !

God has a way of working miracles. And the truth is that one of the miracles God works - is when he changes the heart of a rich man to where he sees the worldly riches as belonging to God and not to him - or her. I have been blessed to meet and get to know several people who in fact do have a great deal of worldly riches. And yet they understand it to belongs to God. They are not attached to it. And it seems to please God to give them even more because they maintain a healthy attitude toward what He has already given them.

The natural man just can't understand how a person can have worldly riches and not be attached to them. Because that is what the natural man does. He - or she - attaches themselves to all the dirt they can get their hands on. And if we stop here - with this simply being some teaching on riches and attachment to them - we will have missed the message intended for us.

Salvation - being able to enter into the kingdom of God - is utterly impossible for man to accomplish. A place in the kingdom of God is completely beyond the sphere of human achievement. All efforts of man to earn or merit salvation is completely futile

And Jesus used an analogy of one of the most impossible things for man - to say that even this - is possible with God. None of us individually, or together, can earn salvation. If God can make it possible for the rich man to be saved - then it is possible for everyone to be saved.

And this is where it becomes a message for us as Fishers of Men. Are we allowing ourselves to be attached to something of this earth - so strongly that it is keeping us from following Jesus? Are we holding onto some material thing – or things – so strongly – that we are not able to be a “Fisher of Men”? In order for us to be the kind of Fishers of Men God intended for us to be - we must make sure that we are more attached to Jesus than we are to any earthly thing.

Fishers of Men - please - let us re-evaluate our attachment to worldly stuff. The text told us of how sad the man was when he turned away from Jesus. Don't you think Jesus was sad when the man declined the invitation to follow?

How many of us - who claim to be Christians - are causing Jesus to be sad - because we just can't bring ourselves to turn loose of worldly things – and follow Him daily?

God doesn't have any problem with you and me enjoying worldly goods. He just has a problem with our desiring the worldly goods over Him. He has a problem with us wanting to hold onto worldly things Instead of holding onto Him.

As Fishers of Men – Let us never believe that it is impossible for anyone to be saved! We can admit that just naturally speaking this person isn't likely to be saved, but with God – it is possible for “even this person” to be saved.

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

The previous lesson dealt with a man who just couldn't bring himself to follow Jesus - because he didn't want to give up his earthly possessions. This lesson will certainly stand alone, but it is much richer if we keep it connected with the previous one. This lesson has both an encouragement and a warning for those of us who desire to be Fishers of Men.

Read Mark 10:28 and make notes:

On more than one occasion, Peter speaks out as if he is speaking for the whole group. Peter, is so much like us today isn't he? He wants to make sure Jesus isn't somehow failing to notice him and the other disciples.

A man had just refused the invitation to come and follow Jesus because he wanted to hold onto his worldly possessions more than he wanted eternal life. Peter wanted to remind Jesus that he and the other 11 had abandoned basically everything they had - in order to follow Jesus.

When we read this passage, we can almost hear a tone of self-congratulations in Peter's voice. This is one of those areas where it is painfully obvious that those first disciples were just like us. What's happening here with Peter is pretty much like many of us today when we begin to think of the honors that surely will be ours in the Kingdom of God - before we have fully understood the nature of the mission to which we have been called.

Read Mark 10:29-30 and make notes:

Jesus' response to Peter's statement - pretty much defines the Christian experience in terms of "promise and persecution." The history of the church so far has indicated there is an interplay of "blessedness and suffering." And it has to do with our Christian life here. But in the age to come - there is the promise eternal life with NO mention of persecution or suffering in the age to come. Hallelujah!

Unlike some today - Jesus didn't sugar coat the life of a Christian. He said from the very beginning - in this life there will be some hard times that will follow some of the blessings we will get to experience.

And there is a very important principle revealed in this passage that we must not overlook. There are those today who teach that anything Christians should lose will always be replaced - multiple times over. That's not exactly what this passage says!

If we look closely at this text - Jesus says anyone who loses things because they have chosen to follow Jesus and the Gospel - it will be returned multiple times over. Jesus put a condition on the loss being returned. That condition is - if we lose it "because" we are following him. There is no promise in this text that we will have things returned to us - if we lose them because we make bad decisions or if we make sinful lifestyle choices.

If people cast us out - have nothing to do with us – because we have decided to follow Jesus - we will certainly receive multiple times over "family" who will love us - encourage us – build us up - comfort us - and lift us up.

And for those who want to say this promise is not for this life on earth - take another look at Verse 30; "homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields." Don't these things sound more like earth than heaven? And Jesus said "to receive a hundred times as much in this present age."

Jesus wanted the first followers to know - just like he wants us today to know - that we don't have to wait until we get to the "sweet bye & bye" to receive blessings - "family" - and friends. If the world - and the people of this world - insist on taking from us the things that mean so much to us - just because we follow Jesus - the promise is that God will restore these things to us - multiple times over!

Did you notice in V29 - it says "father, mother, brother, sister, & children" - but in V30, "father" is omitted? In this New Family - God, the Creator of all that is - will be the father to all of us. So there will not be multiple fathers - just the One!

And along with all these blessings of new family - there will be some persecutions and sufferings. But don't let these earthly sufferings get you down - for in the age to come - there is the promise of complete triumph over suffering, persecution, & disappointments.

Read Mark 10:31 and make notes:

Throughout the recorded accounts in Mark - Jesus has made numerous indications that things in the kingdom of God are not like they are in the earthly societies. This passage started out with Peter - almost boastfully - pointing out that they had left everything to follow Jesus. And we could almost hear in his voice the attitude of, "surely we will be greatly honored and rewarded - because we were first to give up everything for you Jesus."

This summary statement of Jesus - at this particular incident - serves as a powerful warning for Fishers of Men to be careful about making presumptions toward honor. Jesus promised those who have things taken away from them in this life because they follow him - will certainly have those things replaced here on earth. And then Jesus said, but don't forget – many who are first will be last, and the last first."

This just might mean that many of those who have so much given to them here on earth - will have little given to them in Heaven - because they received their reward here. And those who had little given to them on earth - just might have the most given to them in Heaven - because they waited to receive their reward. Or it might mean that many of those who were first in honors here on earth will be the last in honor in Heaven. Those who were last in honors here on earth will be the first in honor in Heaven!

Let's be careful not to confuse these promises with the things we lose because of our bad choices - our sinful lifestyle - our carelessness - or our laziness. And let's not confuse these promises of giving to us - with the things we worked for and earned. God has given assurance of blessing the work of our hands but that is not what is spoken of here.

Fishers of Men - it won't all be fun - it won't be just one long revival meeting - it won't be blessing upon blessing upon blessing. There will be some suffering and persecution along the way as long as we are on this earth. But there is a promise - that is a guarantee - in the next age - after we leave this earth - it will be eternal life. And there won't be suffering and persecution there!

Isn't it truly sad - that so many people today - can't be faithful in following Jesus - because they are afraid that if they show faithfulness to Jesus their earthly family might cut them off. So, in an effort to keep a relationship with their earthly family a whole lot of people are going to miss out on eternal life. This is truly sad! - No! - It's tragic!

Fishers of Men – let us love our families. We should try to be there for them if they need us. But we should not let any earthly person keep us from eternal life. And if we let anyone keep us from faithfulness to Jesus Christ - then that is what they are keeping us from.

I sincerely believe many of us have powerful strong feelings of emotion and love toward certain family members. But let me ask you to consider today - is your earthly relationship with them really so good that it is worth missing out on eternal life? “Well pastor, I'm going to wait until they come with me.” If you are both in quick-sand, one of you has to get out in order to help the other!

We must stop walking on eggshells around our family and friends - when it comes to the gospel and our commitment to follow after Jesus. We must stop holding back from being a Fisher of Men because some family member or some friend might not hang around with us any more. If we are going to be Fishers of Men - then it has to be "Jesus First" in our lives - our hearts - and our commitment.

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

In the passage we are going to examine in this lesson - Jesus is trying to prepare his first disciples for the job of being Fishers of Men. So, he goes over a subject he has talked to them about before. And it is still a very important message for those of us today who want to be Fishers of Men.

A lot has happened in the church through the years. Perhaps without most of us recognizing it - we have gradually allowed the ways of the world to creep into the church. We find some churches today that are being run more like businesses. We find some churches today being run as if they are a local version of "Survivor" Or "Big Brother" where everyone is competing and trying to get somebody else "voted out" — except me.

Today, as much as, if not more than ever before - we need to get a handle on this message. So let's see what Jesus felt was important enough to be repeated and maybe for some of us – clarified.

Read Mark 10:32 and make notes:

It is rather interesting, in Mark, each of the three prophecies concerning the passion takes place in the setting of a journey. In this, the third prophecy, Jerusalem is named as the destination where Jesus will accomplish his mission. In this verse we are told the disciples – and we will take this to mean "the twelve" - are "astonished." And those who followed - we will take this to mean all those other than "the twelve" - were "afraid."

Being on the road going up to Jerusalem couldn't be the cause of astonishment or fear. "Going up to Jerusalem" was a good thing. It is going up to Jerusalem where people could attend the temple of the Israelites. There were synagogues - or local religious meeting houses - scattered throughout the land; but there was only one temple for the Jews - and it was located in Jerusalem.

What was going to happen to Jesus in Jerusalem couldn't be the source of fear for all those who followed Jesus - because we are told in this verse that Jesus took the twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem. Only the twelve were made aware of what was going to happen . It tells us the twelve were astonished and the rest of the people were afraid. And it is after we are told of their fear and astonishment that Jesus tells the 12 about the Jerusalem events.

The disciples had been with Jesus for a while now. They had seen Jesus minister in several different situations and circumstances. They had seen the power of God literally flow through Jesus and change people and change things. And they were walking daily in astonishment of the power of God working through Jesus Christ. The others who were following along - were no doubt in some level of awe - but they were walking in fear - as they witnessed the power at work in Jesus.

It would only be natural for one to ask – what might he do next? What might he do that would change my life? What if he revealed those hidden sins I have hidden? What if he casts something evil out of me? How is that going to look to my family and friends? You know, kind of like we might react, if we were walking along watching Jesus do the things he had been doing.

Read Mark 10:33-34 and make notes:

That He would be delivered into the hands of the chief priest - this he had prophesied earlier in chapter 9. That He would be sentenced to death - he had prophesied this earlier in chapter 8. That He would be executed - this he had prophesied twice before, in chapter 8 and in chapter 9. That He would rise from the dead - this too he had prophesied on both of the earlier occasions when He was prophesying about this event.

That He would be delivered into the hands of the Romans - this is the first time he had told the disciples this detail. That He would be mocked, spit upon, and scourged - this is the first time he had told the disciples this detail. These details that Jesus will be handed over to the Romans - is clearly a prophesying of humiliation and rejection.

Jesus will be rejected by his own people and handed over to a pagan people for punishment. It would be bad if Jesus was to be rejected by his people - refusing to acknowledge him as messiah - and for them to punish him for making such a claim. But the humiliation is intensified when his own people will place a Jew into the hands of a defiled and despised people.

In those days — as well as today — when a member of the Jewish community dies — they do not want the body handled and prepared by a Gentile. It is very important for them, that Jews prepare the body. But Jesus was prophesying that his people was going to hand him over to the Romans - that is major rejection!

And if that isn't enough to imagine a Jew being handled by unclean and defiled people – Jesus prophesies that these defiled people will mock him, spit on him, flog him, and then kill him. Is there any problem understanding what kind of message Jesus has given to his disciples?

Read Mark 10:35-37 and make notes:

Here are two men who had traveled with Jesus - who had been privileged to hear the private teachings that Jesus gave only to his disciples. And yet it appears they have somehow failed to understand how Jesus is going to be treated as He completes His mission.

Jesus has just told them they are going to Jerusalem, and after three days He will rise. They appear to be hearing Jesus say he is going to Jerusalem to set up the fallen kingdom of David. This is something they have been waiting for the messiah to do. So James and John ask for a place of honor - and maybe even some rank - in this newly established kingdom. Isn't it interesting that the message can be so plain - and yet people don't hear it - they hear what they want to hear instead?

Read Mark 10:38 and make notes:

That's a pretty sharp response on Jesus' part. In asking to participate in God's glory - it is necessary to participate in painful mission. The only correct reply to Jesus' questions in this verse are negative - "no we cannot drink the cup you drink - and neither can we be baptized with the baptism you will be baptized with."

The cup of which Jesus must drink is the cup of divine punishment of sins. "Baptism" speaks of an "overwhelming" – or being covered over. None of us could bear up under a partial load of the divine punishment of sin - let alone the full load of it. Only Jesus could possibly hold up under this over-whelming experience.

Read Mark 10:39-40 and make notes:

It seems unlikely these men really understood what they had just confessed - "We can - drink from your cup - and we can - be baptized with the same baptism." While Jesus doesn't give them any promise of a place of honor - He does grant this part of their request - they will indeed drink from the same cup and be baptized with the same baptism.

These two men are so much like us today. They were so sure they were ready to handle whatever Jesus was to experience. It is probably safe to say - these two men did not know what they were asking for.

If we pay attention, there are a number of places in Jesus' ministry where he refuses to allow even the appearance of any arbitrary authority. While Jesus consented and said "you will indeed drink of the cup from which I drink and you will share in the baptism" - Jesus flat out denied these men the right to sit either on his right or his left. Jesus is so submitted to the Heavenly Father - and he acknowledges that all places of honor are to be appointed by the Father and not by him.

And please notice what Jesus said about these places of honor: "These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." These places of honor have been prepared for someone. These places of honor already have been designated. This designation is probably by way of who is obedient and faithful rather than to a specific named person.

Read Mark 10:41 and make notes:

It is understandable the other ten would be indignant because of this request by James and John. They all wanted the places of honor in Jesus' kingdom. James and John beat the rest of them to the punch. Jealousy will do that to us want it? Now I ask you to think about what Jesus had just told the disciples was going to happen to him.

Here is James and John asking for a place of honor. And the other ten getting indignant because James and John asked first. Do you see anyone showing any signs of being sensitive to what Jesus must be feeling?

If someone told you that they are in the last stages of a deadly cancer - that in the next few weeks their body is going to be racked with unbearable pain - they will die in great indignity and in horrible pain - would you then start talking about how sore your finger is where you have a hangnail?

Jesus has just told them he was going to be arrested - beaten - humiliated publicly - and then killed. Wouldn't you think he just might have some anxiety here?

When we see the insensitivity of the disciples at this point - it is easier to understand how lonely Jesus was in those last hours before his arrest. These "called men of God" just didn't get it yet..

Read Mark 10:42-44 and make notes:

Not that long before - in 9:35 - Jesus had told the disciples that "if anyone wanted to be first in the kingdom of God" - then they had to be the very last. In fact they had to be the "servant of all." Here we have evidence in this account that His disciples hadn't got it yet.

In v42 Jesus repeats the message. And he begins to contrast the way things are being done in the earthly kingdom to the way they are done in the heavenly kingdom. In the earthly kingdom - the rulers lord it over those they are ruling - and the high officials "exercise" their authority over the rulers.

In the kingdom of God - we must not "exercise" our authority in such a way as to make sure everyone knows we have authority. "Do you have any idea who you are talking to?" "You can't treat me that way - don't you realize who/what I am?" No, in the kingdom of God - if you want to be great then you must be the servant. And if you want to be first - then you must be as if you are the slave to all.

This analogy might not grab us so much as it did the people of that day. Neither the servant or the slave had the opportunity to be engaged in activities directed toward their own life. The activities of the servant and the slave were directed toward the interest of their master.

As Fishers of Men – we must transform our thinking and attitude of greatness into the concept of doing what we do in an effort to help and assist others more so than helping and assisting ourselves. The earthly concept of "rank" must become the heavenly attitude of servant-hood.

Read Mark 10:45 and make notes:

The ultimate in reversal of human ideas of greatness and rank can be seen in Jesus. Even though he is the Messiah – he did not come to be served – but instead came to serve and to give his very life as a ransom for us. None of use can give to that level. Jesus gave the ultimate level of servant-hood.

Verse 45 could be the source of an entire sermon on its own. But we will leave it here as the summary statement that Jesus set the example - and a high and holy example it is.

As Fishers of Men - we must re-evaluate our concepts and ideas of greatness. An example can be found in a local church selecting an additional Elder. Someone might think - "wow, it is so great to be selected as an elder." But the truth is this new elder will only be a great elder to the level he becomes a servant of the family of God. And that applies to the other Elders, the deacons, and to the Pastor as well.

Who among us will be the greatest in the kingdom? I already know the answer to that question! No, I don't know the name - but I know who. The greatest among us – will be the one of us who serves the most.

Fishers of Men – the one God identifies as the greatest in the Kingdom - just might turn out to be someone who has no title at all. Fishers of Men – let us not be asking for privilege in the Kingdom - but rather let us ask "how can I serve." Fishers of Men – may each of us be so committed to servant-hood - that a visitor might have a hard time telling who is in charge. Let us be so committed to servant-hood - that it doesn't matter - who has a title and who doesn't.

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

We have come to a rather interesting account in our lessons on becoming Fishers of Men. Let's go ahead and read the first verse - and then we will talk about some of the interesting aspects of this account.

Read Mark 10:46 and make notes:

Just a note - the episode involving Bartimaeus is the last healing miracle recorded in Mark. And a second note - this account seems to have a little more detail than most of the others recorded in Mark.

Mark seldom gives names in the accounts of healing - but he does in this account. And not only the name of the blind man - but also the name of his father. These things having been noted - if the Holy Spirit so inspired Mark to record this account differently from the others - it would seem this account is worthy of our time to study.

Jericho is approximately 18 miles northeast of Jerusalem - so Jesus is nearing the end of his journey. The large crowd coming out of the city may have more to do with the season than it has to do with them following Jesus. This road that goes through Jericho and on to Jerusalem is a much traveled route.

At this time of year there would be a lot of people going to Jerusalem to observe the feasts there. And a beggar being placed beside this busy road just outside the city is also a common thing. Those family members - or those friends - who want this person they cared about - to be able to receive lots of donations - would help him locate where a lot of people would pass by. And people going to Jerusalem to take part in the important religious feasts would be more likely to give alms to the poor.

Read Mark 10:47-48 and make notes:

It is kind of obvious that this blind man - Bartimaeus - has heard of Jesus. And his determination to call out to Jesus - in spite of the rebukes - reveals Bartimaeus must have had some conviction concerning Jesus' ability to restore his sight. If you remember a little earlier, the disciples were rebuked by Jesus - for telling people not to bring their children to Jesus. It appears they may have learned their lesson - because here we are told "many rebuked" Bartimaeus - but it doesn't say the disciples did.

There are certainly a lot of people who have compassion for the blind and the crippled. However, there are many others who find them to be a bother. And it was probably people like this who were trying to get Bartimaeus to just shut up and stop calling out to Jesus. "Come on man - you are always asking people to help you get some place or the other" - "you are always bothering somebody for something" - "can't you leave this important man alone."

My wife and I were blessed to live near a school for the blind for about 3 years. We had the opportunity to meet, and get to know, a number of blind people. There were very few exceptions aside from the lack of being able to see - they were very independent. They really wanted to learn to do things for themselves. So its easy for me to tell people who think blind people are a bother - if you give them the right kind of help, they are no bother at all – but in fact a blessing.

Earlier in chapter 8 - when Peter made the confession that Jesus was the Christ - Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone. It is noteworthy here that Jesus did not reject being called "Son of David." It is also noteworthy that Jesus did not join in the cries to try and get Bartimaeus to be quiet. And when Jesus spoke with Bartimaeus, it doesn't say anything about Jesus telling Bartimaeus to tell no one!

Read Mark 10:49-50 and make notes:

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem for something much more important than the feasts. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to fulfill his calling as the Messiah. And there certainly was a deadline. Some things simply must happen to Jesus by a certain time - in order for prophecy to be fulfilled. So Jesus, who was on an important time schedule - took time to "stop" and call Bartimaeus to him.

In spite of the pressure to have so much accomplished by a specific time - Jesus took time for this person who needed him - and was calling out to him. Bartimaeus displayed a dramatic response to Jesus' invitation. The invitation that Bartimaeus had been asking for. Bartimaeus was willing to throw aside anything and everything that simply was not necessary to get to Jesus.

Read Mark 10:51 and make notes:

We have pointed out before that Jesus never exercised his power in an arbitrary way. Neither did Jesus exercise his power in an impersonal way.

What Bartimaeus needed was rather obvious - wasn't it? Jesus, knowing the hearts and minds of people - already knew what Bartimaeus wanted. And yet Jesus asked Bartimaeus "What do you want me to do for you?"

Two really important things took place in this incident. First - Jesus communicated to Bartimaeus that this wasn't some impersonal ministry thing where those in need receive a miracle. Jesus communicated to Bartimaeus - I'm personally interested in you. Second - Jesus coaxed Bartimaeus into expressing clearly his desire!

How we express our desire says a lot about where our faith is. If we say something like "I'm hoping you might heal me" - then we are saying we don't have the faith that you can or that you will. But when we say something like "I want to be able to see" - we are saying we have faith that you can.

That's exactly what Bartimaeus expressed. There was nothing in Bartimaeus' request that sounded like "hoping" or "wishing" - or "fishing to see if he could do this." When Bartimaeus stated his desire it revealed his faith in Jesus to heal.

Read Mark 10:52 and make notes:

Bartimaeus' healing was instantaneous - "Immediately he received his sight" AND Bartimaeus "followed Jesus along the road." Following Jesus along the road is a far better condition to be in than sitting on the side of the road begging for a handout.

His ability to be able to follow Jesus along the road indicates Bartimaeus' physical life has been changed. His following Jesus along the road indicates Bartimaeus' heart has been changed. Just because Jesus ministered to Bartimaeus – Jesus made no claim to own Bartimaeus! Jesus told him to “go” - he gave Bartimaeus freedom to choose!

Please do not let Satan interpret for you what I am about to say. Satan will try to convince some that Jesus no longer heals physical blindness. Jesus certainly does still heal physical blindness. But Bartimaeus' physical blindness was a visual picture of the more serious blindness that far too many people have.

People who are spiritually blind - are basically sitting on the side of life's road. And they can't see what is going on spiritually. Some of these people feel like they are in the dark about spiritual matters and they spend their time begging those who have spiritual sight for a handout.

Others, who are spiritually blind, have become convinced that there are no spiritual things to see. You will find them frequently getting mad at those who say they have seen something spiritually. They are convinced that those who talk about such things are just making it up.

Everything that happens in the physical - is a result of what has already happened in the spiritual. So those who are spiritually blind are continuously caught off guard - surprised - set back - and frequently worried about what is going to happen next. They are very much like blind Bartimaeus sitting on the side of the road. He didn't see anything coming. When it got there - then maybe he could hear something - or maybe he could feel something - or maybe he could smell something - but he didn't see a thing!

Dear Friends - if you are spiritually blind - that is exactly what is happening to you on the roadway of life. And that is how it is going to continue for you as long as you remain spiritually blind. And we can never be Fishers of Men as long as we remain blind! AND others who are spiritually blind can never become Fishers of Men - if they remain spiritually blind.

That's where this lesson comes home to those of us who desire to be Fishers of Men. We must be about the task of bringing spiritual sight to those who are spiritually blind. That is what Jesus did! That is what He desires for us to do as Fishers of Men. And He set the example of how to go about it.

We cannot go about passing out help - giving help - in impersonal ways. We must take a personal interest in those who are spiritually blind. Then we must work with them to get them to be able to express their desire to receive spiritual sight.

For many of those who are spiritually blind - it won't happen as fast as it appeared to happen for Bartimaeus. For a great number of the spiritually blind we will meet it may take some time for them to get to the place where they can express clearly their desire. It may take some time before they can express their faith in Jesus to give them spiritual sight.

Part of our job as Fishers of Men is to help the spiritually blind - to develop their faith to the point – that they have enough faith to believe. It may take a lot of time for some of them to get to this point - but that is what we must do. If we allow them to remain spiritually blind then they will continue to sit on the side of life's road and continue to try to survive off of the handouts of others. And they will never become Fishers of Men.

As Fishers of Men - we must be helping others to become Fishers of Men. Sometimes we will have to help others to see and understand the need to become a Fisher of Men. And sometimes we will have to help others to get to the place where they can believe that Jesus can and will give them spiritual sight.

Are we claiming to be a Fisher of Men - and we don't have any desire to help the spiritually blind to receive their sight? Are we desiring to be a Fisher of Men - and yet we know we are spiritually blind ourselves?

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

Jesus' arrival out the outskirts of Jerusalem marks the beginning of a new section in the gospel of Mark. From this point onward, all the events occur in or around Jerusalem. The prophetic ministry of Jesus is really evident in this last section. This sections begins with three successive days of entering Jerusalem in the morning - and then retiring to Bethany each evening. Following these three days there is a couple of possible interpretations.

The traditional interpretation - at least since the fourth century - is the events that followed these first three days all took place in the span of a week. That's why many churches today celebrate the Sunday before Easter as the day Jesus entered into the city - usually referred to as Palm Sunday.

The second interpretation - considering Mark's brevity in reporting the events - is that the events that followed these first three days may have taken place over the span of about six months. This would have Jesus entering into Jerusalem in the fall at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles - and being there until spring, the time of the Passover, when he was crucified.

Which ever of these two interpretations you choose - it won't change the message to us as Fishers of Men. Jesus did not just "enter the city" - he took the time to prepare to enter the city in a proper manner.

It was NOT customary for pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for one of the feasts to enter riding upon a donkey, horse, or camel. It was customary, even if riding most of the journey, to travel this last distance into the city on foot. So, when I say Jesus prepared for a proper entry - we are not talking about Jesus entering the city as a pilgrim - but rather as the Messiah.

Both the previous passage and the one we are looking at in this lesson - reflect upon fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy - such as Isaiah 29; "In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the poor among them shall exult in the Holy One of Israel." Then there is the prophecy is Zechariah - "See, your king comes. . . riding upon a donkey, even a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Mark doesn't cite any of the prophecies - but he does give us a hint. Also like the last passage, again in this one, Mark gives us detail that is so obviously missing from the majority of his gospel.

The Messianic actions of Jesus at this point were veiled even from the twelve disciples. We learn from the gospel accounts it wasn't until later that they put it all together and understood what Jesus had done.

Read Mark 11:1-3 and make notes:

Jesus took the initiative and sent two of his disciples into the nearby city to untie a young colt and bring it to him. This was an untrained colt - one that had never been ridden before. This is not a small detail. According to the Old Testament instructions - an animal that was going to be devoted to sacred purpose must never have been used for ordinary purposes.

There would not be many of us - if any - that would choose to ride an animal that no one had ever rode upon before. We would expect a lot of bucking and kicking and unpleasant resistance from the animal.

Jesus gave precise knowledge concerning the animal - that it would be tied just inside as you enter the village and Jesus told the disciples what to say when someone should question their untying the young donkey. This detail about it being young and never haven been ridden by anyone emphasizes the appropriateness of this colt for the sacred purpose it was to perform with Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem.

Read Mark 11:4-6 and make notes:

Jesus said "go into the village" – and they went into the village. Jesus said "untie the colt and bring it" – and they untied the colt and brought it. Jesus said "if anyone says to you" – and they said what Jesus told them to say when they were asked.

How comfortable could these disciples have been - going into a village that is not their village - and walking up to a animal tied outside someone's door - and right there in broad daylight - just untie the animal and begin to lead it away. How comfortable would we be? And - oh by the way - if anyone should asks you why you are doing that - just say the Lord has need of it. "Oh, right, like they are going to let some strangers walk away with their neighbor's animal just because we say the Lord has need of it." Would that make us feel comfortable enough to just walk boldly into someone's village and do this?

How different might things have turned out - if the disciples had decided they had a better idea for getting an animal for Jesus! What if they decided it would be better to find a donkey that was for sale - and buy it for him - instead of just taking one? What if they felt this one over here - while it had been ridden by someone before - it was a good deal and it just seemed to have a better temperament than the one that was tied near the entrance?

Jesus hadn't explained exactly what he planned to do with the animal - Jesus hadn't explained the importance of this particular donkey he described to them. So any change they made - due to a better idea - would most likely have conflicted with the divine plan Jesus was fulfilling.

Read Mark 11:7 and make notes:

The disciples placed their outer garments upon the young donkey instead of a saddle - and Jesus begins his ride toward the gates of Jerusalem. When the disciples threw their cloaks over the donkey that didn't leave them standing there in their underwear but this is a noteworthy episode.

When the disciples threw their cloaks into the ministry of Jesus - that did expose what they were wearing underneath their cloaks. You can choose to see this as saying, well the disciples didn't have ragged and worn out clothes or they would have kept their cloaks on to keep that fact hidden from the people. OR - you can choose to see this as saying, the disciples were so committed to ministering to Jesus that they were not concerned with what people thought about their clothing.

They were more willing to minister than in trying to pretend. Which ever way you choose to interpret this - it does raise a question for us - How much are we willing to expose to the public in order to minister to the cause of Christ?

For the great majority of Church People today - what others see and hear of them at Church - is a lot like the cloaks these disciples wore. The way we are at Church is all that others see of us - we don't let others into our lives - they don't know what we are like - not really.

If we were to take off this outer shell - what would others see? And do we want to serve the cause of Christ enough that it doesn't matter what others see? In other words, how transparent are we willing to be ?

Read Mark 11:8 and make notes:

We need to be careful at this point - even though some fine sermons have been preached using this text to point out the people were accepting Jesus as the Messiah. It was a customary practice in those days to do these very things when a famous person was entering into a village or city. If a military leader was returning from a successful campaign - the people would welcome him into the city this way. If a famous Rabbi or famous prophet were about to visit the village or city - the people would go out and do this as an act of respect and honor.

We are not told - so we really don't know - if God imparted some divine insight to the crowd of people and they were doing this because they believed Jesus was the Messiah - Or if they got excited when they saw the disciples preparing the colt and Jesus beginning to ride upon it - and they responded as they would toward a famous military person - famous Rabbi - or famous prophet. I personally believe the people just got caught up in the disciples' excitement.

We do know that many of the people who had traveled along with Jesus were in awe and in some degree of fear. So when Jesus gets on a donkey and begins to ride - it may have been out of respect and honor. It may not have been that the people understood they were welcoming the Messiah - but they were.

Read Mark 11:9-10 and make notes:

Those who went ahead and those who followed were chanting one of the great psalms of ascent. The “Hallel Psalms” were used in liturgies of that day concerning the Passover and the Tabernacles. These Psalms helped the people focus on prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. Let's look briefly at what they said:

- .a. Hosanna
- .b. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord
- .c. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David
- .d. Hosanna in the highest

(a.) "Hosanna" means "God save us" - what an appropriate prayer when the Messiah entering – even if they didn't realize that he was the Messiah.

(b.) "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" - formed part of the customary greeting among Jewish leaders of that day . In short, if you are coming to me in the name of the Lord, then you be blessed - but if you are coming in the name of another - then my blessings are withheld.

(c.) "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David" - this is a clear reference to the expected redemption that was prophesied would come - when the kingdom of David was restored and would last forever.

(d.) "Hosanna in the highest" - "God save us, You who dwells in the highest of places."

Again, the people could have been saying these things accepting the military work or the ministry work of the famous Rabbi or prophet as helping to bring this final salvation closer. It doesn't mean they actually understood Jesus to be the Messiah - they might have - or at least some of them might have - but this text does not tell us that.

Read Mark 11:11 and make notes:

Once Jesus was inside Jerusalem - he went to the temple. It doesn't say he went inside. To say "He looked around at everything" - could easily mean he looked around at everything in the temple area - "since it was already late, he went to Bethany with the Twelve." Jesus is "Lord of the Temple" isn't he - it is just the natural thing for the Lord of the Temple to ride by and check things out.

If the crowd had been responding as they would toward a famous person rather than understanding Jesus to be the Messiah - we could understand how the people would all disperse once inside the city. It was already late - these pilgrims needed to find accommodations for the night. If they were responding as they would toward a famous person entering - once the person was inside the village - what else was there to do - and if you stood around too long - all the rooms would be taken.

It would be reasonable to think - if this crowd had understood Jesus to be the Messiah - getting a room for the night probably would not be as high on the list. Who would want to leave the presence of the Messiah?

So, what does this passage have to say to us as Fishers of Men? There are three things we need to take with us and apply to our everyday lives - if we are going to be the Fishers of Men God has called us to be.

First - The life of a Fisher of Men is to be one of humility rather than one seeking acclaim.

While the people probably did not make the Messianic connection - Jesus knew who he was - and Jesus knew the purpose for which he was going to Jerusalem. Wouldn't it have just seemed right to us - if Jesus had told his disciples where to find a young white stallion upon which no one had ridden? Wouldn't it have seemed right to us to hear that the Messiah came into Jerusalem riding on a great white horse?

And yet, the one who has been given a name above all names - took the place of humility - and rode into town on a donkey. Christ is indeed the master of humility - the one who deserves our highest praise - is willing to take the most humble position. He was born in a stable - and he marks the entrance into the final stage of his ministry riding upon a donkey. A most humble statement. Humility - that must be the hallmark of our lives as Fishers of Men! And let me say, this applies to the Pastors - Elders - Deacons - and all the church leadership as well.

Secondly - As Fishers of Men - we must be obedient to God's instructions and resist coming up with a better plan.

Jesus said "go into the village" - they went into the village. Jesus said "untie the colt and bring it" - they untied the colt and brought it. Jesus said "if anyone says to you" - they said what Jesus told them to say when they were asked. As Fishers of Men - we must be willing to do what God asks us to do. Without trying to make sense of it - Without trying to figure out if it is okay - Without worrying about what somebody else might think of us - We must simply do what we are told!

And too many Church people today simply talk themselves out of doing the little things God tells them to do. "Well, if God would explain to me why he wants this done - in this way - then I would do it." The ways of God are so much higher than our ways. The truth is that the great majority of us would interfere with God's plans if we knew what he was trying to accomplish. We would figure out some short cut - or some other way to accomplish the same thing - or so we would think. I am convinced this is the major reason God doesn't explain more to us.

As we show ourselves to be faithful - God does share more and more with us. As we show ourselves to do what he asks of us without trying to do it "some better way" - God does begin to show us what the purpose is. As Fishers of Men - we must be obedient to the simple tasks we are given - and accept the fact that even if it looks a little strange or sounds a little strange to us. It is probably only a small part of a much bigger picture and might only make sense when seen as the whole.

Third - Jesus, as the Lord of the Temple, is going to ride by from time to time.

It is his right, his privilege, his responsibility. We learn later in the New Testament - that under the New Covenant - our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. When he rides by this temple - what kind of condition is he going to find it in? As Fishers of Men - we need to keep the temple in good shape - at least, keep the temple in the best condition we can. Are we taking reasonable care of the temple?

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

It is pretty well known - that the passage we are going to examine in this lesson - is considered to have major difficulties for a lot of people. Some people treat this account as a miracle of destruction. And for those who see this account as one where Jesus gets angry and curses a fig tree - it brings about questions of how you can reconcile this kind of action with the nature of Jesus – that he displayed throughout the New Testament - as one of mercy, love, and compassion. Others suggest this text has been altered and is no longer what was originally written. Let's take a look at it - as instructions to Fishers of Men.

Read Mark 11:12 and make notes:

This was the "next day" after Jesus made his "entrance" into Jerusalem. The entrance where people threw coats and palm branches on the road before him - and cried out with "Hosanna's" and "Bless You" as he entered. If you remember - Jesus made a quick trip by the Temple. Then he and his disciples left Jerusalem and spent the night in Bethany.

It is reasonable to understand that if Jesus was hungry - then his disciples were probably hungry as well. The reason for making this observation will be shared in a moment.

Let me say at this point that it was neither Jesus' hunger - nor his disappointment in the failure of finding fruit that led him to make the statement he makes in v14. I believe you will see in a few minutes - why I am making such a statement.

Read Mark 11:13 and make notes:

Some people, in an effort to do away with what they see as contradictions, say the last part of v13 was added later by a scribe and wasn't part of the original text. These people seem to believe if you take away the part about it not being the "season for figs" - then there is no problem - because everyone can believe it probably was the season for figs - and that would make Jesus' action appear to be reasonable. You know, it wouldn't be unreasonable for Jesus to chastise and punish the tree for not having fruit - if it was the time when the tree was supposed to have fruit.

They just don't want anyone thinking Jesus went into an angry rage and cursed a poor tree. There is simply no reason to start taking things out of the Bible to make it somehow more acceptable.

When we are seeing some passage as contradictory or troublesome - the better approach is to back away from it and begin to ask the Holy Spirit to teach us what is it that we don't know. There must be something we don't know if we are having problems with a passage.

Is it reasonable to even think - that the Lord Jesus would be ignorant of the proper time for a fig tree to have fruit on it? Is it reasonable to think that the Son of God, who has on numerous occasions demonstrated his gift of divine knowledge would not know what was common knowledge to the people of that area?

Don't you think the one who created the fig tree would know what every keeper of the fig orchard knew about the fig tree? I ask you to remember what I said as we read v12 - if Jesus was hungry - it is reasonable to think his disciples were hungry also. Jesus seized the opportunity provided by his - and their hunger - to teach the disciples something they needed to know - in order to be the Fishers of Men he had called them to be.

Many physical events have a meaning beyond their face value - this is especially true of prophetic messages. Rather than try to change the text to say it actually was time for figs - let's accept the text as true - and it was NOT time for figs.

By Jesus going to the tree and looking for fruit - when it was not the natural season for fruit - would just naturally stimulate curiosity among the disciples. This would cause the disciples to begin to look for some meaning that is deeper than the physical event itself. Had Jesus approached the fig tree during the season for fruit - then no one would have ever even thought of seeking a deeper meaning.

There are a number of examples in the Old Testament of what scholars call "prophetic realism" - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Micah and others frequently spoke of the fig tree as referring to Israel's status before God. They also spoke of the destruction of the fig tree as being associated with God's judgment.

The Jewish people in Jesus' day understood the context of the fig tree symbolizing Israel. It would have been a natural thing for them to understand what happened to the fig tree as representing what was going to happen to them as a nation.

One of the oldest commentaries on the Gospel of Mark from around 1000 A.D. - stated the early church understood "Jesus used the fig tree to set forth the judgment that was about to fall on Jerusalem." The abundance of leaves on the tree concealed the fact that there was no fruit on the tree. For those who did not know the season for figs - the appearance of the tree filled out with leaves would obscure the reality of a lack of fruit.

The magnificence of the Temple - and the ceremonies that took place within - concealed the fact that there was no fruit to be found in it – in much the same way as did the fig tree. To those passing by – to those who had no real understanding of spiritual matters – Israel could appear to be full and bounteous – however, beneath the outer appearance there was no fruit – in fact underneath the outer appearance - Israel had become lifeless. Israel simply had not produced the fruit of righteousness that God required of them – the fruit that God had demanded of them.

The Old Testament prophet Micah, a cried about the absence of righteousness in Israel and compared the land to the gleaned vineyard and exclaimed "I desire the first ripe fig." Jeremiah cried "When I would gather them, says the Lord, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree." What Jesus spoke to this fruitless fig tree - stood as a clear and unmistakable example of what was about to be spoken to Israel for honoring God with their lips - when their hearts were in fact far far from God.

Read Mark 11:14 and make notes:

What had this tree done to deserve such a judgment? Who could find fault with the tree for not having fruit - when it was not the season to have fruit? What Jesus said to the tree doesn't make a proclamation of destruction - it only states that no one will eat of its fruit.

Later, as we read Peter's interpretation - we see that Peter calls it a "curse." But let's take the text at face value for now - let's not add to it!

Jesus performed a judicial action - and made a prophetic statement to this fruitless tree. Even if this tree had at some time in the past been beneficial to people - it will not be beneficial to anyone from this time forward. This is a prophetic statement to the nation of Israel - even though you have in times past been beneficial to the people of this world - you will no longer be beneficial to anyone.

The message for us today:

To exist without bearing fruit is not an acceptable option.

In fact - bearing fruit is not an option! Was Jesus' hunger more than just physical hunger? Was Jesus hungry for something beyond mere physical food? I declare to you that his hunger was for something more than physical food. What is it that Jesus hungers for, even to this day? Is Jesus not hungry for the same thing today - that he was in that day?

Read Matthew 5:6 and make notes:

Does Jesus not hunger for righteousness among God's people? Human beings - unlike the fig tree - do not have to wait for a specific season to bear fruit. People are capable of bearing fruit year round - basically whenever we choose to do so. In light of this episode with the fig tree - How must God look at the person who "can - but simply chooses not to bear fruit"?

To be the kind of Fishers of Men God expects us to be - we must make an effort to bear fruit for the kingdom of God. It is not acceptable to simply sit in the shade of the tree and occasionally partake of it's fruit. We must be about the business of bearing fruit.

I know many people do not follow sports. I certainly don't follow sports much any more. But let me share with you an analogy from sports - because I believe it speaks to where many of us are today in the church.

A few years ago, the professional baseball teams were competing in League Playoffs - trying to earn the right to compete in the World Series. In the history of baseball - there has never been a team that won the first three games in the playoffs - and then lost the next four. But that is exactly what happened in the American League Championship playoffs.

The Boston Red Sox were playing the New York Yankees for the American League championship. The famous New York Yankees won the first three games and the Boston Red Sox lost three in a row. People, looking at history had already begun to declare the Yankees to be the American League Champs. I don't know what was said to the Red Sox - I don't know who said it - but the Red Sox were able to put aside the history and track record. They went out in the last four games and simply played better baseball and won four in a row - to take the league championship.

In the church today - we have so many people who are looking at their track record. And when they hear someone say – we need to be producing fruit for the Kingdom of God. They are telling themselves things like "the odds are against me" - "I have waited too late to put forth the effort" - "there is no way I can produce fruit now." And as a result - they don't even go out to play the game any more. What if the Boston Red Sox baseball team had taken that attitude in the recent American League Playoffs?

Please pay attention to these next few sentences:

We have Calvary on our side. We have every reason to stay in the game. God has filled his Word with promises of forgiveness for those who repent. God has filled his Word with promises of cleansing for those who confess their sins as such. And God has his Word filled with examples of people who have committed the most grievous of sins and then gone on to be used of God to produce significant fruit for the kingdom.

When the Boston Red Sox found themselves with their backs against the wall - and very few - if any - who believed they could come back. They went out there and tried - against all odds - and won the most important game in their 104 year history.

We must get our eyes off of the past losses - and get our eyes focused on the future with Christ Jesus! Are we ready for a visit from the Fruit Inspector? Would you like to get ready for the Fruit Inspector?

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

Judaism in the days of Jesus - held everything to do with the temple - as being of great importance. The splendor of Herod's Temple, and the immense crowds of pilgrims that came there for principle feasts, just to name a couple. And the fact that they held everything to do with the temple in high regard - makes the situation revealed in today's text a little perplexing.

In the text for this lesson - we see that they failed to hold one thing in high regard. And it definitely was something to do with the temple. I have already been asked how this particular text can have anything to do with us as Fishers of Men. So let's go see.

In the outer court of the Temple - the area known as the Court of the Gentiles - there were four markets. In these four markets, pilgrims could purchase the appropriate animals for sacrifice - so they didn't have to haul these animals the distance as they traveled to Jerusalem. Doesn't this just sound like it makes sense? The people are going to travel - some of them a great distance - how convenient it would be if they could just buy a ritually pure animal for sacrifice once they arrived at the Temple area.

These four markets were under the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin. Some people have suggested the court of the Gentiles had always been used as a market place - however, there is no historical proof or even any indication this took place until around A.D. 30.

Depending upon which historian you listen to - Jesus would have arrived at the Temple in Jerusalem sometime between A.D. 30 to A.D. 36. It could be this practice began the very year Jesus came to the temple or it could have only been taking place for a few years. But all indications are that it was a very recent concept and activity.

Jesus expressed deep indignation at the flagrant misuse of the court of the Gentiles. The forecourt had a divine purpose - it was to be a place for the Gentiles who desired to worship Jehovah. For the leaders of the Temple to allow the outer court to become a market place - basically says the leaders of the Temple had no regard or respect at all for the worship of the Gentiles.

Allowing these markets to exist in what was supposed to be the court of the Gentiles says they did not see the Gentiles and their worship as having any value.

Since the worship of the Gentiles had no value - then it was no loss to take away their place of worship. When Jesus drove the merchants from the court of the Gentiles - this is the only recorded act of violence on the part of Jesus. And since there is no recorded counter-action on the part of the Temple authorities - we can understand that the leaders knew this was not a proper thing to be taking place in the outer court.

This market area disturbed - in a big way - the worship in the Court of the Gentiles - but it didn't really disturb the worship activity that took place in the Sanctuary part of the Temple. Some might be tempted to say "well as long as it doesn't interfere with what is going on inside - then it doesn't matter all that much what takes place outside." This is a dangerous attitude to take!

Read Mark 11:15-16 and make notes:

Most Bible Scholars agree this took place in the Court of the Gentiles. This was a wide enclosure through which one had to move before they could get to the entrance to the interior parts. The rules of that day did forbid using this outer court as a thoroughfare, but generally the Jewish leaders had come to consider this Court of the Gentiles to have little sacred significance.

The Jewish requirement was for the annual Temple Tax to be paid "after the shekel of the Sanctuary." They all lived in a country where the currency was Roman money. It made sense that there had to be someplace where the Roman money could be exchanged for the sanctuary shekel - so that the Jews could pay their annual temple tax in a proper manner.

And it is noteworthy that those who changed the money for these traveling pilgrims had a slight surcharge for exchanging the money. As we mentioned earlier - it was a practical thing for the worshipping pilgrims to be able to purchase a proper animal for sacrifice once they arrived at Jerusalem. This made the trip easier than if they had to carry the animal with them.

So there were stalls where one could purchase doves, sheep, wine, oil, salt, and other necessary sacrifice items. As practical as it may sound - and as well intentioned as it might have been originally - this practice had transformed the Court of the Gentiles into nothing but a big bazaar and cattle mart. Unlike the Jewish leaders who were not bothered at all by this - Jesus was appalled at the disregard for the sanctity of the area that was to be used by the Gentiles.

We can see in this action by Jesus - he expelled the merchants from the Court of the Gentiles in an effort to safeguard the rights and privileges God had ordained for the Gentiles.

Read Mark 11:17 and make notes:

This quotation is taken from Isaiah 56. The prophecy speaks of a destiny and a design which God had for his house; “All nations” is a clear reference to Gentiles. The designation of God's house as a "house of prayer" is fairly ancient. We can find it as far back as 1 Kings 8. “A den of robbers” may be speaking more to the Temple leaders than to the merchants.

This text doesn't have to mean the surcharge for exchanging money was wrong. This text doesn't have to mean the charge for ritually pure animals for sacrifice was wrong. Either or both of these might have been excessive - but this text doesn't necessarily mean that.

However - without a doubt - this statement does mean - the temple leaders had robbed the Gentile believers of having a sacred place to worship. So, whether there was anything wrong with the prices by the merchants or not - the Temple Leaders were guilty of robbing the Gentiles. And it should be very obvious by this time in Jesus' ministry that Jesus wants the Gentiles to be included in salvation and in worship.

Read Mark 11:18-19 and make notes:

When Jesus' legitimate critique of the temple leaders is made for the misuse of the outer courts of the temple area - wouldn't this have been an opportune time for them to repent? But instead of repenting - the temple leaders started looking for a way to kill Jesus. Please notice the last part of v18 - "the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching."

While the chief priest became hostile at Jesus' corrective action and words - the people were spellbound at this authoritative call for what is right. This account tells us Jesus was teaching the people - it doesn't tell us what he was teaching them - but the teaching was an attention grabber. Negatively for the chief priest - and positively for the people.

What does this say to us as Fishers of Men today?

There are two things for Fishers of Men today:

Lets look at the last point first - When Jesus began to teach "the right thing to do" - the people became spellbound !

Fishers of Men - even if the whole community – religious leaders, civil leaders, i.e. everybody - accepts certain activities as "okay for today" - let us follow Jesus' example. Let us teach the "right thing to do." It may make certain leaders angry - but it will get the attention of the people. And it will likely lead to an opportunity to tell them about salvation in Jesus Christ.

Teach Everyone - To Do The Right Thing!

Under the New Covenant - there is no longer a building with an "inner court" and an "outer court." Under the New Covenant - where is the temple? Each Believer is "the temple" - are we not? Under the Old Covenant - there was a temple building - with an inner court where only the Jews could enter and worship. And then there was this "outer area" where the Gentiles could draw up close to the temple and worship there. The Gentiles had to worship outside - they could not worship inside.

For those of us who have accepted Jesus as Savior - we are no longer Jew, or Gentile. We are Children of God – joint heirs with Jesus. In our "inner parts" – our heart – our mind – our soul – we enter into worship the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Non-believers today can come up near the temple. Now where is the temple? Every Believer point to yourself and say "This is the temple of God." Non-believers can come up close - and draw near to the temple - but they cannot enter in can they?

It isn't that there is no longer an inner part to the temple under the New Covenant. It is that the inner part of the temple has been relocated. The inner part of the temple is no longer found in a building - it is now found in the heart of the Believer. In that day when Jesus came to Jerusalem - he went to the temple area and witnessed what the temple leaders were offering those who assembled in the outer court - and he was not pleased !

Instead of the temple leaders offering those who gathered in the outer court a place to worship - a place to convert - a place to learn God's Word - a place where Godly seeds could be planted - a place where they could begin a new life - instead of any of these - the temple leaders were providing an atmosphere and an environment that actually discouraged worship and conversion. And offered those gathered there basically the same thing they found in the daily market places. Only the items here were "authorized" and "spiritualized."

Today, when Jesus comes to the Temple - what does he witness us offering those who assemble outside our temple area?

Those who gather in our presence - do we offer them the Word of God? Do we offer them an atmosphere and environment where they can repent and convert? Or do we offer them an environment in our presence where worship and repentance is actually discouraged? Do we offer them the latest gossip - even if we do "spiritualize" it and call it a prayer request? Do we offer them dirty jokes? Do we offer them dirty conversations? Do we offer them deals that are "not exactly" honest?

Let me ask this a little differently. For everyone who claims to be a Believer - if I invited someone to come worship with us at our local church - and I mentioned "you" attend here - would they say "I can't come and worship at your church because I have been to their house and I know what they do and what kinds of things they say" - "I have been in the car with them and I know what kinds of things they talk about." Or would they say "I have seen this person do the right thing in a tough situation - I have never heard them say anything bad - it would be easy to worship there." If I were to invite the people you deal with - having been in the outer court area of your temple - would these people be more inclined to want to come - or would they be more inclined to stay away?

As Fishers of Men - we must be careful about what kind of environment we create in our outer court. Are we making it difficult for the non-believer to become a believer? Or is the outer court around our temple a place that just encourages the non-believer to want to become a believer too?

We cannot afford to accept the lie that what takes place outside does not affect the worship on the inside. Even if the outer activities didn't affect the inner worship - Jesus does care what kind of environment we allow the outer court to become. And this might be a good place to remind ourselves - While the religious leaders didn't seem to think the outer court activities were affecting their inner court worship. There was no life in their inner court worship - they had the ritual - but were spiritually dead. That might be a clue for us - if we can think what takes place outside doesn't affect the inside - then the inside may already be dead!

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

The two verses that begin this passage keep it connected to the two previous passages; (11:12-14) Jesus and the fig tree and (11:15-19) Jesus at the temple. So let's continue looking into Mark for instructions to us as to how we can be the Fishers of Men God desires for us to be.

Read Mark 11:20-21 and make notes:

The statement that this tree had withered from the roots speaks of the total and complete uselessness this tree now has. For them to know that it had withered from its roots probably means one of the disciples begin to cut the bark of the tree looking for some signs of life. You can just see them viewing the withered leaves all over the tree that was so full and alive yesterday. So they go up and cut a little piece of the bark and see that the tree is completely dry and dead beneath the bark. So they move further down on the tree - same thing. And they finally make a cut in the bark down near the ground and sure enough this tree is D-E-A-D.

And this is significant - because this complete “deadness” came about in less than 24 hours time. That is not natural. It usually takes a number of days for a tree to completely dry up - to completely shrivel.

So here are the disciples with Jesus and they see visible - tangible – proof that "no one will ever eat fruit from this tree again!" That was the pronouncement made by Jesus - and a day later there is evidence that the judicial pronouncement of Jesus has been put into affect on this tree.

Peter appears to be amazed and points out the “deadness” of the tree and refers to the tree as the one Jesus "cursed." As I shared when we looked at that passage, it might be better understood if we don't see Jesus' statement as a curse but as judgment. There is no indication Jesus corrects Peter. If anything, Jesus appears to just ignore that comment about "curse" and simply moved on with the lesson attached to this event.

As we mentioned when we looked at the passage with Jesus and the fig tree - this is a clear picture of the judgment that is about to come upon the people of Israel. BUT - there is also more to the message than simply a judgment illustration.

Read Mark 11:22 and make notes:

There are number of statements scattered throughout the gospel about faith and prayer. In v22 we find a very short, concise word to "have faith in God." Some may prefer to see this as an exhortation to "have faith in God." Or we might prefer to see this as an encouragement to "have faith in God." However we personally prefer to see it, this is the only response Jesus makes to Peter's comment about the tree.

We can almost hear the excitement in Peter's voice as he points out the dead tree that in just one days time it has withered from the roots and Peter refers to what has happened as a curse. Instead of saying "yes, and there is more curse to come" - Jesus responds to Peter's reaction to the withered fig tree and to Peters' comment.

By saying "have faith in God," Jesus wanted his disciples in that day to remember God's faithfulness. It is because of God's faithfulness that we can have faith in God. After all, it is God's faithfulness that gives us encouragement and confidence.

It is not our ability to stop things – it is not our ability to accomplish things – it is not our ability to overcome things – it is God's faithfulness. It is the faithfulness of God that helps us understand the assurances we are about to read in v23-24.

Read Mark 11:23 and make notes:

Jesus and his disciples would have been in the vicinity of the Mount of Olives - and the Dead Sea would have been in sight from where they were. It could be that Jesus was referring to the Mount of Olives specifically - but that isn't necessary. Some have even suggested the mountain to which Jesus referred was the Mountain of the Temple. That may be a good sermon illustration - but it is probably stretching the text from what it was actually saying.

To fully understand the practical application of this verse we need to read and understand the two following verses. I want to go on record by saying this verse is true and it has application to our daily lives. But we need to be careful how we try to apply it. We will refer back to this verse later.

Read Mark 11:24 and make notes:

The real message to his disciples that day was more about God's readiness to respond to unwavering faith. It would be a serious destruction of the text to fail to point out the connection - and the interaction - of Prayer and Faith.

There are some really good teachings that have been taken over by the enemy and he has changed the teachings. And the changes while sounding very exciting - have actually taken the power and life out of the teachings.

One of those has been to divert - and to pervert - the teaching to say you only have to Believe and Not Doubt - and you will get everything you want. This has become the battle cry of the "Blab it and Grab it " camp.

Another of those has been to divert the teaching to say that as God's child you never have to "ask for anything" – you just pray it to be the way it is desired to be – since you pray it to be that way – *Voila* (“wah-lah”) it becomes that way. Each of these are errors – but they started out as truth – in fact valuable truth.

It is not simply what we "believe for" without doubting. It is not simply what we pray. Look again at v24:

*"whatever you ask for in prayer,
believe that you have received it,
and it will be yours"*

It is what we "ask for in prayer" - and "believe that we have received it" - that shall become ours. We are not being very respectful when we walk up to God and begin telling Him how it is going to be. But it is the pleasure of the Heavenly Father to give to His children what they "ask for" when they "believe without doubting" that He will give it.

To the head that is bowed before the God of Glory – and asked in faith – and holding onto the certainty of God - that nothing is impossible for God. To this person nothing is impossible.

Read Mark 11:25 and make notes:

There are a number of Bible scholars who want us to believe v25 was added at some later time and was not part of the original text. They think v25 is an abrupt change from the topic of vs23-24. I submit to you that it is not an abrupt change at all. Jesus is preparing his disciples to become Fishers of Men. Jesus is responding to something the disciples have seen - the immediate affect upon the fig tree. Jesus tries to get the disciples to see beyond the fig tree.

If you think affecting a whole tree so quickly is something - why not consider a whole mountain? And Jesus tells his disciples not to be overwhelmed by the mountain - mountains can be cast down - mountains can be cast aside - when a person believes in their heart that it will happen! Jesus tells his disciples that it has to do with prayer - and that what they "ask for" in prayer - and "believe they have received" - is going to happen!

Just like v23 is a condition for what is declared in v22 - if you want a mountain to be cast aside – then you get it to happen by "asking for it in prayer" and then "believing that you have received it." Verse 25 is another condition to this kind of receiving what you pray for. You can be receiving things you ask for from God - if you are willing to forgive others.

There is nothing abruptly different about this statement at all. V25 is what makes v24 work - v25 explains that it is those whom the Heavenly Father has forgiven - who have the privilege to ask for things and expect to receive them.

"When you stand praying" - what praying is he talking about? The praying where we are asking God for something. "Here I am God and I am asking you for something - and I am going to believe - and not doubt - so I fully expect you to come through and give this to me. HOWEVER, God, don't let my hard feelings toward this fellow over here get in your way of giving me what I ask for. I don't plan on forgiving this person - but I still want you to give me what I ask for." But God says, "if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

What is the message for us in this text?

First - Fishers of Men must take care to remain rooted.

Life depends upon the roots. The connection of our roots determines whether we live or die. The worship of the people of Israel had become rather ornate and ceremonial but it had become disconnected from its roots.

Everyone else looked upon the tree full of leaves. Jesus looked past the leaves and saw the roots. Everyone else looked at the ceremonies of the Jewish faith. Jesus looked past the rituals and looked at the roots.

The worship of Israel died from the root upward. What had happened to this fig tree was only a picture of what had already happened spiritually to Israel. When our roots become dead - we cannot provide fruit to anyone. This is another passage that blows a hole in the teaching that says once you get saved - it doesn't matter how you live. Regardless of how long we have been saved we need to be careful to keep ourselves rooted. And that means relationship with Jesus more than ceremony and ritual. Ritual is good - but only when it is rooted in the relationship with Christ.

Second - We must be a forgiving people of faith.

Fishers of Men must have "faith in God." But there is more to it than simply saying "I have faith." There are some conditions to the kind of "faith" that "bears fruit." Fishers of men are not to be discouraged by the mountains that block our way. Fishers of men can cast aside mountains of opposition but there are conditions to mountains being cast aside. One of the conditions is that we must "ask for it to be removed" - one of the conditions is that we must "believe that we have received what we asked for - one of the conditions is that we must not have un-forgiveness toward others.

Today's Christians have become victims to "overwhelming" circumstances. There are far too many Christians in today's churches - who are giving up and making statements that they are defeated. They look at the situation and declare there is nothing we can do. That's not what God's Word says! That's not what Jesus told the first disciples! That's not what Jesus is saying to disciples today!

I am personally aware of many situations where the natural circumstances were overwhelmingly against someone. Sometimes it is a financial situation that there is no natural way out of. Everything says this person is going down for the count - bankruptcy - losing everything - they will be left with nothing. And when a Fisher of Men - began to pray and ask God for deliverance - even when everyone said there is no way - just let this one go under and let them start over - God came through with a financial miracle that no one saw coming.

Sometimes it is a situation where one person has taken complete legal control over another person - and there is nothing that can be done. This other person is day by day destroying a person's life and they cannot defend themselves. Everything says this person is going to lose their family - their job - and their life. And when a Fisher of Men - began to pray and ask God for deliverance - even when all advice was to give it up - God came through and caused the controlling person to turn loose and take off - without any explanation.

Sometimes it is a spiritual situation where a person is simply unable to get above it - it seems every way they turn the demons of hell are already there and have already undone all they try to do. People are saying it is too late for this person — they are too far gone. And when a Fisher of Men - began to pray and ask God for deliverance - even in the face of no possible way - God miraculously changed their heart and mind - and raised them up out of spiritual darkness.

“There ain't no mountain high enough; there ain't no valley low enough; there ain't no river wide enough; there ain't no ocean deep enough” - to keep God's people from the things we ask for - if we will remain forgiving people who believe.

And yet, unforgiveness can keep us from the things we ask for. Some like to point out the enormous problems of things like drugs and pornography. But the biggest problem in the church today - and among God's people – remains “un-forgiveness!”

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

The passage we are going to examine in this lesson is another of those very familiar passages. I ask you not to tune out just yet. I believe the Lord wants to show us this familiar and often used text in a way that has a message to us as Fishers of Men.

Read Mark 11:27 and make notes:

In this final phase of Jesus' earthly ministry - we get the impression Jesus is making the temple something of a focal point. He keeps coming to the temple area, day after day. It's interesting to note, each of the three groups that make up the Sanhedrin is mentioned individually - "the chief priest" - "the teachers of the law" - and "the elders."

If the text only said the "Sanhedrin," it could leave the impression that perhaps only one part of the religious leadership of that day may have been concerned about Jesus or offended by Jesus – and this one part had brought charges against Jesus before the rest of the Sanhedrin. But we are told explicitly - all three groups that make up the religious ruling council was expressing some alarm over the actions and words of Jesus.

Read Mark 11:28 and make notes:

"These things" includes the expelling of the merchants from the court of the Gentiles as well as the withering of the fig tree. No doubt many people are still talking today, about Jesus chasing the merchants out of the outer court yesterday. And as they are talking about Jesus' actions in the outer court, those who traveled along with Jesus back into the city today – probably said something about the fig tree. "You've got to see this fig tree – just yesterday Jesus stood in front of that tree and said "may no one ever eat fruit from you again" – and this morning that thing is completely dead – from the roots up."

There has been some speculation among Bible scholars about whether the Sanhedrin received some kind of royalties or kick-backs from the merchants in the court of the Gentiles. With the lack of evidence from the Bible and the lack of any historical documents – I can't say whether they did or not. It wouldn't surprise me to find out they did, but it doesn't bother me to think they did not. Assuming the Sanhedrin did not receive money from the markets in the court of the Gentiles – then it probably wouldn't bother them all that much to have some zealous person insist that the merchants move outside the temple – what does it matter to the Sanhedrin? I'm not even so sure the Sanhedrin would have cared all that much about Jesus causing some tree to wither up over night.

The Sanhedrin probably wouldn't get excited about a person performing some miracles. However, the Sanhedrin, - the religious leaders of that day - did care a great deal about one thing – that was the excitement the people were showing toward Jesus.

The religious leaders resented – in a big way – the attention and the honor the people were giving to Jesus. You see, Jesus was giving the people a religious message that had life and power. The groups that made up the Sanhedrin was only offering the people a religious activity – and it was one with no life, no power, no relief, no comfort, and basically not much hope that things would get better. Until maybe, the "sweet by and by."

The Sanhedrin was very concerned about the popular response to Jesus! They demanded to know "By what authority" Jesus was doing these things. And they demanded that he identify "who gave you this authority" To this point in time in Jesus' earthly ministry - Jesus has never openly and publicly said he was the Messiah, or even a prophet.

Read Mark 11:29-30 and make notes:

Answering a question by another question was a common practice among the rabbis of that day. It was thought that it was much more educational and beneficial to a person to help them figure out the answer to something - than it was to simply give them the answer. It was a common practice for a rabbi to ask a question that would cause the person to think through a situation or a problem. They wanted to teach the people "how to solve a problem" more than they wanted to teach them what the right answer was. Just as a personal note - I am convinced that is still a superior way of teaching today!

The one thing that is different in this particular instance is that Jesus makes his answer completely dependent upon their answer. If they can't answer his question, then he will not give them the answer to their question. Jesus' reference to John the Baptist seems rather appropriate. The ministry and preaching of John caused something of a split between the people and the religious leaders. Even though John had been dead for a while now, the religious leaders were still stinging somewhat from the effect of John's sermons. We could say they are still a little touchy about that subject.

Jesus did not ask his question regarding John in an open ended way. Jesus offered the religious leaders only two possible answers - God or man. It would be easy to conclude at this point that Jesus is saying something like "my authority is the same as John's - if you can figure out where John got his authority, then you will know where I got mine." That is possible - but it isn't necessarily what Jesus was trying to convey to the religious leaders. I am convinced Jesus was headed in a slightly different direction with this.

Read Mark 11:31-32 and make notes:

Jesus' question placed the religious leaders in a state of embarrassment - and something of a dilemma; "if we say from heaven, then he will ask why didn't we believe John" - "if we say from men - then they people would probably turn on us." If you are one of those who thinks Jesus was saying "his authority was the same as John's" - then you have to interpret this to mean the religious leaders realized that if they say from heaven then they would have to accept Jesus' authority as being from heaven.

But, let's take this text at face value for a few minutes in the manner of a good Jewish teacher of that day. Let's just leave it at Jesus trying to get the religious leaders to re-evaluate John and his authority - for the purpose of revealing something to them that is important.

The good rabbi - or the good teacher - wanted the student to learn important lessons - rather than simply learning the answer to a specific question. The good teacher wanted the student to learn lessons that would have application to all areas of life. The good teacher understood that the method was more important than the answer. For Jesus, the real issue is not where John received his authority. The real issue is about the method the Sanhedrin is using to make decisions!

The answer to a specific question might only have application to this specific problem. The method of arriving at the answer - or the method of figuring out how to deal with a problem - would probably have application to several areas of life. I am convinced Jesus was still in this mode of operation. Jesus was trying to get the religious leaders to come to understand something that was so much more important than where "his authority came from." Please remember something I shared earlier in this series - Jesus wanted the religious leaders to be saved as much as he did any one else.

If we approach this text with this concept in mind, we are more likely to see Jesus trying to help these religious leaders - instead of seeing Jesus getting the upper hand on them.

It is really interesting to take note of v32 - it reveals to us that the religious leaders were more concerned with what man thinks than they were concerned with what God thinks. "If we say John got his authority from man - we will lose our credibility with the people." How valuable is the religious leader who is more concerned about their reputation than they are concerned about helping people come to the heavenly father?

"If we say John got his authority from man - some of these people might hurt us." How valuable is the religious leader who is afraid of what people might do them if they tell the truth?

When Jesus asked the religious leaders the question about John and John's authority - it did cause them to evaluate themselves and their attitudes - at least as much as it caused them to reconsider John's authority. Can you imagine how Jesus would have responded if the religious leaders had acknowledged they had come to the place of being more concerned about how they were received and perceived by the people than they were concerned about being faithful to the Word of God? It could have been a very different story of the early days of the Church - which Jesus was shortly going to establish. What a revival could have taken place right there in Jerusalem! But the religious leaders didn't respond with repentance.

Read Mark 11:33 and make notes:

Some spokesman for the group lied and tried to plead ignorance. He tried to indicate the religious leaders had simply suspended any judgment on John. Jesus held to the condition he placed upon their answer. Since they didn't answer Jesus' question about John's authority - he would not tell them where his authority comes from. For those who interpret the early verses as indicating Jesus saying my authority comes from the same place as John's - it is easy to see this response as being a little snotty on Jesus' part.

I ask you to reconsider vs31-32 - where the religious leaders discussed Jesus' question among themselves - they clearly acknowledged the possible negative consequences from the people if they said what they really thought. Instead of acknowledging they had come to be led by the flesh rather than the spirit - then they clearly lied to Jesus.

These religious leaders were sinners who are unwilling to repent and are willfully lying to Jesus. Why bother to give them any more truth? Wouldn't any further truth be wasted upon them?

In the gospel of Matthew we read where Jesus taught that we should not cast our pearls before pigs - if we do they will probably trample the pearls under their feet. Precious jewels have no value to pigs. More truth has no value to the unrepentant sinner who denies the truth they already have.

I submit to you this entire episode with the religious leaders was about giving them an opportunity to repent and get right with God. I am convinced that was what Jesus wanted to happen that day. And it is what Jesus wants from us today. "Knock and it will be opened to you." These religious leaders wouldn't even acknowledge they saw the door - so they certainly wouldn't knock on it. What should we take home with us?

First - We must not ignore the opportunities to repent.

To be Fishers of Men - we must respond with repentance when we are shown that we are wrong. God may bring it to our attention through the words someone who speaks to us. God may bring it to our attention through the question someone asks us. God may bring it to our attention by simply causing us to think about what we are doing or saying. We cannot be the Fishers of Men we need to be - if we are unwilling to repent when we are provided the opportunity.

Second - We must get free from the fear of man.

To be Fishers of Men - we cannot be all that concerned about what other people will think of us. We must be more concerned with what our Heavenly Father will think than we are about what other people will think. When you find someone who walks in the fear of man you will never know what they will do next - and you will never know how they will respond in any situation. The person who walks in the fear of man - will do or say - in any situation what they think will keep them in good with the people they are around at that time.

It is not wrong to want people to like you. Anyone in their right mind will want to be liked by other people. Some more than others. But we must be most concerned with what the Heavenly Father thinks of us. We will remain in good standing as long as we do the right thing - regardless of what others might think at that moment.

As mad as it might make some people in a given situation - every one will respect us more when we are the kind of person that will do the right thing – period. For the person who is committed to doing the right thing - and not changing when it might cause others to "not like them" - this is the person others come to trust - because they know in advance what this person will do - they will do the right thing! Fishers of men – we need to be people that can be trusted.

Third - We must be truth speakers.

Let me ask you to consider: How valuable is the medical doctor that will only tell you what you want to hear? How valuable is the medical doctor that will refrain from telling you anything that might cause you to be unhappy or uncomfortable? When we are physically sick or hurting - we want to know the truth about what is causing us to be sick or to hurt - and we want to hear the truth about what it is going to take to make us well and to stop hurting.

How valuable is the Pastor who will only teach or preach what will make people feel good - or preach and teach only what will be enjoyed? How valuable is the Pastor who will not teach certain parts of God's truth because it might make someone unhappy? Do we not see how that kind of an attitude in the Pastor could leave many people without the help they need to find forgiveness for their sins and to find relief from their struggles? Don't you really want a Pastor who will teach the whole Word of God - and not skip the tricky parts - or the uncomfortable parts?

How valuable is the Counselor who will only tell people what they want to hear? Do we not see that the people who are having trouble will never find help and relief from their troubles if they never hear the truth? If you were having a problem and needed help or guidance - wouldn't you really want a counselor that would tell you the truth?

Fishers of Men must tell the truth to the people we meet, live with, and deal with. For it is the Truth that sets us free. Everyone probably enjoys a "warm fuzzy feeling" - but does the "warm fuzzy feeling" set anyone free?

If we do not tell the truth - then the people around us will never be helped. If we do not tell the truth - then the people around us will spend an eternity without God. If we do not tell the truth - we are NOT going to catch many people for the kingdom of God.

We can possibly build a large gathering by not telling the truth - but without the truth - the people of that gathering will not be headed toward Heaven.

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