

## **DEVOTED TO JESUS PROLOGUE**

### **WHY READ ABOUT JESUS?**

That is probably the \$10,000 question. Of what value is it to today's person to read about someone who lived so long ago? Isn't anything that happened in the 1<sup>st</sup> century absolutely irrelevant in today's fast paced world? The common thinking is that the church has become almost an obstacle given the way we live today. So each person reading these devotions has to come to grip with this central question. Why should I read about Jesus?

The answer to that central question lies in the fact that people in today's society have even less ability to cope with life than those say 50 years ago. I suppose that is because the world we live in continually depersonalizes us as individuals. It's all about information and efficiency. While it is true that we have more information, you have to ask yourself the question, "So what?" There has never been a correlation between happiness and knowing more. With the Earth's population surpassing 6 billion people, each person has much less significance than those who lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It is also true that we've become more efficient. We can beam out thoughts over the internet and have it half-way around the world in a matter of seconds, but does that make us happier? I'm reminded of a line in the movie, "Sabrina," where the main character says, "More isn't always better, sometimes it's just more."

So how is Jesus relevant? The truth is people haven't become any more adept at coping with life than they ever were. One only has to look at the increases in suicides, divorce and crime to understand that this flood of knowledge doesn't automatically give us a successful life. One has only to look at our failures at human relations, our inability to get along with others or even

ourselves, to understand the need for the answers that Jesus gives us. As I write this I find that today's social media has made us less polite and less able to find the good in others. Because the internet is largely anonymous, our society has found that we can tear each other down and not have to bear any consequences.

So what can we find when we approach Jesus Christ? I suppose the bottom line is that we find answers. We find the answer to our guilt when Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." We find peace of mind when Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." As the population of planet earth grows, we find a new way to live with other people in the examples that He set in his daily life.

Each day that you read this devotion, you are going to be challenged to apply what you read about Jesus into your daily life. After all, that is really where it counts isn't it? If you just read about Jesus, what good does it do? It isn't good readers that Jesus desires, it is disciples. I just have the feeling that God is not going to be that impressed with what I know when I stand before Him on the last day. If that were true, God would be really impressed with the Scribes and the Pharisees of Jesus' day, yet Jesus had a lot to say about people who talk about the truth, but don't live it. I would challenge you to read a portion of this book each day with an open mind and an open Bible. Each day there will be scripture for you to read and then we will talk about what you are reading. At the end of the day as you meditate on what you have learned, you will be asked to write down the answers to a couple of question. The first is to write down the things you learned about God that day. The second asks you to write down the changes you sense that God is telling you to make with what you learned that day. It is my prayer that you will not only learn something about the life and times of Jesus Christ, but also that you will allow God to change you in the process. You cannot come into the presence of Jesus Christ without being changed. That's the work He did the few short years He was here. That's the work He continues to do today. So I

invite you to take this journey with me. I have always believed it to be a journey worth taking. I believe you will also benefit from this year long journey in ways you cannot now imagine.

Ray Tuttle

## **WHAT WILL WE BE READING ABOUT THIS MONTH?**

As we left off last month, we will finish looking at Jesus' ministry in the Gersa region as Jesus is politely asked to leave the area. He goes back to Galilee and ministers once again to an area where He was most familiar. His popularity is rising with each miracle. The people hang on every word and would follow Him anywhere right up to the point where He feeds 5000 of them. It is at that point that Jesus ceases to be the Messiah the Jewish crowds expect and a great many of them walk away.

It is shortly after that time that we cross over from the Middle Galilean Ministry to what is termed the Later Galilean Ministry. Without the overwhelming popular support, the opposition to all that Jesus stands for continues to build until He is forced to leave the region. We will be walking with Jesus as he travels into the Gentile Decapolis region east of the Sea of Galilee.

Among a largely Gentile audience, Jesus' ministry changes once again. The miracles that He does are different. Jesus is there only a short time as the opposition cools a bit back in Galilee. By the end of this month, we will find Him once again back ministering to the people of the region of Galilee.

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 1st**

**Fear in Gersa**  
**Mark 5: 1-20**

As we pick up the scene from yesterday in Mark 5: 1-20, we are seeing numerous pigs floating in the Sea of Galilee and a man who called himself Legion sitting at Jesus' feet. The keepers of the dead herd of pigs had fled into the town of Gersa. These men had seen it all. They saw as the demonic man had approached this guy who had mistakenly gotten out of his boat too close to the tomb area. They had waited to see what they knew was going to happen as the feared Legion would do his normal mayhem. They had heard Legion's unearthly utterances directed at this unknown fellow from across the lake. To their great surprise Legion didn't attack and tear this group of men apart. They had seen him do it on a number of occasions, but all they witnessed this day was Legion dropping to his knees in front of one of the men who appeared to be the leader.

Then all of a sudden this man gestured towards them and the herd that they had spent so many hours caring for suddenly and without warning their livelihood ran into the sea and drowned. In total and complete terror, these keepers of the herd ran into town. As they arrived in the town square, they began to shout to anyone who would listen what they had just witnessed. These men caused such a stir that the whole town was aroused with an intense curiosity about what had happened down at the tombs. To answer that curiosity, they marched out to the tombs to see for themselves.

When they arrived at the shoreline, they witnessed the man, who had tormented them for so long, sitting at a man's feet. The man they knew as Legion seemed to be normal again, not that any one in the crowd could remember what normal was for this fellow. As they approached, they could see Legion kneeling at the feet of a man and listening to Him quietly talk. There just didn't seem to be any hint in Legion of the terror and mayhem that the townspeople had always known. At that point, the townspeople quietly asked Jesus to "get out of Dodge."

Is it just me, or do you always look at this story with a sense of puzzlement at the reaction of the townspeople? That's probably because we don't put ourselves in their shoes. We don't really understand what was going through their minds at the time. You have to understand they didn't know who this stranger was. You have been following this story for months and you are beginning to understand who Jesus was when He walked the earth. The men in this town didn't have that knowledge. It was doubtful they had even heard of this man. Remember, they weren't Jewish. They had probably never set foot in Israel and they didn't have the evening news back then.

So was it the loss of a herd of pigs that had caused this reaction? After all, these pigs did represent a source of income for someone in that town. No, I believe they reacted to the fact that standing before them was obviously someone with a power that they didn't understand and couldn't control. The people of this time and place were extremely superstitious. They held everything that wasn't part of their everyday life as something to be feared. They reacted as all men do when they are confronted with

uncontrollable power. They wanted that power as far away from them as was possible. Yet, notice they didn't demand. They didn't threaten Jesus and His disciples with bodily harm if they didn't leave right now. Quietly and with much care, they asked Jesus if He might leave at His earliest convenience.

Webster defines superstition as an irrational attitude of the mind toward supernatural events resulting in fear. People fear what they do not know or cannot control. What do you fear? Think about it, what is your first reaction when you hear the word, terrorist? What do you feel when you hear a news story about a drive-by shooting, or worse a freeway shooting? Isn't your first reaction one of fear that such a thing could happen to you? In his first letter, the Apostle John says that perfect love casts out all fear. Jesus came to set you free from the power of fear in your life. When you come into a relationship with Him, there is nothing that can happen to you that will ever separate you from Jesus. He came to set us free from being afraid of all that may happen to us in life. As always, the choice is yours. As you look at life around you, you can let yourself live a life filled with terror, or you can look into the eyes of Jesus and believe that He still has it all in control.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What fear is separating you from God?

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 2nd**

**Legion's New Assignment**  
**Mark 5: 18-20**

All I wanted to do was to follow the Master. Up to the point that I came in contact with Him, my life had been a shambles. Actually, it hadn't been a life at all. I had been shunned by society all of my life. It's hard to live as an outcast, separated from anyone who could matter. I had lived a long way from God even before the demons came and took up residence in my body. Then into my life walked this man who set me free from the torment that was that life. When I looked into His eyes, I saw both a power and a compassion that I had never seen before. After the demons left, He talked about how much God loved me and wanted me to follow Him for the rest of my days. No one had ever said these words to me. There was actually someone out there who wanted me.

Yet, as I tried to enter the boat with Jesus' disciples, He stopped me and gave me a new charge. He asked that I go back into town and tell everyone that I came in contact with about what God had done for me. I cried out that I have never been a religious man. I don't know the first thing about religion, especially the Jewish religion. He told me that He didn't ask me to talk about the Jewish religion; He just wanted me to tell people what had happened to me. I complained that people, when they saw me, would run the other way. They were all afraid of me. He answered that when people saw what was now present in my eyes, they would accept me and listen to me. No one had ever seen anything present in me that was worth anything. Yet, this man was asking me to accept a task that was far bigger than I could ever be. Jesus' convinced me that I would not be

alone in accomplishing this task. He told me that the God, who created all things, would walk beside me to strengthen me and to give me the words that He wanted me to say.

We are closing out our time in the region of the Gerasenes as told in the fifth chapter of Mark. In reading verses 18-20, we understand that there was nothing more that Jesus could have done in the region. The residents were all busy hiding from Him; afraid of the power that they didn't understand and couldn't control. The only way His message could penetrate the darkness of their souls was through the man He had healed of the many demons. Jesus knew that Legion's story could penetrate the darkness. The townspeople could argue against Jewish teaching until eternity came, but they couldn't deny what had taken place in the life of this man who had plagued them for so many years. So He sent Legion as His representative to reach a people who were so precious to God.

All God asks of us is to be a witness to all that He has done for us. We do make it complicated at times. I am currently reading *The Externally Focused Church* by Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson. In that book they make an observation that really struck me. It seems that rather than do what Jesus asked Legion to do, we Christians have created a parallel universe for ourselves. If our schools are broken, we have created our own schools. If the entertainment industry is lacking, we've developed our own. If you read our magazines, there is now even a Christian diet in case God has blessed you a little too much. We can venture through life without even having to deal with the world. We have

told ourselves that we don't want to be polluted by the sin in the world. We want our families to be separated from all that is evil.

While there are good reasons for us to stay out of the filth that exists in the world, we play right into Satan's hands when we take such pains to separate ourselves. I have heard it said over and over that a new Christian is an effective witness for Jesus for only about two years after they are saved. After those two years, all their friends are Christians. The world looks at the church as some kind of exclusive club filled with people who think they are better than everybody else.

So what is the answer? I believe the answer lies in the charge that Jesus gave to Legion. Your first step is to sit down and think about what Jesus has done for you. Write down some of the ways that knowing God has been a benefit in your life. Think about the ways He has strengthened your family. Think about all of the times when He has provided for your needs. Think about the times when His presence has comforted you in your pain. The list you are making is now getting quite long isn't it? Now the next time God brings someone into your life dealing with the same issues, tell them what God has done for you. It's just that easy.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What benefit does God give to your life?

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## THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY

June 3rd

### **Faith Developed**

#### **Luke 8: 40-42**

Faith is a most misunderstood word. If you asked the average man on the street to define it, you would probably get a myriad of answers. To some, faith believes in something or someone. I have heard that definition a lot. Yet it does lack in describing what we will be talking about today. I thought today we would shift over to the Gospel of Luke for our next series of events. If you would turn in your Bible to Luke 8: 40-56, that will give you the entire story. However, we will only be dealing with the first three verses today.

Jesus has once more traveled directly across the Sea of Galilee. That would bring Him right back home to Capernaum. That is what Luke implies in verse 40 by the fact that Jesus returned. He also says that the crowds were expecting Him. The root word in the Greek for this expectation is to look for. In other words, Jesus didn't send an advance team back to Capernaum in order to get the crowd ready for His arrival. The original Greek means that the people of Capernaum were on the look out for Jesus. Granted, these people seemed to be hooked on miracles, but they were looking for Jesus, which is never a bad thing.

Luke records that upon reaching the shore, Jesus was met there by a man by the name of Jairus. Luke tells us a couple of things about this man. The first was that Jesus

and Jairus were undoubtedly well acquainted. We are told that Jairus was the ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum. Jesus would have needed this man's permission whenever He spoke in the synagogue. We are also sure that Jairus not only knew Jesus, but he had listened to His words on many occasions.

The second thing that Luke reports is that Jairus had a twelve year old daughter who was ill. If we look at a parallel version of the story in Mark 5, we get the idea that his daughter was quite young. As a father of a daughter, I am sure that this girl would always be quite young to her father. The truth was that under Jewish Law, a girl of twelve was considered to be a woman so she had to be a bit younger than that. We also understand that the illness that had befallen this girl had come on quite suddenly and had intensified rapidly. Otherwise, it would be difficult for us to understand why Jairus wouldn't have approached Jesus the day before He left on a journey of unknown duration. We also know that the illness was quite serious. The literal meaning of the original language that Mark uses to describe the girl means to be at one's last breath.

So what of Jairus' faith? We know from past discussions that Jesus' miracles were done in order to develop or increase faith in His Father and His message. Jairus was not blind or deaf. He had, no doubt, heard all about the healings of others that had taken place in his town. He might have even witnessed more than a few of them. He would have also heard the charge of the Pharisees that this man's power came as a result of satanic possession. For him to approach Jesus could have proven costly to his career. Jairus waits until the very last minute to finally make his decision to approach Jesus,

when his only child lay dying and there were no alternatives left to him. This shows that Jairus' faith was superficial at best.

It would be necessary for Jesus to develop and perfect this man's faith. To Jesus that would have been far more important than granting Jairus' request to heal his daughter. Now I know there are some who would question that logic. Some are thinking right now, "What could be more important than the death of a child?" That's because we tend to look at death as being the ultimate tragedy. We fail to see that for God, death is not as great a tragedy as we think. God understands that death is only a transitional phase. He created the human soul to last for all eternity. For God the ultimate tragedy is someone dying without knowing His son and possessing the free gift of eternal life. For Jesus, it was far more important that Jairus understand that losing his responsible leadership position was not as important as the decision he was going to make about Jesus that day. His eternal destiny was lying in the balance at this point. The perfecting Jairus' faith was done through the delay caused by a woman who touched the hem of Jesus' robe. For that story, you will have to tune in tomorrow.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What is now separating you from God?

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## **Faith's Cousin**

### **Mark 5: 25-34**

There are a lot of people who don't even know that faith has a cousin. All right, so there isn't much of a family resemblance, but he's kin just the same. As Jairus was standing around, foot tapping, insides churning, Jesus stops right in His tracks to deal with a woman who had touched Him. I can almost imagine Jairus looking around for someone that he could direct to get this woman out of here. Jairus knew from the look of her that he had never seen her in synagogue. How could Jesus interrupt His day with such an obvious low-life? As we continue in our journey in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke, we arrive today at verses 43-48. In my opinion, Mark gives a much fuller account of these events, so let's put our thumb in Luke and wander over to Mark 5: 25-34.

As Jesus followed Jairus to his house, the crowds pressed in upon Him. It was almost as if He had achieved "rock star" status. Present in the crowd is this woman. Notice how Mark describes her in verses 25 and 26. He uses the Greek word that is normally translated scourge. Now that word was normally used in the first century to describe the Roman process of preparing a victim for crucifixion. In that sense, the word paints the picture of a kind of pre-death. Here the meaning is much the same. Mark is telling us that this disease would soon lead to this woman's death. Despite all of her efforts and all of her savings, the disease had taken its natural course for the last twelve years. The bleeding would have also left her spiritually defiled, and as such, she would not be welcome in the synagogue of Capernaum.

So, since we took a look at Jairus' faith, it's only fair that we take a look at this woman's faith. Actually her faith is quite strong. Notice what she says in Mark 5: 28, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." The faith is real, but what she lacks is faith's cousin, knowledge. Her strong faith was based upon an imperfect knowledge and Jesus cannot let that go uncorrected. It is strong faith coupled with imperfect knowledge that leads to superstition. It was not Jesus' garments that had healed her. That kind of belief like this woman exhibited that will lead us into all kinds of places we don't need to go.

Did you notice that there are two things that happened as the woman touched the fringes of Jesus' garment? The first thing that happened was that the woman knew that she had been instantly healed. The second thing that happened was that Jesus knew that she had been healed. There is nothing in Mark or Luke's language that would indicate that Jesus had failed to know not only that someone had been healed, but exactly who in the crowd had touched Him. So if Jesus already knew who had touched Him why did He ask? It was for the woman's sake that He went through the entire process. From the moment that He had created her, He had loved her as a father loves his only child. As a father would, Jesus took the time out to correct her and put her life back on track. This woman needed to understand that it was not the touching of His garment that had caused her healing. It was her faith. She didn't just need to touch His garment, she need to believe in Him as her savior. She needed her strong faith directed towards the proper source.



So faith has a cousin, and its name is knowledge. They are both needed if we are going to enter into a relationship with the true and living God. Take a look around you at all of the publications this world has to offer. It won't take long to see that faith and spirituality are definitely rising in popularity. The problem is that most of what passes for faith today is in direct conflict with what God wrote in the Bible. If we don't spend the majority of our reading time in the Bible, there is a real danger that we'll get off course. Jesus took valuable time out of His day in order to make sure this woman understood who it was that had caused her healing. He stands ready to do the same thing for you. You will find Him right there in the pages of the Bible which stands open before you.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What are you currently doing to learn more about God?

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 5th**

**Talitha Koum!**  
**Mark 5: 35-43**

As we left Jairus, we were viewing his feet tapping and insides churning as he waits for Jesus to be done with this woman so that He could get back to the more important issues at hand; that of healing his daughter. We are continuing our story as found in Mark 5: 35-43. We see that there was considerable delay as Jesus dealt with the woman

because not only had word finally arrived that Jairus' daughter was dead, but the elaborate mourning process had already begun. One can only imagine the turn of emotions within the father of this girl. Those of you who have lost children can relate to the feelings that are now welling up inside Jairus. Jesus doesn't comfort the grieving father. He just gives him a challenge, "Don't be afraid; just believe." If Jesus' intent was to strengthen this man's faith, then He takes Jairus to an emotional cliff with no bottom in sight. You can almost imagine the insertion of hope that Jesus gives into what was certainly a hopeless situation.

When you read today's passage, did you notice who went with Jesus into Jairus' house? For the first time, it is recorded that He took only Peter, James and John with Him, along with the girl's parents into the upper room of that house. These three disciples become what is now known as the inner three. It is believed that these three men saw more, learned more and did more than the other nine. It was out of these men that there would develop the leadership structure that would move the church onward after Jesus was no longer walking the earth.

As the party enters into the house, you can almost hear the tumult and confusion that abounded within its walls. The mourners, whether real or hired, had already gathered and begun their wailing. The melancholy sound of the mourning flute could already be heard filling the house with sadness. The preparation for the spectacle that was the eastern funeral had begun in earnest. As Jesus walks into the house, He directs the mourners to cease their mourning for the child lying upstairs is merely asleep. The

subsequent laughter of those present tells us two things. First, the mourners believed that the child was dead. It also tells us that the disciples still viewed raising the dead as being an extraordinary event, even for the Messiah. As such, they felt that it was important that the disbelief of those present be substantiated for future generations. After their laughter had died down, Jesus put the mourners out of the house. This house was no longer going to be the proper place for a bunch of mourners.

Jesus now leads the disciples and the parents to the chamber and the maiden. Without doubt or hesitation, He took the child by the hands and utters in Aramaic, Talitha Koum! The literal translation of Jesus' words is, "Maiden arise." Just imagine the amazement and the astonishment in the room at that moment as the little girl's eyes open and life begins to flow back into her face and body. Jesus then charges those present that they not tell anyone what had happened. I can't tell you why He did that. It would be difficult to imagine that the entire town of Capernaum wouldn't find out. What are the parents going to say when the girl shows up at synagogue next Saturday?

This is the second time in Jesus' ministry that He had raised the dead. He will do it one more time towards the end of His ministry. I suppose it is valid that we consider raising the dead to be an extraordinary event. Yet, every one of these three people died again. You cannot visit Israel today and hope to look these three up in the telephone book. No, in my opinion the really great miracle happened three days after Jesus was crucified. It was that miracle that ended the sting of death forever. It was that miracle that gives me the great hope that though I may at some point physically die, my eternal

future is assured. It is set in stone. It will happen just as surely as the sun will rise this morning. To me, that is the greatest miracle that Jesus performed, but this one wasn't bad was it?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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How has my view of death now changed?

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 6th**

**Prophet without Honor**  
**Matt. 13: 53-58**

It is at this point that Jesus embarks on his third Galilean tour. As Jesus departs from Capernaum this time, the town ceases to be His home base. While He will visit there from time to time, it was always on His way to somewhere else. There was a growing opposition to His ministry by both the Pharisees and by Herod Antipas. As that opposition grows, it is best for Him to stay mobile. It is at this point that Jesus becomes the true missionary. Jesus describes this point in His ministry very well when he says, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. (Luke 9: 58)"

Matthew 13: 53-58 tells us that it was now time for Jesus to go back into Nazareth. This visit was much different than the last one that we looked at in the fourth chapter of

Luke. That's not to say that Jesus was different, nor was the reaction of the people much different. It's just that as Jesus walked into town, His popularity had greatly increased, His followers had greatly increased, and His fame had greatly increased. It would not be too great a stretch to believe that the expectations of Nazareth were even greater than they had been on His last visit home. After all, this was their home town prophet and they wanted to make Him into their mold. I'm sure that there was more than a little jealousy that up to this point their man had His headquarters elsewhere. All in all, we see a town that was full of pride and conceit.

As was the case at His first visit, Jesus was given the opportunity to speak in their synagogue. The seeming assumption of superiority on the part of Jesus seemed just too much for the upper classes of Nazareth. You see, they mistook the authority with which Jesus spoke to them to be proof that He now held Himself to be somehow superior to those who had watched Him grow up. They saw Him as someone who should have remained in town looking after His mother and keeping the family business alive. After all, that was the main job of the oldest son in those days. So, the town reacted as one would expect; they rejected both Jesus and His message.

Their rejection of Jesus comes in two forms. The first is their reference to His educational background. They believed that all of His education occurred right there in the local School of the Rabbis. That was where He had sat along with all of their sons to learn the time honored lessons that had always been taught. They wanted to take a look at His university degrees. Where was the PH.D. that should have been hanging on

Mary's wall at home? They believed that Jesus' wisdom had to have its origin within the walls of the great university in Jerusalem, or it was not to be given much credence.

The second form that rationalized their rejection of Jesus was indicated by the mention of His family who still lived in town. It was widely known that Jesus' own family didn't buy this "prophet stuff." Their unbelief must have really hurt Jesus' witness in His own home town. If His own family doesn't hold Him to be a prophet, much less Messiah, then why should they?

Their resulting lack of faith was completely predictable. Jesus did a few healings and quietly left town. Upon leaving He does utter the same words that He had said in His first visit, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor." At least, there wasn't an episode with a cliff this time around.

Sometimes it is our own relatives who are the most difficult and frustrating to reach. Perhaps it is because they know us all too well. They tend to look at us the same way that the people of Nazareth looked at Jesus, "Who does He think He is?" Somehow the message gets lost as they try to maintain their own superior position. My only advice to those who find themselves in this position is to never stop praying for them. Pray that God would send His word to them through someone else if it would help. In the end, you have to remember that God gave your relatives the same free will that He gave everyone else. It is their choice to accept or reject the free gift that Jesus offers them.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Who do you need to continue to pray for?

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 7th**

**The Disciples' First Journey**  
**Matt. 10: 1-5**

There are two times that Jesus sent His disciples out to minister without Him. You can refer to them as practice runs for when He would be gone out of this world. We have come to the first of these missions. Before He sends them, Jesus gives them a long set of instructions that are recorded in the tenth chapter of Matthew. This is a long section of scripture, but I would like you to read through it one time in order to get an overview of what Jesus is trying to tell them. Many of the passages recorded in this chapter are restated in other connections within the gospels, meaning that Jesus used them on other occasions. You might also notice that these instructions appear to go well beyond the scope of their experience on this occasion. It is almost as if Jesus is beginning to prepare these men for what they will experience within their lifetimes. This chapter can almost be seen as a sketch of the early history of His church.

Over the next few days, we will sift through what Jesus says here and will look carefully at each section. For now, let me leave you with this idea. In this exercise, Jesus

is able to multiply His own ministry by six within the small villages and towns of Galilee. It was as if six pairs of His ministry went forth and ministered. Isn't that what the mentoring relationship of discipleship is all about? One person can only do so much when it comes to the task that Jesus left His church. He can see only so many people. He can influence only so many lives. Yet when someone teaches several people, his own ministry and influence are multiplied many times over. Dr. Alexander Bruce in his book, *The Training of the Twelve*, says, "This mission of the disciples as evangelists or miniature apostles was partly, without doubt, an educational experiment for their own benefit; but its direct design was to meet the spiritual necessities of the people, whose neglected condition lay heavy on Christ's heart." To the Pastors and the teachers who are reading this right now, does this describe your heart? Are you taking pains to train up people who have the same heart you have? Are you giving them opportunities within your community to reach those who lay heavy upon your heart? Your marching orders, as given by the Apostle Paul in the fourth chapter of his letter to the Ephesian church, are to become equippers. That's all you are to do. Do you find yourself doing more ministering than equipping? Then maybe you have your ministry a bit out of kilter. As to that possibility, I will leave that between you and God.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Is your ministry currently out of kilter?

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**Present Instructions**  
**Matt. 10: 6-15**

We are still in the tenth chapter of Matthew talking about the first time Jesus sent His disciples out in pairs to the lost villages and hamlets within the Galilean region to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven. His instructions break down into two distinct parts that we will talk about over the next couple of days. The first part can be found in the first fifteen verses of the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew. As you read these verses, notice the kind of instructions that He gives these men.

The first thing that I see is that it was at this point that these twelve men were given an unusual power. It's not that Jesus noticed some latent talent within them that He developed into the ability to cast out demons or heal the sick. As His followers, these men were given the right to use His name, and with it His power, in order to do His work. There was a twofold purpose to this exercise. The first was for the spiritual growth of the twelve. The second was that these six pairs of men could greatly multiply His outreach. As Jesus' representatives, these men had to do the kind of things that Jesus was doing in His ministry. Also these men would later remember this experience when they went forth after Jesus' death. In the Book of Acts for example, we see a confident Peter and John heal a lame man at the gate called Beautiful by using the same name that they now used to do some really extraordinary things.

The second thing I notice is that the disciples were sent only to the Jewish cities, within the region of Galilee. In fact, they were expressly forbidden to preach to any Gentiles or to enter Samaria. The time would come when Jesus would give His Great Commission to go into all the world, but the disciples were not yet ready. The fact was they were still way too Jewish to be effective outside of their own people. They didn't know about the cross or the resurrection. The only thing that they really knew was what they had learned from John the Baptist; that repentance was the first step to entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. That message would have no meaning outside of Israel.

Notice the tasks that Jesus charged them to do while they were gone. They were to preach and to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast out the demons present in those with whom they came into contact. It was essentially the same mission that Jesus had spent most of His time doing up to this point. They were to use the miracles to gain a hearing and to preach about a Kingdom that was close at hand. The miracles were all done in Jesus' name so that those the disciples came in contact with would not be wondering who these men were, but they would be left to ponder who this Jesus was.

Provisions for the journey would be just what these men normally carried on their persons. They would not be packing a lunch. Judas would not be dividing the group purse so as to give each man a little "pocket change." It was necessary that these men begin to understand and live by the provision of the God they served. The great faith that these men were known for in the Book of Acts had its beginning right here in Galilee.

Each time they stepped out trusting only in their master and the God they served, their faith grew as they saw God's provision in their own lives.

Finally in Jesus' instructions, we see that the disciples were given some measure of judgment. They were to enter into each town on the lookout for worthy people with deserving homes. It was with these kinds of individuals that the disciples were to stay. It was to these kinds of homes that they would leave the kind of peace that only God can give. Of course, the opposite was true when the disciples failed to find a good reception to their message.

I've not seen any ceremony commissioning missionaries today that even closely resembled the charge that Jesus gives here. Normally when a missionary hears the call of God, the first thing that is done is that support is raised for the work for which God has called that particular missionary. I believe that a great deal of what Jesus spoke of here was for the twelve disciples and for this time in their development. If you want to draw an application out of this chapter of scripture, it is not God's will for our lives to simply attend a church and learn about Him. Jesus expects us to tell those He brings into our path about all that God has done for us. The second application you can draw here is that faith is developed in steps. Faith is never something that just shows up unannounced. You start out trusting God in little things then as you see that He is always faithful, you begin to trust Him more and more each day. Those are the lessons that I see that can be applied right here, right now.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What is God telling me to do for Him right now?

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 9th**

**Future Warnings**  
**Matt. 10: 16-42**

It is doubtful that Jesus said the words recorded in Matthew 10: 16-42 to His disciples at this time. There are two reasons that I believe this to be true. The first reason is that these words are not recorded in the parallel accounts of this event that are written in Mark 6: 6-12 and Luke 9: 1-6. The second reason is that such a warning would have scared the living daylights out of the disciples. In this initial state of following Jesus, they would have been far more likely to go right back to the relative safety their homes. I believe this is another example of Matthew teaching his readers about the reality of persecution when they choose to follow Jesus. To be sure these words were spoken by Jesus; it's just that I don't believe they were spoken at this time in the disciples' development.

When one takes on the mantle of discipleship, it is wise that we look at both the rewards and costs of such a move. Jesus said the very same thing when He would later advise people to count the cost of discipleship. It is easy for us to become fascinated with

the idea of pleasing our savior. It is easy to become wrapped up in the great rewards that await the disciple of Christ in heaven. It is also easy to overlook the kind of things that Jesus is talking about in Matthew 10: 16-33. So let's take a look at what Jesus has to say.

The first thing that Jesus tells us is that persecution is going to come upon these men from three different sources. Persecution is going to come from men who want nothing to do with a God that they perceive might limit their own personal freedom. Persecution will come from those who worship religion instead of God because following Jesus upsets their own power base. Finally, persecution will come from the civil authorities for much the same reason as the religionist; Jesus upsets the natural order of things. I'm sure there are those reading this today who have seen persecution from at least one of these sources. Yet Jesus' promise to us is that He will be right there with us, giving us the words that we need at the moment to defend our faith.

Second, Jesus teaches that He is the cause of all of the persecution. It is because men hate all that Jesus stands for that His disciples will also face persecution. We are not above our master. They persecuted Jesus and called Him Satanic, they will do the same to His disciples. If your wish is to make friends with all men, then being a disciple of Jesus is not something you should do.

Jesus' third lesson to His disciples is that they are not to fear. The God whom we serve is more powerful than anything man can muster. There is nothing that man can do to us that will affect our eternity; only God can do that. We serve a God who cares

deeply about even the smallest details of our lives. When we face opposition, we must always remember who it is that we work for.

Finally, I find that verses 32 and 33 make great marching orders for the disciple of Christ. For me it just puts it all in perspective. If we serve God, we must do so with all of our heart, mind and soul. All of our former relationships, even family ties, are now different. We serve a new master now and to do that effectively we must not let earthly relationships derail us from the task at hand. To be sure, we take to heart Jesus' advice that we are to be as shrewd as snakes and as harmless as doves when we deal with people, but we are not to let persecution stop us from advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What stops you from spreading the "good news?"

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 10th**

**A Brief History of Antipas**  
**Mark 6: 17-29**

As we move through the gospels, especially in the sixth chapter of Mark, we come to a part that seems to be almost a parenthesis. The events that Mark records in verses 17-29 take us back a bit in time to explain the final outcome of John the Baptist. In order

to figure out what the big deal was, you have to have to open up a book titled Antiquities of the Jews by the Jewish historian Josephus. Let's travel back in our story to the rule of Herod the Great.

Now in order for Herod to remain in power, he had to fight to stay on top of the hill. He had to placate and please Augustus Caesar. He had to placate the Jews and keep them happy. He also had to be on the lookout for those within his own family who would be a threat to both his life and his rule. Josephus records that Herod had five wives and various children by those wives. His first wife, Doris, bore him a son whom Herod named Antipater after his father. Antipater was the heir apparent to Herod's throne. Unfortunately as he grew up, Antipater wanted to rule a bit before his father was done ruling. In other words, Antipater thought Herod was living a bit too long and wanted to correct the situation. Herod the Great discovered the plot and had his oldest son executed.

That event opened up the position of heir apparent, which then fell to his next eldest son, Alexander. If you go back to when Herod came to power, you have to understand that Herod was not Jewish, he was Idumean. In order for Herod to have some legitimacy to rule Israel, he married Mariamme I, who was of the Maccabean line that had ruled Israel for over three hundred years. With Mariamme, Herod had four kids, two boys and two girls. The boys were named Alexander and Aristobulus after their Maccabean ancestors who had ruled in Israel's past.

The relationship between Herod and Mariamme was one of mutual suspicion and outright hostility. She was also influenced by her mother, Alexandra who believed that rule of Israel should never have left their family. Then you have to add into the mix the fact that Herod's sister, Salome, wanted to rid the world of the entire Maccabean line and their influence at court. As another sidelight you need to understand that Salome had also married into the Maccabean line to a man by the name of Costobarus, who was governor of Idumea. Earlier Salome had tired of him, denounced him and had him executed. I went into all of this is so that you will understand the influences that Herod the Great was under.

Salome teamed with her mother, Kypros and allegedly caught Mariamme in a plot to end Herod's life and see her sons, Alexander and Aristobulus take over rule of the kingdom. Josephus goes into a lot of detail about the two boys and how they promoted their own innocence. After a mock trial, Herod ordered Mariamme and later Alexander and Aristobulus executed for treason.

The next in line for the throne was Herod Phillip who was married to Herodias at the time. When Herod the Great finally died and his will was validated by Rome, it divided his kingdom up among three of his sons, none of which were named Herod Phillip. Herod Phillip was given a nice house in Jerusalem and a comfortable income, but no power. Unfortunately that just wasn't good enough for Herodias, so she left him and charmed her way into the life of the younger brother, Herod Antipas, who was given



rule over Galilee and Perea. It was John the Baptist's criticism of that arrangement that caused him to be arrested by Herod Antipas. I will talk more about this tomorrow.

I only go into this history so that you can understand the background of what happened to John. It also helps when we look at Herod Antipas to understand what kind of man he was. He does figure prominently in our story as he ruled part of Israel and would have viewed Jesus' rise in popularity with much suspicion and fear. In that sense, Antipas was much like his father, Herod the Great. It seems that his father had taught Antipas well what it took to maintain power and control over a contentious population.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Do you find a bit of Herod Antipas in your own heart?

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 11th**

**Antipas, A Character Study**  
**Mark 6: 14-20**

As we left Herodias yesterday, she had been safely married to the next in line to rule Israel after the death of her father-in-law, Herod the Great. Her plans were thwarted when the old tyrant had changed his will at the last minute. The new will had left his son, Herod Phillip, quite wealthy, but with no political power. What had started out as a guarantee that she would help rule Israel ended with Herodias being put on the proverbial

shelf. Such an event was absolutely unacceptable to a woman with the ambitions of Herodias. It was at that point that she set her sights and won the favor of Herod Antipas, who would rule both Galilee and Perea. It was on a visit to Jerusalem by Herod Antipas that the intrigue started. One can only imagine the scene as it unfolded. The end result was that it was agreed that upon Herod Phillip's return from Rome, Herod Antipas would repudiate his marriage to his current wife, the daughter of King Aretas of Arabia and wed Herodias.

Antipas' current wife caught wind of the plot and quite innocently got permission from Herod Antipas to visit his palace in Macchaerus. From that point it was an easy jump over the border to daddy's house. Her father was quite understandably a bit upset over the whole affair. Upon Antipas' return from Rome, he married Herodias even though both were married to other people. Such a thing was illegal under Jewish Law. While the Jewish leadership remained silent and did not criticize the marriage, John the Baptist was quite vocal about the situation.

We are in the gospel of Mark. If you could take a moment to read Mark 6: 14-20, you will see an interesting portrait of this man. From what we've said so far, one can easily understand that Herod Antipas was used to getting what he wanted. Most who opposed the king saw the business end of a sword real fast. He had learned those lessons quite well from his father. Yet, Herod Antipas had not had John killed, only imprisoned him. We are given the reason for the hesitation in verse 20. There seemed to be a part of Herod Antipas that longed for the goodness that he saw in John the Baptist. It's just that

Herod Antipas was one of those people who kept their religion separated from the rest of his life.

One can only imagine what Herod and John talked about during those long sessions lasting well into the night. We know from John's ministry where his heart lay and the kinds of things that John would have told Herod about what God expects in the way of behavior. Yet there had to be some tenderness in the words of John or he would have lost his head a lot sooner. What resulted from these conversations was a very conflicted Herod Antipas. If what John had told him about the coming Messiah was true, then to kill God's anointed messenger would put Herod in bad with an angry God. Yet for Herod Antipas to believe John and to put his life right would have meant that he would have lost all of his power and wealth. That was something that he just wasn't willing to do.

So Herod Antipas left John in a holding pattern, refusing to set him free either by releasing John or having him executed. In the end, his dilemma was solved by his wife. Most historians agree that the execution of John the Baptist was a turning point in Herod's life. A few years later, after an unsuccessful war with King Aretas, Herod Antipas and Herodias were removed from power by Rome and sent into exile.

Herod Antipas' lifestyle can be seen in a lot of people today. Perhaps there are some reading this who see too much of this man in their own lives. You flirt with Christianity, but are unwilling to give all of your heart to God out of fear for what you

might lose. You go to church because it makes you feel good, but you hold back fearing what you will lose if you take the idea of discipleship seriously. To such people, I would say that you need to look at things from an eternal perspective. All that you treasure and hold important is going to pass. You can lose it all in the next recession. Even if you are able to hold on to it for the rest of your life, you still can't take it with you when you die. What Jesus Christ offers you will last for eternity. Herod Antipas chose the temporary and lost it all. John chose the eternal and is still enjoying the fruits of that decision. What will you choose?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What choice did you make today?

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 12th**

**Salome**  
**Mark 6: 21-29**

She was born with the proverbial silver spoon in her mouth, the product of a strong willed mother and a weak father. For her upbringing, she had been taught to use her charms to gain the only thing that mattered, power. To describe her physically, one could only say that she was beautiful, but that beauty was only on the outside. Inside her heart and mind one would find only the constant lessons she had gained from her mother. She had learned early on that she could trade on her beauty. There were plenty of weak men

without character that she could control. To be sure the world was run by powerful men, but she learned early on that they could be controlled and made to bend a certain way. All it took was to bat her eyes and stand in that way that could cause a man to forget what he was about and to desire only her.

She had danced well that night. It was quite unusual for someone with royal blood to become such a spectacle, but she rather enjoyed the looks in the eyes of the men that had ogled her. She knew that it was in those stares that true power lay. At the head of the table sat the “birthday boy”, her hated step-father. To see him looking at her in that way made her skin crawl. Yet even as he stared, she knew she had him right where she wanted him.

At the end of the dance, the applause was deafening. The adoration that was lavished upon her had built up her self-esteem to the point where she felt she was on top of the world. Then came the moment that was totally unexpected; her step-father actually offered her anything that she desired, up to half of his kingdom. In confusion she excused herself and fled the room to find the only person who could help her in her dilemma as to what to ask for. She knew her mother would know what to do. Upon telling Herodias what her step-father had offered, she saw a gleam come into her mother’s eyes. It seems that Herodias had wanted something for quite some time but was unable to get her new husband to grant her request. Salome knew about the Baptist. I mean who didn’t know about the man? As an evil smile crossed Herodias’ lips, she carefully told her daughter what to ask for.

Quickly she swept back into the great hall in front of all who had gathered for the party and made her request known. Salome knew that Herod Antipas could not possibly fail to grant her request given the oath that he had just sworn in front of his guests. With the utterance of her request, orders were given to bring her the head of John the Baptist mounted on a silver platter.

There are a lot of examples of parenting that can be found in the Bible. Some of the examples are good and should be followed. Others, like our story today, are examples that should be avoided at all costs. Parents have a lot of influence over their children. Unfortunately the influence can be both positive and negative. Wise is the parent who makes God a central part of their parenting strategy. For those parents reading this today, let me ask a few questions of you. Do you pray daily for your children? Have you ever apologized to your child when you have blown it? Do you accurately share with your child everything about your own walk with God? Children can spot hypocrisy better than anyone on earth. If you want your child to have a solid walk with God, then you better be real with them and you better be authentic.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What do you need to change in the relationship with your children?

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 13th**

**5000 Hungry Men**

**Matt. 14: 13-21, Mark 6: 30-44, Luke 9: 10-17, John 6: 1-13**

The event that we are going to talk about today is one of the few miracles that appear in all four gospels, so we might be skipping around a bit. If you can grab something to hold your places, we will be in Matthew 14: 13-21, Mark 6: 30-44, Luke 9: 10-17 and John 6: 1-13. Each writer adds something the story so the only way to gain a full picture of what went on is to look at all of them.

After the disciples had returned from their first missionary experience, Jesus wanted to take them aside and rest. By that time, Jesus' popularity had risen to the point where finding a place to be alone was quite a challenge. Mark 6: 30-32 says that they boarded a boat and headed for a solitary place on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Dr. Luke tells us that the intended destination was the area around Bethsaida, which was most likely the Bethsaide-Julias that Herod's son Philip currently ruled. Apparently they didn't sail too far from land because the people were able to follow them on foot and were there when the group disembarked. Mark tells us that Jesus had compassion on the crowds and began to teach them many things. Both Matthew and Luke record that Jesus also did miracles that day.

The crowd must have been there for quite some time as each of the gospel writers report that there arose a concern from the disciples about the fact that no one had eaten.

Since it was late and they were a long way from a grocery store, it was suggested to Jesus that He dismiss the crowd to allow them to enter into the local towns and villages to buy food. The disciples reacted with the wise and right thing to do given the circumstances as they saw them. John's narrative tells us that Jesus reacted to their concern with a question intended to give Philip and the rest of them a little test. In John 6: 7, we see that Philip either had done an audit of the group's financial wealth or just pulled a number out of his head that it would take more than eight month's wages to even give each person a single bite of bread.

The next thing we know is here comes Andrew with a small boy who was wiser than all of the adults in the crowd in that he had brought a sack lunch with him. John tells us that the bread in the kid's lunch consisted of five small barley loaves. These loaves would have been the size of one of our dinner rolls, and barley was the cheapest grain available on the market. Now I know that we have always viewed the two fish that were also in the lunch as being of a good size. Most pictures we've seen of this event even show them to be about a foot long. Unfortunately the Greek word that John uses for fish is in the diminutive tense. In other words, these fish were of the tiny variety. Such fish were about the size of one of our sardines and were often pickled and eaten with bread. You have to remember the whole package was originally intended to serve the needs of one small boy.

Both Matthew and Mark record that Jesus had the disciples get the crowd seated right there in the grass. Jesus then took the offered lunch and raised it towards the



heavens, gave thanks to God, the provider, and started to divide the bread and fish for the disciples to distribute to the crowd. Matthew tells us that those who ate their fill that day numbered around five thousand men and then you had to count the women and the children present.

Finally Jesus sent the disciples through the crowd each carrying a small wicker basket to collect the leftovers. The narratives say that each disciple filled his basket with bread and fish. We'll talk more tomorrow about the reaction of the crowd, but let's draw some lessons for ourselves from the events we talked about today.

Over the years, I have been in groups where someone has uttered a statement something like this, "Why should I give? The church really doesn't need the small amount that I can afford." If we truly understand what Jesus is teaching us today, we would never entertain this thought. The boy gave all he had and it was used by God to fill a multitude of need. That's the God whom we serve. You can find no where in the Bible where God criticizes a person for the size of a gift given in love to Him. All He has ever asked of us is our all, and then He opens up the windows of heaven and pours out more than enough to fulfill the need. So the next time you drop your money into the plate, make sure you are giving sacrificially and that you remember the God you serve. You will be amazed at the abundance that gift will do in the Kingdom of God as it is multiplied by the creator of the universe.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Are your giving habits going to change as a result?

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 14th**

**Let's Make Him King**  
**John 6: 14, 15**

In this country there never is a shortage of people who would like to be President. I suppose that is why there is rarely a time over the last several decades when there wasn't someone running for the job. They may have not yet declared that they are running, but they are running none the less. As these people give us their view of what our country could look like, we begin the process of minutely examining these potential Presidents to determine if they have the right stuff to lead our country and if they could do the job we want done. And so begins the vetting process where the people of this country are constantly bombarded by news about the various aspects of all of these candidates. One by one each Presidential hopeful falls by the wayside until there is left standing a single person to lead our country for the next four years.

I suppose the reason people would put themselves through all of this in order to gain free rent in a nice house is that they have a desire to do something with their lives that has great significance. Of course I understand that there are a lot of reasons someone would like to be President, but this one works best for me. I guess I have always wanted

to see the best in people. We live in a country that has a tremendous history of being able to choose those who would lead us. The problem is that we also tend to view the Bible in the same light. As we look at today's passage, we tend to think that it is normal for the people to be able to choose their ruler; unfortunately that was not the case in a Roman occupied world. In the first century, the idea of democracy was just that, an idea. To be sure, democracy had been tried in Greece and during the Roman Republic, but it did not last long. Sooner or later, someone who was bigger or stronger came along and the great experiment was quickly squashed.

We are finishing our look at Jesus' first feeding of a large group of people by looking at John 6: 14, 15. The Apostle John reports that after the crowd had eaten their fill of bread and fish, there was a great ground swell to elevate Jesus to become the next King of Israel. The idea for this had come out of all of the teaching that every Jew had heard since they were small children. First God was going to send Elijah to get them ready. Next would come one like Moses who would supply them with miraculous food. Finally the Messiah would come and defeat their enemies so that they could live out their days in total luxury, safe from outside threats and constantly fed a diet of holy food. If you remember, we saw the same progression in the second chapter of John when the religious leaders came out to question John the Baptist. Those leaders wanted to know which one of the big three John was claiming to be.

Here we are seeing the same questions being answered by the multitudes. "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world," was their heart's cry. This is what

they were looking for all these years. This is what they felt they wanted. Imagine their surprise when Jesus didn't acquiesce to their desires for His future. The surprise that was felt by the crowds would have quickly changed to one of confusion as he quietly dismissed them and wandered into a mountain area to pray. They had finally gotten who this Jesus fellow really was. Why didn't He get it?

The reality was that the crowds didn't get it. What they wanted was that which was only for the "now." Their solution didn't fix the sin problem that had plagued mankind since the days of Adam. It's just another case of the creation wanting to control the creator. It just doesn't work that way. When someone makes a movie about man creating a machine that eventually kills him, we call that a horror film. We just fail to see ourselves in that same light. It is not for us to make Jesus anything. If you have any doubt, take a look at the nineteenth chapter of John's Revelation at the end of the Bible. There you will see that Jesus is the King of Kings. No one had to make Him King. He is king because He existed before anything else. He spoke and all that we call reality came into being. He created Adam with the same breathe that He created you, and He controls the universe and places planets into their orbits by the mere moving of his fingers (Psalm 8). The only question that remains to be asked would be, "Is He your king?"

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Can you truly say the Jesus is your king?

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## THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY

June 15th

### **A Night at Sea**

**Matt. 14: 22-33**

There are three things that happen immediately after the first feeding of the multitudes. The first was that He sent the multitudes away, no doubt in a very solemn mood. They had wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him king. I'm sure they went away greatly puzzled as to why someone would reject such a magnanimous offer. Their emotions were no doubt still churning as their confusion mounted. In their hearts they felt that they had found the one whom the rabbis taught would lead Israel out of bondage and He didn't want the job. How was that possible?

The second thing Jesus did was to send His disciples out onto the Sea of Galilee to return home. Actually though John 6: 17 says Jesus sent them to Capernaum, Mark 6: 45 indicates their destination to be Bethsaida. Now the only Bethsaida we know about would be Bethsaida-Julias, some miles east of Capernaum. That would seem to be confusing except that the name, Bethsaida, means town of fish, or as it was commonly known, fisher town. As archaeologists have dug out the location of Capernaum, there were no traces of a harbor to be found there. There are some who believe that this Bethsaida was actually a small quarter of Capernaum, long ago disappeared, that would have served as a base for the town's fishermen. After all, we know that Peter had a house in Capernaum. He would probably have not traveled five miles from Capernaum to

Bethsaida-Julias to get to work. With no freeways in those days, there was no such thing as commuting.

The third thing Jesus did was to go into the mountains to pray. It was during those times when Jesus would have been recharged both physically and spiritually. One can only go at full speed for so long before the body begins to protest. The same thing is true in ministry. Wise is the minister who regularly takes time out to take in spiritual sustenance. Wise also is the minister who stays in constant contact with the one for whom he is ministering.

John's gospel indicates that the disciples had taken most of the night to travel less than four miles. This night had seen one of those sudden storms that hit the area. Given the geography of the area, these storms normally were caused when cold air rushed out of the mountains of Herman to the north down the deep trench, across the Sea of Galilee towards the Dead Sea. That means the disciples would have been rowing against a very strong wind for most of the night.

In the early morning hours, sometime after 3:00 AM, the disciples saw a familiar form passing by them on the sea. Their natural reaction would be that they were seeing a ghost and they responded with the usual wild terror. The form, of course, was none other than Jesus walking across the sea to greet them on the other side when they finally got there. It seems that the followers of Jesus never got quite used to seeing the unusual

when it came to their master. Yet, Jesus' first action was to calm His disciples just as He would later calm the storm.

So as you read Matthew 14: 28-33, the natural focus is on the actions of Peter. As we look at His faith, we stand in awe. I mean, would you do something that appeared to be absolutely foolish as he did? Yet in Jesus' eyes, Peter's faith had a long way to go. To be sure Peter had more faith than the other eleven still clinging to their seats in the boat. The trouble is that we tend to look down on Peter's faith because we know the end of the story. If you put yourself in their shoes, would you have been one of those still in the boat or out there playing in the water?

Before you get too hard on yourself, remember what we said a few days ago. Faith is something that grows slowly over time. The more you see Jesus working through your life, the more you will trust Him to continue to do what He says. That is the building of your faith. So even if you feel that your current level of faith is a bit anemic, know that Jesus is not finished with you yet. He is still in the process of building you. Even you do not know what you will become later in your life.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Looking back over the last 5 years, how has your faith grown?

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**Eye on the Ball**  
**Matt. 14: 28-33**

Quite a long time ago, I used to dabble at the game of golf. I use the word dabble because, though I played for several years, I never was good enough to really think that I had any real future on the pro tour. What I heard from a lot of people with whom I played was that you must keep your eye on the ball. In golf, if you want to see a really bad shot then look up before your club strikes the ball and you will get a first hand view of your own shot as it heads some place you don't want it to be. I use this illustration because it really pertains to Peter's episode on the Sea of Galilee. We are still in Matthew 14: 28-33, so if you need to, take some time out to refresh your memory and read this section of scripture.

As you will recall after Jesus had fed the 5,000, the crowd had wanted to take Jesus by force and make him their king. After all the Jewish nation had all been taught that the Messiah's one role in life was to be king. By miraculously feeding them, they were absolutely convinced that Jesus was Messiah, so making Him king just followed that logic. As we discussed yesterday, this was one of those areas where Jewish teaching and God's teaching differed dramatically. Yet Jesus also had to deal with the disciples' beliefs in this area. He knew in this instance that they stood with the crowd. That's why He took such pains to separate the two groups of people. He dismissed the crowds to go home and sent the disciples out on the Sea of Galilee to deal with an upcoming storm.



He knew that as they were rowing and bailing out the boat, they would have little time to dwell on what just happened on dry land.

As you remember the story, Jesus walked by the boat early the next morning. This totally freaked out the disciples until they recognized who it was that was walking on the water. Peter asks Jesus if he could step out on the stormy sea and join his master. At Jesus bidding, Peter decides to get into water walking. He does just fine at first until he takes his eyes off the master. As long as Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, it was just like walking on the grass on a summer's day. It's only when he concentrated on the storms that surrounded him that he began to sink.

That lesson was meant for all twelve of those men. Each of them had just been in a situation where the storms of confusion and doubt had buffeted them a bit. They needed to be reminded to keep their eyes upon Jesus, for He knows what He is doing. As Mark noted in chapter 6, verse 52, they didn't understand what Jesus was trying to teach about the loaves of bread that had miraculously multiplied. In Matthew 14: 33, there is recorded a significant change in the way the disciples viewed their master. Their view of Him changed from looking at Him as Messiah to understanding that their leader was none other than the Son of God. That's quite a transition if you think about it. The last time they had been with Jesus on the Sea during a fierce storm, they were saying, "What manner of man is this that even the winds obey Him?" It is at this point that they finally have an answer to that question.

It is much the same issue today when we spend a lifetime walking with Him. It is especially true when we are going through a storm in our own lives. Our tendency is to start questioning God's wisdom in allowing us to go through such a thing. After all, we reason, if God really loved me, He would do something to stop the pain. The next time you are tempted to think this way, remember this story. You need to remember to take your eyes off the storm and place them exactly where they need to be. In your life, just as in the lives of those disciples, Jesus knows what He is doing. Only Jesus can see what the sum total of your life is going to be. Only Jesus knows the impact that He wants for your life. The true issue is always, do you really trust Him enough to take your eyes off the storm? Just like in the game of golf, ones eyes need to be firmly planted on what is truly important.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Do you need to shift your focus from the storm to the eyes of Jesus?

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 17th**

**Wash Your Hands!**  
**Mark 7: 1-5**

Upon arriving on dry land the next morning after the most extraordinary of evenings, Jesus and His band of disciples found themselves on the Plain of Genneseret, which lies at about a ten o'clock position on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. While that

would put them quite a ways from their original destination of Capernaum, it would be understandable given the adverse winds that they had experienced all night. Genneseret is a plain whose richness is glowingly described by both Josephus and in rabbinic writings of the time. The point at which they are standing is a well watered plain just about a mile north of ancient Magdala. We see from the end of chapter 6 in the Book of Mark that word quickly reached the surrounding area of Jesus' arrival bringing with it the usual flood of people carrying their sick to at least touch the hem of His garment and so bring the healing they sought.

As we read further into chapter 7, we see that Mark notes the arrival of a group of Pharisees that had been sent by Jerusalem to gather any evidence they could in order for the Jewish authorities to prosecute their case against this interloper from Nazareth. Their charge was that Jesus allowed His disciples to eat their morning meal without the normal ceremonial washing of the hands. Ceremonial cleansing was so important to Jewish ritual that when the oral traditions were finally written down in the third century in a work called the Mishnah, one entire volume or tractate was devoted to the subject. Though it is difficult to trace the origin of this ordinance, most believe that it was originally created to avoid the eating of sacred offerings done in the temple with unwashed or defiled hands. Once it became an ordinance of the temple, then scripture was immediately sought to justify it. There are some who base the ordinance on their reading of Leviticus 15: 11; others believe the ordinance was more supported by Leviticus 11: 44.

Over time the washing of hands before all meals became so entrenched in Jewish society that to question it was viewed with the same disdain as to question the laws that Moses had given them. While I believe that the normal habit of Jesus and His disciples would have been to wash, there is no record that such an observance took place the day before when the multitudes had eaten their fill. Obviously the ceremony also didn't take place on this particular morning.

While the charge of the Pharisees wasn't against Jesus, Himself, still the mere fact that He had allowed those in His charge to do such a dastardly act would not be tolerated by the Pharisees present. This was just another bit of evidence that would allow them to justify their original charge that Jesus was the total embodiment of satanic influence. In their eyes they could see another bit of evidence that Jesus was, in fact, a sinner and could therefore not be considered by them to be Israel's long sought Messiah. It was the Pharisees' view that any violations of the sacred oral traditions were held to be an even greater sin than an actual violation of the Law of Moses. That's how important they viewed Israel's oral traditions.

While we are going to look at Jesus' response to the charges leveled by these Pharisees in our time tomorrow, let us close by taking a moment to think about all of the things we do on an average Sunday that are viewed the same way as the Pharisees viewed washing. If you think about it, there are a lot of things that take place in church that you just don't change. I suppose the main reason they exist is that people feel a certain comfort level with the way things have always been done. It's quite easy for us to look

down on these Pharisees for daring to question our Jesus, yet we often do the same kinds of things. For example, how do you feel about a new pastor coming to town and changing the things are done in your church? How do you view the church across town that everyone seems to be flocking to?

All too often we take the view that our church does it right and everyone else just doesn't read their Bible right. We think, "If those people were as spiritual as we, they wouldn't be doing church that way." That is exactly the kind of thinking that went on in the minds of those Pharisees. If you think that the way church is done should never change, then to be consistent, you need to go back to speaking in first century Greek. The fact is the way church has been done has changed quite a bit over the centuries. Remember the first person who dared translate the Bible from Latin to English was called a heretic. Change is not the "bogy man" that people believe it to be. It has always taken place and will continue to do so. The important thing is that we worship and strive to know God. If you think about it, everything else is just a bunch of fluff.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What needs to change in your heart in your attitude towards change?

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 18th**

## **The Religiously Deceived**

### **Mark 7: 6-23**

Today, we'll talk about Jesus' answer to the Pharisees who criticized Him for allowing His disciples to eat with unwashed hands. If you want the whole story, turn in your Bible and read Mark 7: 6-23. As you read this section, notice the tone and substance of Jesus' response. He doesn't vindicate their charge, nor does He apologize for His disciples' breach of tradition. Jesus could not have an attitude of indifference to this issue, for the entire direction of His ministry rejected the idea that anything that came from man could possibly supercede something that came from God.

So Jesus begins by using a quote from Isaiah 29: 13. Of course, Jesus added the part about the Pharisees being a bit hypocritical. In fact, the Greek word Jesus used here for Hypocrite was originally used to denote an actor. It was common practice in both Greece and Rome for actors to wear masks on stage with special mechanical devices to augment and change their voices. By Jesus' time, the word was meant to describe a person whose inward reality didn't quite match their outward show. Jesus was not the only one who believed the Pharisee to be hypocritical. The word was used by a lot of the rabbis and Sadducees of the day to describe the Pharisees.

The main issue that Jesus deals with is what it means for one to live a life that is pleasing to God. There is something about a rule that causes a man to believe that if he keeps that rule, he will be on the right side of God. I suppose it takes all of the guess work out of the equation. The error is the belief that keeping a set of man made rules

could ever make one pleasing to God. It goes back to the idea of who is in charge here? Besides by Jesus' day, there were so many rules and variations of rules that it would be impossible for anyone to keep all of them. Jesus teaches here that it is out of the heart that you please God, not out of your brain. Jesus' purpose here was to show the complete hypocrisy of a system of traditionalism that said that doing an outward duty was more important than tending to what was going into your heart.

The illustration that is given shows exactly what He is talking about. The Jews at the time were much addicted to making vows. In this case, there was a saying among the rabbis that, "It is hard for the parents, but the law is clear. Vows must be kept." Charles Ryrie in his study notes says, "If an amount needed to support his parents was corban, the scribes taught that he was exempt from his duty to care for them." Apparently, according to Ryrie, the man was not even obliged to give that money over to the temple in Jerusalem. Do you notice the hypocrisy here?

A fundamental principle found in what Jesus was teaching here was that the Law that was brought to us by Moses was not simply a system of outward observances. The reality is that which is outside of man doesn't affect any inward reality. As Paul talks about in his letter to the Galatians, the Law's purpose was to point out man's need for a savior. It addresses a person as a moral being by appealing to the heart and the conscience. In other words, you honor your father and mother because it is right. That doesn't change by the mere fact that you call something "corban." Now I know there are some reading this who didn't have great parents. Don't get so caught up in the

example that you miss the point. It is possible for someone to get so caught up in “doing” religion that they are religiously deceived. You can attend church every Sunday, bow here, pray there and still have a heart that is far from God. There is nowhere in the Bible where it says that God has a tally sheet with your name on it. He is not counting all of the times you do good things and when you get to some kind of magic number, you’re in.

Jesus is clearly teaching that it is all of the sewage that comes from deep within us that truly makes us unacceptable to God. Take a moment and reread Matthew 5: 20. Unless you deal with the real sludge in your life, you’re not going to get in. To be sure, you can do a lot of outward things that make you feel good, but when all is laid open at the end of time, it will all be for naught. Jesus’ point was always to open a new door for us. Religion was never meant to be an answer to the relationship that you have with your Heavenly Father. Jesus has been and will always be the complete and total answer, for without Him there can be no relationship with God. I know that sounds a bit narrow, but that’s what Jesus said. If you have a problem with that, you will have to take it up with Him.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Can you truly say that Jesus is all you need in life?

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**The Crowds Get Hungry Again**  
**John 6: 22-27**

As the old proverbial saying goes, “meanwhile back at the ranch,” the same crowd who had been miraculously fed by Jesus was still on the other side of the Sea and were still looking for Jesus. They were a confused lot. They were at that point where they couldn’t believe in Jesus, yet they couldn’t disbelieve either. He could not be Messiah, who would not be Israel’s king. In their minds the two were inseparable. So on that idea alone, they should have walked on home and resumed their normal lives. Yet they were still standing around at on the same plot of ground where they had eaten their fill, still reliving the glory that they had felt when Jesus had done what they viewed as a miracle that would have been done by only Israel’s Messiah.

Today we find ourselves beginning in John 6: 22. We’ll begin to take a close look at Jesus’ famous Bread of Life sermon. Before we look at Jesus’ words, it is important to understand what His audience was thinking at the time. Everything that Jesus would tell them that day was in direct response to those beliefs and thoughts. Now as we open our story, the crowds were puzzled as to where Jesus was. There was only one boat on the shore of the sea the night before and they had witnessed Jesus putting His disciples into that boat and it launching out to sea. After a careful search of the area, it was reported that Jesus was nowhere to be found. After some careful scratching of their collective heads, John records that some boats from Tiberias landed and the people all booked

passage to Capernaum to look for Jesus. Since Capernaum was Jesus' home base, it would have been only natural for the crowds to go there in search of Him.

One can only imagine their confusion when in Capernaum; they ran into Jesus, who had just arrived from the Gennesaret plain. They knew He wasn't in the boat with His disciples and they knew He wasn't in their boat, so how in the world did He get here? Instead of answering their question, which was not really relevant, Jesus deals with the state of their hearts, which was very relevant. Jesus addresses who the crowds expected to find. What we see here is another example of an unhealthy desire to witness miracles. That's what Jesus addresses in verse 26. The crowd was looking for a different kind of kingdom. They weren't looking for a kingdom that would be characterized by righteousness, peace and joy. They wanted a kingdom of meat and drink; one of self-gratification. They wanted a Messiah who would allow them to sit back and be fed every day while they got to witness Him defeat all of the gentile dogs that had oppressed Israel for the last several centuries.

Jesus begins to take them to where they need to go right at verse 27. He needs to lead them away from their current mode of thinking and point to Himself and the message that He came to earth to bring. Do you notice how Jesus begins with an image of contrast between what they were looking for and what they should have been looking for? It is always true. People are temporal beings. They always live in the here and now, but God is an eternal being and always looks at things with an eternal perspective. The Kingdom of God must always be looked at from God's eternal perspective, for all

that is within that kingdom is eternal. To put a period on his thought, Jesus uses a common Jewish idiom used at the time, which if you translate the Greek word for word says, “For Him the Father sealed, even God.” The rabbis had always taught them that the “seal of God” was truth. What that crowd would grab from Jesus’ opening line would have been that if they wanted real food, they would have to come to Jesus because God had impressed upon Jesus His own seal of truth, and so would have authenticated Jesus’ mission and His teaching. According to Jesus, it was going to be necessary for these people to put away their own prejudices and seek the God who had created them.

In today’s world Christians come under a lot of criticism for saying that Jesus is the only way to God. The crowd still wants a smorgasbord of choices when it comes to spiritual enlightenment. If you think about it, the whole idea of Jesus being the only way to God does sound a bit arrogant. Yet as a Christian, one can’t divert from the point that Jesus made while He was on earth. In all of the time that you have been with me, reading these daily devotions, has there ever been a time when Jesus listed out a bunch of different paths to God? Would you take my word that from here on to His resurrection and final ascension into Heaven; He won’t be describing any other path? When it comes to Jesus and His message, there is only one path into the Kingdom of God. If that is true for Jesus, it is also true for you today. Anyone who approaches Jesus must get their minds around the fact that He’s all there is. Personally, I kind of like the simplicity of it. There is a certain security in knowing exactly how to attain eternal life. I like the fact that there is not a lot of guesswork surrounding such an important topic.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Do you believe Jesus is correct here?

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 20th**

**Their Belief about Manna**  
**John 6: 26-34**

When we left off yesterday, Jesus had begun the task of convincing the crowd about who He really was. After all they had their own version of Israel's Messiah. All of them had been taught since they were small about what Messiah would do and say when He arrived on the scene. It's just that this Jesus fellow didn't fit their mold. They were confused. Today, we have to talk about some other things that they believed. This is necessary or the entire Bread of Life sermon makes no sense. If we do not understand where the crowd was coming from, we will fail to grasp the points that Jesus makes and then fail to understand the crowd's rejection of the Messiah that God intended to send to Israel.

The first misunderstanding for the crowd would be in the area of working to please the God of Israel. Do you notice their question in John 6: 28? They want the list, point by point of each of the required tasks they must complete in order to gain entrance into the kingdom of Heaven. I'm sure if you had been there, you would have gotten out pen

and paper to get all of this down. Of course, your pen would have dropped to the ground when Jesus only gave a single answer, just believe. Believe in the one God has sent. Believe in the one who was standing right there in their midst.

The crowd's response to Jesus' mode of entry into the kingdom was to demand an even greater miracle than He had already done. It was as if they were saying, "What you've done so far was all right, but if you want us to believe such a lofty thing as you being our Messiah when you don't fit our mold, you're just going to have to do a whole lot better." After all, what was one meal compared to what Moses provided during the forty years their ancestors spent in the wilderness? What these people were really saying that day was, "You're going to have to do something on that scale and we'll think about it."

This is where Christians today start scratching their heads when they read this sermon. You need to understand what the people who made up that crowd were being taught about the manna. If you were to take a look at the lintel above the synagogue in Capernaum, you would see carved in the stone an engraved pot of manna. Manna was believed to be angel food. The Jews had always been taught that manna was a miraculous food of all manner of tastes and suited to all ages, yet it was believed that manna would have tasted bitter to the gentile palate. Another common belief was that manna was provided through the merits of Moses and ceased when he died.

Over time, there came out a much different application that had developed over the whole manna issue. It is this application that Jesus addresses in verse 32, 33. The rabbis looked at Solomon's Proverbs 9: 5 where it says, "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed," and developed the idea that the verse applied to what happened during the wilderness wandering. In other words, they believed that Solomon was referring to both the manna and the miraculous water that God had provided in the wilderness. They also taught that the manna and water were symbolic of the real bread from heaven, the Law of Moses. That belief was what lay behind their question in verse 34. The crowd was looking for Jesus to teach them about the Law of Moses.

Of course, Jesus really threw them when He taught them that the wisdom that Solomon talked about and the entrance into heaven that the law was supposed to provide was all wrapped up in Him. He taught them that in order for a person to have true wisdom the only thing needed was to come to Jesus and to believe in Him. That is the real reason for the grumbling you see in verse 41.

What Jesus was teaching them went against everything they had ever been taught about God and what it took to please Him. There may be some reading today who are finding themselves in exactly the same predicament as these people. Perhaps you are examining the claims of Jesus for the very first time. You're thinking, "It can't be that simple." What Jesus is saying here is true. Where you will spend eternity has never been about the things you do in life. It has everything to do with what you believe about Jesus. All I would ask you to do at this point is to keep on reading this book and your Bible and

to begin to pray that God would open your heart to His truth, and let's see where that takes us.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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How did your view of Jesus change today?

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 21st**

**The Bread of Life**  
**John 6: 35-59**

The Bread of Life Sermon is one of two great sermons that John records where Jesus tries to convince the Jewish nation of who He was. This sermon was given in the synagogue at Capernaum. The second sermon was given in the temple at Jerusalem. As you read John 6: 35-59, He is using the symbols of bread and flesh to draw people to Himself. He is giving them a natural progression from where they were, after they were fed the miraculous bread, to where they need to be in order to enter the kingdom. There are two different ways to view this sermon depending upon which side of the Kingdom of God you are on. Each side can gain something different from what Jesus teaches here.

To those who are still on the fence about Jesus, the sermon gives another opportunity, another way of thinking about Jesus. This is the first time He will allude to what will happen at the end of His ministry and the effect His sacrificial death will have

upon all of mankind. As you read verses 53-58, you have to remember that Jesus is speaking symbolically here. I know there are those who believe the eating His flesh and drinking His blood refers to the communion that is celebrated in church every once in a while. Transubstantiation is the idea that at the moment you take the elements, they become the flesh and blood of Jesus. I don't believe that is what Jesus is talking about here. Jesus always addressed people where they were mentally, and that's just not it. Rather He is using figurative language to express a spiritual idea. In order to understand what Jesus is teaching, simply substitute the word "believe" when he says eat or drink and the meaning of what He is saying will become clear. The issue for the crowd is the same issue you must deal with; what do you believe about Jesus? What do His words do in the deepest part of your soul? If you find His words stirring you deep down inside your innermost being, that is God drawing you to Him. Look once again at verse 44 where Jesus says that no one can come to Him unless God draws Him. Since you now have a loving heavenly Father drawing you, what are you going to do now?

To those who have accepted the free gift that Jesus gives you and are now busy fleshing out just exactly what that means, Jesus has something for you in His sermon. Do you find some comfort in verse 35 to 40? This is one of many sections of scripture where the Christian learns that he is forever secure in Christ. There is a great deal of comfort when Jesus says, "All the Father gives me will come to me." We want to give a collective sigh of relief at His words, "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day." Isn't it great to know that God is faithful and has guaranteed to you all that He has promised?



Isn't it great to know that He is not going to suddenly change His mind at the last moment when you are standing before the Throne of God? In the entire expanse of time that is represented from Genesis to Revelation, there is not a single instance where God ever changed His mind. There is not a single promise that has been left unkept. You can't even point to anywhere where God has not been totally open about entrance into His kingdom; no deception exists anywhere.

This sermon marks another turning point in the ministry of Jesus Christ. While that is important to our story, it is not the most important point that needs to be made today. The most important point that needs to be made today revolves around the question; does what Jesus had to say about the way you enter into His kingdom mark a turning point in your life right at this moment in time?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Do you find yourself at a turning point today?

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**THE MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 22nd**

**Sifting the Wheat from the Chaff**  
**John 6: 60-70**

I suppose there was the human side of Jesus that had hoped what He had to say in His Bread of Life Sermon would be accepted as truth and people would be saved. Yet

the God side of Jesus knew that that would not be the case. Today, we are in John 6: 60-70 and will be talking about the aftermath to the sermon. It would be an understatement to say that the sermon had some decisive effects upon the crowd. It seems from what John tells us that the popular opinion of Jesus went straight from adoration to complete and total disgust. We see that the high point of Jesus' ministry when He had fed them on the hillside a few days earlier had completely turned around as disciple after disciple walked away from Jesus and His ministry.

I would guess that every pastor I have known would deem it hard to preach a sermon one week and have a majority of your congregation walk out and never come back. I don't know many of these men of God who are making an honest attempt to empty their church. Yet that is exactly what Jesus did and if I read verses 64, 65 correctly, Jesus knew before He had uttered a single word that is exactly what would happen. So you have to ask yourself, why did He do it? If large crowds had been a goal of Jesus, then you probably would have seen Him running after the crowds screaming that He really didn't mean what He had just said. To Jesus, large crowds were not the point of His ministry. To be sure, the end results of the Bread of Life sermon must have grieved Him. It would be the same feeling that parents have when they say to an older child, "No, you can't move back in with us. It's time that you grow up."

The real issue here is that Jesus wanted disciples who were God given (verse 37), God drawn (verse 44) and God taught (verse 45.) It would be only those kinds of disciples who could possibly persevere and remain strong right to the end. It is only

those kinds of disciples who would follow Jesus right up to their own crosses if that is what God wanted. Jesus knew that it was necessary for the multitudes to be sifted. He knew that as the farmer threw the recently harvested wheat into the sky what fell back to the earth would be only the sweet kernels of the grain. The rest would just fly away in the wind. That is why He had preached to them such a mystic message. He could have told them straight out, in no uncertain terms, who He was and what they needed to do to gain entrance into His kingdom, but that was not the intent of His message in this instance. Acceptance or rejection of what Jesus had to say that day absolutely depended upon the spiritual state of the hearer. That's why some of you read the sermon and wonder why the crowd reacted the way they did. Your spiritual state is entirely different from their spiritual state. The multitudes were still of a mind that believed, "He could not be Messiah, who would not be Israel's king." The multitude had hoped in their minds that when they first approached Jesus, He would be telling them that He had changed His mind on their kind offer and would now consent to be their king.

One can only imagine the heaviness in Jesus' heart when He finally turned away from the departing crowd back to His twelve closest friends to utter the question that He asks in verse 67. These men were being put in a position that would test their faith most severely. They probably didn't understand the Bread of Life sermon any more than the crowds. For them, it would have been very easy to leave and follow the crowds at that moment. Yet Simon Peter takes his usual role of group spokesman and responds for the group. His response gives us three anchors that helped these men ride out this storm and stay true to their calling. From these three anchors, we will draw our application today.

The first anchor is that these men had a religious earnestness about them. They were sincere in what they believed. Their supreme desire in life was to know the words of eternal life. Their expectation was not for worldly wealth but to gain a spiritual wealth. The second anchor was a clear view of the alternatives. Where else could they go? They couldn't go back to John the Baptist; he was dead. Jesus had taught them too much about the Pharisees, Sadducees and Rabbis for them to ever think that any of them had the answer they were seeking. Could they now go back into the stupidity and indifference of the crowd? Jesus' disciples today must, at times, respond to the same alternatives that come at us in life. The third anchor was a confidence in the character of their master. That is what is echoed in Peter's words of verse 69. Such confidence only comes from a complete intimacy with their master. One cannot trust a stranger with such confidence.

How many of these anchors characterize your life? Take a moment and go back to each of them and ask yourself, "Is this an anchor that I truly depend upon each and every day that allows me to remain firmly attached to Jesus?" If not, they are well worth appropriating right now.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Do you see any of these anchors in your life?

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## THE LATER GALILEAN MINISTRY

June 23rd

### **Still Another Turning Point**

**Matt. 15: 21, Mark 7: 24**

As an Elder in our church, I get exposed to a lot of theories about what it takes to make a church grow. On the surface some of those theories might have come straight from the board rooms of any Fortune 500 company. It seems that there is no shortage of books out there on the subject. To some, growth is simply a matter of making prayer a greater part of your church. To others, growth will come with more community service. While I am not here to debate what strategies actually work, one thing I know; I have never seen a book written that recommends the methods that Jesus has been using over the past week in our study.

Can you imagine some author trying to sell a book on church growth that promotes the antagonizing most of your congregation as a way of increasing your attendance? Somehow, I don't think too many pastors would dole out their hard earned dollars for such a book. The truth is I have never thought that Jesus' main thrust was to build a large church. He just set out to change a world. That was His main role. He knew that growth would come. His ministry was not about building the church at all. That would be the job of the eleven men who had been following Him these few years. That is the job of pastors and elders across our world today.

The job that Jesus came to do was to make an attempt to transform Judaism from what it had become to what it was always supposed to be. We've talked a lot about the amount of crustiness that had enveloped Judaism by the time Jesus came on the scene. All of that pollution had to be chipped away if the valuables that lay beneath the gunk were to be made shiny again. Jesus' ministry always remained within the confines of the nation and the people of Israel. To be sure, He did venture out into Gentile lands at times and He did some really miraculous deeds that benefited those Gentiles, but the vast majority of what He did was done to those in the house of Israel.

It is at this point that Jesus purposely takes His disciples and withdraws to a remote region in extreme Northern Galilee. As we transfer from what is known as the Middle Galilean period of Jesus' ministry to the Later Galilean period, there is a marked difference in the thrust of His ministry. We are getting close to the end of His time on earth. He has just over a year left until He has a date with the cross. During this last year, we will see His emphasis shift from a public ministry to one that focuses on the twelve men who have been following Him everywhere. Both in Matthew 15: 21 and Mark 7: 24, we see Jesus staying in a house which is, according to Mark's account, on the borders of Tyre and Sidon, both cities were located in a country called Phoenicia.

Without the support of the general public and with the increasing opposition that was developing within the entire Jewish leadership, it was not safe for Him to walk around. This was a time to let things cool down a bit. Matthew 14: 1, 2 gives us the idea that Jesus' fame had caught the attention of Herod Antipas, who may have felt more than

a little threatened by Jesus' popularity among his subjects. When word got to Herod that the crowds had tried to make Jesus king, that might have sent things a bit over the top. So it was probably wise of Jesus to get out of town for a short time.

The reason that I wanted to take this time to talk a bit about the main thrust of Jesus' message will become clear tomorrow when we talk about an encounter He had with a certain Syro-Phoenician woman. The whole episode does not make sense unless you understand that the main thrust of Jesus' ministry was to the nation of Israel. We like to think about Jesus as everyone's Messiah, and to be sure, He still is that, but at this point in His ministry, Israel is still foremost on His mind. We'll talk a whole lot more about that tomorrow.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What lessons do I take from this the next time I experience opposition?

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**THE LATER GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 24th**

**The Syro-Phoenician Woman**  
**Matt. 15: 21-28, Mark 7: 24-30**

Today we will still be referring to the story found in both Matthew 15: 21-28 and Mark 7: 24-30. As we talked about yesterday, Jesus has taken His band of followers up to the northernmost reaches of the region that surrounded the Sea of Galilee. He would

have been staying in a Jewish house so as to not further antagonize the nation of Israel and had been there several days as indicated by the scriptures list above. It was not Jesus' intention that His presence in the house be known. He had other things to do with the twelve men who had followed Him there. Yet His fame at the time was such that it had spread throughout the surrounding area and had reached the ears of a woman whose daughter was demon possessed. That mother, having nowhere else to turn, traveled from her home to entreat the Master.

Matthew describes the woman as a Canaanite woman, while Mark describes her as Greek. You can substitute the word, Gentile, and be fairly close to how the woman would have thought and reacted to Jesus' words. The encounter would have been more difficult for her, coming to beg at the feet of a Jewish rabbi, but her daughter was more than worth it. It appears from both narratives that the woman had been unsuccessful for a number of days in getting Jesus to hear her pleas. Of course we both know that Jesus had a greater purpose in mind as He ignored her. Always remember that as far as Jesus was concerned, it was not about the healing, it was about building faith. That was the process that this woman had to go through in the days that she plead for her daughter's release from the demon.

As you read through both narratives, you have to ask yourself why Jesus initially rejected her plea. After all, He had healed other Gentiles like the Centurion's servant and don't forget Legion. The answer laid in her initial address, calling Him Lord, Son of David. Her words spoke of a Hebrew Messiah. As a person who was regarded at the



time as a heathen Gentile, she would have no knowledge of the Messianic prophecies. She probably didn't even know what a Messiah was. David had never ruled any of her ancestors. For Jesus to have immediately granted her request, it would have reversed his entire teaching and made this merely a work of power. As I said above, Jesus only works when someone has faith in who He is. There is nothing in her initial statements to indicate she had any understanding of who it was that she was pleading with. It was necessary that she be taught what she needed to know and to be given an opportunity to respond. For me it would have been far worse for Jesus to immediately heal her daughter and have the woman wander away to spend an eternity in torment.

It's only when in complete desperation that she drops to her knees and cries out "Lord," does Jesus respond. Yet His initial response was a classic Jewish idiom of the time. Do you notice in verse 26 how Jesus refers to Israel as children and Gentiles as dogs? That was common in those days. Yet her reply implies, "Yes, Lord, it is as you state it. Heathenism stands in relation to Judaism as house dogs to children. But as house dogs, they are the master's and they are under his table." It is because of the great truth of what she said that Jesus granted her request and healed her daughter. It was a strong faith that had finally developed in who Jesus was that led to the healing. It was her strong faith that allowed her to leave Jesus and return home with only Jesus' word that her daughter was healed. An even greater transformation took place that day than the healing of someone with a demon. There is now at least one more person who will be your sister in heaven.

Today's encounter with Jesus strikes deep within me. I do tend to be more focused on the goal than the journey at times. In Bill Hybel's book, *Just Walk Across the Room*, he tries to shift the reader's focus on interrupting life in order to make friends with people in need. It might be to help your son's soccer coach pick up the balls after a game, as Bill relates in the study. It might be something equally simple that will happen in your life today. It would have been far easier for Jesus to quickly wave His arms and heal the girl so he could go about His business, but what about the woman's eternal destiny? What about the destinies of all those she would later come in contact with? It's time that I put on some proverbial magic glasses that allow me to see with eternal perspective so I can see what is really important in this life. How about you?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Are you focused on goals or on Jesus?

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**THE LATER GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 25th**

**The Deaf Man**  
**Mark 7: 32-35**

For today, it would be helpful for you to pull out one of the maps that are present in most study Bibles sold today. The original language in Mark 7: 31 gives us idea that Jesus started out in the extreme portion of Northern Galilee next to its border with Phoenicia and His ultimate destination was going to be Decapolis. From looking at the

map the shortest route would take the group through the region of Bashan, which was ruled at the time by the half-brother of Antipas, a man by the name of Philip. Two things can be noticed immediately about this route. The first is that it does appear that Jesus was avoiding a confrontation with Herod Antipas as He was steering well clear of his territory. The second thing is that Jesus and His disciples were in for some mountain hiking. They would have traveled right through an area that is known today as the Golan Heights.

As we talked about when we were dealing with Legion, Decapolis is a compound Greek word. The first part is “Deca” which in Greek means ten. The second part is “polis” which means city. If you look on most maps, you will see that the region was made up of ten major cities. Ancient monuments that have been unearthed in this area show that the people worshipped Greek gods and the cities were very Greek in flavor. Historians believe they were governed as free Greek cities, meaning they largely governed themselves and were subject only partially to the governor of Syria.

The first thing Jesus encountered in the region was a man whom Mark describes as deaf, and as a result of the deafness had difficulty speaking. The Greek word Mark used gives the idea that this man’s deafness robbed him of speech’s effectiveness. This man was brought to Jesus by a group of his friends, probably both out of a desire to see their friend healed and out of a desire to witness something really spectacular. It seems that Jesus’ fame had reached even the Greek region of Decapolis. You wonder how that fame could have spread given the lack of a newspaper and the evening news, until you

remember the fact that earlier Jesus had left Legion in the area to tell everyone what had happened to him.

The first thing I noticed when I read about Jesus' healing of this man in Mark 7: 33-35 is that this healing is somewhat different from others that I have read. When we were looking at the healing of the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter yesterday, Jesus just told the woman that her daughter was healed. Here Jesus pokes His finger into the man's ears, then spits on His finger and touches the man's tongue. Finally Mark describes Jesus sighing, looking into heaven and uttering the words "Be opened." Do you suppose there was something about the man's malady that required such elaborate steps in order to affect the healing? To think so would mean that you would have to buy into the idea that any disease present on earth would give the creator of the universe a difficult time. I just don't think that is a logical reason. Alfred Edersheim in his book, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* says, "This elaborate use of such means would banish the idea of magic; it would arouse the attention, and fix it upon Christ, as using these means, which were all connected with His own person; while, lastly, the sighing, and the word of absolute command, would all have here their special significance." You have to remember these people did not have the same view of God that Israel had. Their gods were self-centered and selfish. They didn't just walk up to someone and heal him for no good reason. The point had to be made that Jesus was different from anyone they had ever encountered. To me that was the real reason for the elaborate healing.

I have always thought it would have been nice to be one of the disciples. Imagine walking around from town to town watching your master do some really incredible things. Yet we get to do much of the same thing. While it is true that we don't get to see people physically healed like they did, we do get to see people spiritually healed from time to time. To see a person, whose life is a mess, meet Jesus and come out the other end living such a dramatically different life is no less a miracle than any the disciples witnessed. Sometimes I think we must wake up and smell the coffee. Miracles happen all around us. So let's rejoice when we see them, keep our witness strong and relevant and pray for more of them.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Who is the last person you saw who experienced this kind of miracle?

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**THE LATER GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 26th**

**Teach Them Where They Are**  
**Matt. 15: 29-31**

Today's title is a take off on an old baseball adage that says, "Hit it where they ain't." You have to go into the fifteenth chapter of Matthew to see what we will be talking about today. So turn there in your Bible and read verses 29-31, if you will. What you are reading is a summary of Jesus' ministry in the Decapolis region. Remember that these people worshipped Greek gods, and so probably had very little knowledge of

Jewish law, traditions or teaching. That is because evangelism was not a high priority within Judaism at the time. To soil oneself by contact with heathens was considered a really bad thing in first century Judaism.

Yesterday, we talked about the opening salvo in the battle for the spiritual lives of those living in the region of Decapolis. Jesus had healed a deaf man and cured his speech issues with a thrusting of the finger and a little spit. Though Jesus had commanded the man not to saying anything about his fortunate encounter with Him, word had gone out none the less. All right, so that would be like telling the sun not to announce its arrival each morning. Just by this man walking into town and ordering a hamburger, the people would know something was up. The before and after picture was just that dramatic.

The verses you just read in Matthew tells us some of the other miracles Jesus did in the area so that His fame and the praises were multiplied. Matthew records that a great crowd suddenly appeared with all of their sick and infirm in order for their loved ones to receive the same healing that their deaf neighbor received. The diseases the gospels record include the blind, the crippled and the mute that were all brought to Jesus in the hopes that He would do what no one else had been able to do; heal their loved ones. In the tenderness and compassion that we have come to associate with Jesus, He healed those who were brought to Him.

Now Matthew does not record that Jesus taught anything at this time, but I would be hard pressed to believe that teaching didn't take place. To know Jesus is to know that

He would never let such an opportunity pass. To know the ministry of Jesus is to know that He never healed without faith, and faith requires teaching in order to know where one is to place that faith. We also see the result of that teaching at the end of verse 31, “And they praised the God of Israel.” It is interesting that there is no mention that the people were also praising Jesus as the Messiah of that God of Israel. That’s because I believe the subject was not brought up. Jesus always taught based upon where His audience was in relation to the Kingdom of Heaven. This group did not know about all of the Jewish teaching about the Messiah. Also there was no reason for them to know about the Messiah, for Messianic teaching would have no meaning to them. The Messiah was an entirely Jewish concept. All that was written about Messiah up to that point held that He would rule Israel. The only mention of Messiah in relation to the Gentiles was that Israel’s Messiah was going to defeat all of the Gentiles in battle. That particular aspect of Jewish teaching would not have gone over well with the crowd Jesus was dealing with in Decapolis. Mark records that the opinion of all of the people was that Jesus had done all things with honor and with nobility, a direct translation of the Greek.

I have been a teacher for most of my Christian life. I’m not sure if I understand this concept instinctually or learned it somewhere along the road; but it has always been obvious to me that the proper way to teach someone is to take them from where they are and bring them to where they need to be. It seems so simple when it is said in those words, doesn’t it? Yet I find that this principle is not used very much when Christians share Christ with others. I don’t know if it is from nervousness or a need to appear somehow superior, the tendency is for well meaning Christians to do what is called a data

dump. Wise is the Christian who tenderly and with compassion shares Christ the way Jesus did. We take the time to get to know them and gently steer them towards Jesus. I know that this is a radical thought, but we even share the times with them when we have failed Him and how Jesus still accepts us. We should make every effort to show Jesus as He really is, not in order to make ourselves look good, but in order to make Jesus look good. After all, isn't that what really matters?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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How can you listen better as a Christian?

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**THE LATER GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 27th**

**Lunch on the Green**  
**Matt. 15: 32-38**

As I read today's reading from Matthew 15: 32-38, I couldn't help but be struck by both the similarities and the differences between this event and the feeding of the five thousand. While the feeding of a large number of people with a relatively small amount of provisions is the same, the rest of the events that happened that day are much different. To refresh your memory about the event of the first feeding, it might be a good idea to at least scan John 6: 1-13 to remind yourself of its main points. So let's begin our discussion by pointing out some of the differences between these two events.



The first, and most obvious difference, was the former began with five loaves and two fish and fed five thousand. This one had seven loaves and a few fish and fed four thousand. Of course in both cases the number was only for the male members of the crowd. In both cases the number could easily be doubled when you include both women and children present.

Second, the former feeding was provided because the people had gone after Jesus in such haste that they would have forgotten to take food along. In this case the people had been with Jesus for three days in a remote area. Any provision that they might have taken with them would have long ago been exhausted.

Third, there is a difference in leftovers. The former feeding had twelve baskets full gathered by the disciples, this one had seven baskets left to eat another day. It should be noted that the Greek word to describe the baskets used in each event are different. When Jesus fed the five thousand, the baskets were small hand baskets, such that each of the twelve could gather the bread. In this case the baskets described were hamper-like baskets large enough to hold a man. As a side light, the same Greek word to describe these baskets is used to describe the one that held the Apostle Paul when he escaped from Damascus as Luke described it in Acts 9: 25.

Fourth, and I think most important difference, was the make up of the crowd. In the former case, the crowd had been a Jewish one. One of Jesus' main points to the miracle was to point out to Jewish audience that their view of Messiah and His mission had some

serious flaws. The feeding served as a vivid illustration of what Jesus was trying to say in His Bread of Life sermon when He compared it to Moses and the giving of manna in the wilderness. This feeding was done out of simple compassion by a Savior who cared that these people not die of hunger as they journeyed the long distance back home.

As I write this, there is a tremendous movement among the church in America towards more compassion when it comes to dealing with the under-served of our society. There seems to be a groundswell of opinion that the church needs to do more reaching out and less looking down. As I compare the church with all that I have read and have written about concerning the life of Jesus, I can only say, "It's about time." You can't take a close look at the life of Jesus Christ without being completely impressed with the compassion that He showed the less fortunate. There was never a time when Jesus gave the wealthy preference over the poor. In fact, in most cases, the opposite is true. If the church is going to model the life and teachings of Jesus, they cannot afford to ignore this aspect of those teachings and the examples that are given to us about His compassion. The same thing is true in your life and my life. We cannot say that we are becoming like Jesus unless our compassion for the poor and the forgotten in society grows stronger with each passing year that we follow our Lord. There are a lot of churches who are beginning to wake up to this part of their ministry that is lacking. When your church begins to move in this area, it will need a lot of volunteers for this effort to be effective. When they call, will you be the one to step forward and say, "I'll help?"

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What is God calling you to do for the poor in your area?

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**THE LATER GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 28th**

**Be Careful What You Wish For**  
**Matt. 16: 1-4**

By boat Jesus and His disciples travel back across the Sea of Galilee and into the stronghold of both Herod Antipas and the Jewish Leaders. Today we will be using Matthew 16: 1-4. Upon their arrival, Matthew records there arrived a most unusual group to be seen traveling together in that particular period of history. For the first time the gospels record that Pharisees and Sadducees were actually doing something together. These two groups hated each other intensely. If you examine the writings from that time, you will never find a kind word from one party written about the other. I suppose that is because their views on the Bible, the supernatural and just the way they looked at life were complete opposites. Yet they had learned to live with each other because to do otherwise would invite hoards of Roman soldiers to lay waste to their land and their prosperity. That reality was one that they just couldn't have tolerated. Their arrival together to confront Jesus reveals to us the seriousness with which they took the threat that they perceived Jesus to be to all they held to be important.

So why did these men ask for a sign from heaven? First off, Matthew tells us that this demand for a sign is given as a test to Jesus. In their opinion this Jesus fellow was making claims that they held to be inconsistent with their own version of “sound Biblical doctrine.” He dared preach a kingdom different from theirs. In Jesus’ kingdom, their kind didn’t win. He was at odds with all of their customs. He was a breaker of the Law and the Commandment, at least as they understood them. As they read the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, Jesus was seen as a false prophet and His miracles were done in the power of Satan. To justify their position they demanded that Jesus show them a sign that would come straight from heaven and they demanded that sign now!

Mark’s gospel tells us that Jesus’ response was given with great sadness (Mark 8: 12). If you notice what Matthew records next, the part about weather forecasting, is not found in some of the older and more reliable manuscripts. While these words do fit the story and might have been said, I will move to the part about the sign that Jesus indicated would be given to them to validate His claims. He refers to the sign of Jonah. Jesus has given this response before. If you go back to Matthew 12: 38-41, we find that there are two parts to this sign. The first obviously refers to Jesus’ upcoming death, burial and resurrection. The second part of the sign refers to Jonah’s message, the one that he fought so hard against preaching, that of repentance. Jonah’s message was not that different from the message of John the Baptist and Jesus. It’s just that the result of that preaching couldn’t be more different. After Jonah preached in the wicked City of Nineveh, the entire town repented. Unfortunately the same thing cannot be said for the Israelites.

If you look at this scene from the aspect of history, God did give Israel a sign and would fulfill these and later words of Jesus when all of Jerusalem was burning and the temple had been pulled down, stone by stone. The God that Israel supposedly worshipped fulfilled their request during the last moment of His son's life when they said, "Away with Him, we have no king but Caesar." For the Roman general Titus who ordered the temple pulled down, he later returned to Rome and became its Caesar.

There are times that we wish for some truly dumb things. I can remember a time when I wished for a new job, that when I got it, turned out to be my worst nightmare. When I made the decision to change jobs, I did all of things the books say to do. I even made a list of all of the positives and negatives about the choice I needed to make. The list made the choice an easy one to make. Now I'm not saying that God didn't use my time at the new employer for His glory. When your life is thrust into the fire a lot of molding can take place. It's just that the fire is not a pleasant place to be. At this very moment, I am in the process of making another check list for much the same reason. The issue that this story has brought to my attention is not that the check list is a bad thing to do. The issue is about what things are on that check list. Right now, the check list has on it some things like making a lot of money so I can retire soon. It has the fact that the struggle I have been through for the last 2 years has just gotten more difficult. In fact, as I go down the list, God isn't even mentioned. So for me, at least, this lesson has had the effect that I have chucked the list and dropped to my knees. Are you currently in the midst of making a major decision in your life? Where does God sit on your check list?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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Where does God sit on your check list?

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**THE LATER GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 29th**

**Leaven of the Pharisees**

**Matt. 16: 5-12**

Sometimes to know where someone is coming from, it is necessary to know the status of their heart. This is the case today. Jesus is speaking about something that was weighing very heavy on His heart. We are in Matthew 16: 5-12. A parallel version of the same story can be found in Mark 8; 13-21 if you want to look at things from a slightly different perspective. The events that will make up today's discussion happened in a boat taking the band from Magdala, on the southwest shore of the Sea of Galilee up to Bethsaida-Julias. Obviously not enough time had elapsed since the Bread of Life Sermon, since the furor over Jesus in the region of Galilee had not yet died down.

We are told that the disciples had neglected to purchase provisions for the journey. There was apparently a small loaf of bread, but that was not enough to feed all of them. So you have to say that the situation surrounding their stomachs was very much on the minds of the disciples. Their oversight was probably due to the haste in which they left the area due to the opposition that they had encountered there. It could not have escaped

Jesus' notice that His message had caused Pharisees and Sadducees to unite in order to oppose all He stood for.

What was heavy on Jesus' heart is very evident in the question that He asks them in verse 6. I'm sure that He was heavily disappointed at the spirit of unbelief that was ruling Jewish society during His day. That spirit of disbelief had a kind of diffusiveness about it that reminded our Lord of leaven or yeast. It passed from father to son, from rich to poor, from the educated to the masses until it had infected an entire generation of what once were God's people. I'm sure that Jesus' encounter with the self righteous sign-seekers at Magdala, reminded Him that He was failing to win over the nation of Israel, and that would have been weighing heavily on His mind. In spite of the fact that a great body of evidence was presented to this generation, they still didn't get the fact that the King and His kingdom were in their midst. Even though Jesus spoke words that no man has ever spoken and done things that no man has ever done, this generation of Jews did not want to see; did not want to believe. All they wanted was to see more signs from heaven. There was a constant craving for more outward evidence that was surrounding and crushing in on the heart of the King of Kings at this moment in time.

Jesus did not reprove His disciples for their lack of understanding of what He was talking about. He did reprove them for their lack of faith. For that was also very much a part of the leaven of the Pharisees. If you go back and read John 6: 7 and Mark 8: 4, you will see that even the disciples were not getting it. They did not understand that they worshipped a God who provided for the needs of His people. Sure they knew the stories

of old where God had miraculously provided, but those stories had not quite made the journey from the mind to the heart. These men should not have wasted their time worrying about whether or not God was going to provide for their needs.

Jesus was more worried about the greater danger that threatened His band of followers. He was more worried about the influence that the Pharisees and the Sadducees had on His disciples; the very same influences and beliefs which had underlain their demand for an even greater sign. The disciples had treated the event in Magdala too lightly and their neglect in failing to bring enough bread too gravely.

The leaven that Jesus was talking about is much too evident in today's church. Today people are searching more than at any time in man's history, yet Christians are too busy praying about their own personal needs. Take a look at the weekly prayer list that is present in most churches today. What do you see there? Do you see requests for more prayer for loved ones to find Jesus, or do you see requests for more signs from God? If the weekly prayer list is an accurate mirror on the hearts of God's people, those in Christian leadership have their work cut out for them. What about your own heart? What dominates your time in prayer with God? Do you have the mind of Christ when it comes to those who surround you each and every day, or are you in this just to soak up God's blessing? Please accept my apologies if today's reading gets you right between the eyes, but know that today's application hits me right in the same spot.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What dominates your prayer time with God?

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**THE LATER GALILEAN MINISTRY**  
**June 30th**

**The Belief of Friends**  
**Mark 8: 22-26**

As they land, the group finds themselves in an area that was ruled by Philip, the half-brother of Herod-Antipas. After the opposition that Jesus had encountered upon His recent reentry into the Galilean region, He once again retreated back into largely Gentile territory. After a four mile walk from the seashore, the group would come to the recently rebuilt city of Bethsaida-Julias. It is there that Jesus had an encounter with a man who was born blind. This episode is only recorded for us in Mark 8: 22-26, so why not take a moment to familiarize your self with this story?

This healing has more in common with the healing of the deaf man in Mark 7: 31 than any other healing that Jesus accomplished. In both cases Jesus uses His own spittle and in both cases the healing comes in two stages. It seems in this case that the first try didn't quite do the job completely. The question begs to be asked, why couldn't Jesus heal this man with a single word like He had so many others? Of course the question that I just asked is not the right question. If you believe what Jesus and others said about Him, He is the One True God walking around the earth in human flesh. As such, there is

nothing that is too hard for Him to do. So the question is never why couldn't Jesus do anything? The right question is why didn't He do it in one step? The answer is the same as it was in the case of the healing of the deaf man. The audience that surrounded them was not Jewish; they were Greek in culture and beliefs. Jesus had to take steps to dispel the idea that magic was somehow involved and to focus everyone's attention upon Jesus and not on the healing.

So here we have Jesus spitting on the man's eyes, putting His hands on him and asking him if he saw anything. After He received the words from the recently blind man that he was looking at men, but they looked like large trees, Jesus once again put His hands over the man's eyes and his eyesight was completely restored. I'm sure this man's vision was restored to a point beyond what I currently possess.

There is something else that is unusual about this healing that you probably missed upon first examination. There is no mention of this man's faith. We've said before that Jesus only did His miracles as a result of faith or as a means to build up faith. Yet here we do not see that Jesus even discussed the subject with the blind man before or after He healed Him. In this case the faith was exhibited by the friends who had brought the man to Jesus. Imagine where these people were who had faithfully taken care of the needs of this man over the years. Imagine the heartbreak as they described to the blind man what they knew he would never see. Then there is the glimmer of hope as they hear that Jesus is on His way to town. That these people had an absolute belief in Jesus' ability to heal

their friend never seems to be in doubt. It was only a question of Jesus' willingness. The passage says that these friends begged Jesus to heal their friend.

So today's story is about your willingness to enter into Jesus' presence and beg for Him to bring healing to your friends and loved ones. Just as in this case, it was never about the man's belief in Jesus. It was always about the belief of his friends. Do you care enough about someone in your life that you would get on your knees and beg Jesus to heal them? This story gives us ample evidence to believe that Jesus cares for the loved ones of those who believe.

Yesterday we took a look at what makes up your daily prayer life. We said that there should be a burden for those who surround you who are lost and choose not to have a relationship with the God of the Universe. Today, we are talking about having a burden in prayer for those in need who surround you every day. I just thought I would bring the subject up in case your prayer life needed adding to.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

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What burdens do you need to add to your prayer life?

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