

The Weekly Word

Dec 14-20, 2020

Hello Reading the Bible readers. As we continue to move through Advent, we also continue our read of Mark's gospel. This week we reach a critical juncture in the gospel. Mark 7 & 8 are up this week. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, December 14: Mark 7:1-23 NIV2011

¹ The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus ² and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. ³ (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴ When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

⁵ So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?"

⁶ He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

" 'These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

⁷ They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules.' ^k

⁸ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions."

⁹ And he continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! ¹⁰ For Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother,' ⁿ and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' ^o ¹¹ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)—¹² then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. ¹³ Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

¹⁴ Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.

¹⁵ Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them." ^[16]

¹⁷ After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸ "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? ¹⁹ For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)

²⁰ He went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. ²¹ For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

A confrontation with the Jewish leaders leads to a stinging rebuke of the Jewish leaders. This leads to a poignant teaching by Jesus about what truly defiles a person... things that come from within, from the human heart.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Two overarching teachings grow from this text. First, we are to follow God's laws not human made laws. Human rules, which can grow out of honest intent, have a way of subverting God's true intent in His law. Within the Christian faith we must be on the look out for human made regulations, which build on or add to what God has said. I grew up in a tradition that said girls' skirts had to come to no more than one inch above the knee. While the intention was honorable, not wanting young women to wear provocative clothing. It created a rule that didn't deal with the internal issue.

This leads to the teaching Jesus brought out from the confrontation. What defiles a person is not something external that we take in, like food. Rather what defile comes from within, from the human heart. Back to my school days, better to teach the need for appropriate dress than to make an arbitrary skirt length. If someone wants to be provocative, they can do it by how they sit, walk, talk, brush near people, even if their skirt length is within the acceptable limit.

We, every single one of us, have to face ourselves and the sin bents within...

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

The Spirit is holding a mirror up to my gaze for me to peer within. What I see isn't pretty. Facing the defilement within and being honest with Jesus is God's call to me today...

Tuesday, December 15: Mark 7:24-30 NIV2011

²⁴ Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. ²⁵ In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet.

²⁶ The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

²⁷ "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

²⁸ "Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

²⁹ Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."

³⁰ She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

The passage tells about a foreign born woman who comes to Jesus to ask for the healing of her demon possessed daughter. Refusing to take 'no' for an answer, she fires back with a statement that reveals her faith. And Jesus heals the daughter.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Ask Jesus in faith... and Jesus' compassion is open to everyone who believes regardless of ancestry.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

No one is beyond the love and compassion of Jesus... I am to believe, see what Jesus can do. Also, I have to be careful not to erect ethnic boundaries around my presentations of the gospel or my thinking of who is worthy of following Jesus.

Wednesday, December 16: Mark 7:31-37 NIV2011

³¹ Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. ³² There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.

³³ After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!"). ³⁵ At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

³⁶ Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. ³⁷ People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Jesus is in the region of the Decapolis (the ten cities), which were outside the Israelite nation. Even there, Jesus is known and people brought a deaf and dumb person to Jesus for healing. Taking the man aside, Jesus healed him and instructed them not to tell anyone. They didn't listen. The people's reaction... "He has done everything well".

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Again even though Jesus' primary focus was on Israel, His ministry was not limited to only Jews. Jesus intentionally traveled to the Decapolis and healed people there. This was a statement in action that His message, and authority and power are open to all.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

I have to be very careful that I do not establish my own artificial boundaries regarding who God cares for and who God does not care for. No one is outside of the Lord's care and no one should be outside of my care either.

Thursday, December 17: Mark 8:1-13 NIV2011

¹ During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ² "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with

me three days and have nothing to eat. ³ If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance."

⁴ His disciples answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?"

⁵ "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked.

"Seven," they replied.

⁶ He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people, and they did so.

⁷ They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. ⁸ The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ⁹ About four thousand were present. After he had sent them away, ¹⁰ he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

¹¹ The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. ¹² He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it." ¹³ Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

The bulk of today's reading is the feeding of the 4000. In many ways it is a parallel of the feeding for the 5000. Sitting here in my chair I think how dense the disciples were not to leap at the opportunity to say, "Hey Jesus, why not feed them like You did the 5000 the other day." But still they stymied about what to do.

In similar fashion Jesus takes the meager bread and fish, gives thanks (note He gives thanks to God for the provisions rather than blesses the provisions) and has the disciples distribute it to the crowd. Again, more leftovers are collected than was the original bounty.

My chosen read ends with a brief paragraph where Jesus refuses to give the Pharisees a sign from heaven that they ask for.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

This passage reinforces Jesus as a compassionate miracle worker. Like the feeding of the 5000, the crowd may not be aware that a miracle took place, but the disciples certainly understand. They have a front row seat as they distribute the meager 7 loaves and a few fish to feed 4000 men.

We are not told of the reaction of the disciples. Imagination must fill in what we believe their reaction was.

Reading this, I am left in awe of Jesus whose compassion for people in true need is matched by His authority and power to mitigate the people's need, even if a miracle is needed to do so.

Jesus' refusal to give a sign to the Pharisees tells us Jesus is not about miraculous parlor games. Jesus does not need to prove Himself to others. His desire is to help people and watch the power of God break in and touch lives and defeat evil. And when power and authority is needed to help others Jesus is very willing to do the miraculous if necessary to help. But Jesus is never about power for power sake!!!

This is a lesson we, in the contemporary church, need to learn and relearn.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

Faith is not about personal show. Faith is about living in a way that honors Jesus and advances His name and fame. Using His authority and power is wonderful when it advances Jesus' agenda and fame, but NEVER when it advances our name or fame.

Friday, December 18: Mark 8:14-26 NIV2011

¹⁴ *The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat.* ¹⁵ *"Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."*

¹⁶ *They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread."*

¹⁷ *Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?"* ¹⁸ *Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?"* ¹⁹ *When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"*

"Twelve," they replied.

²⁰ *"And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"*

They answered, "Seven."

²¹ *He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"*

²² *They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.* ²³ *He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"*

²⁴ *He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."*

²⁵ *Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.* ²⁶ *Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village."*

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Traveling after the feeding of the 4000 Jesus warns the disciples, *"Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."* They are 'blockheads' and begin discussing that they had no bread, missing entirely Jesus point.

Jesus corrects them reminding them of the feeding of 5000 and 4000. I can only imagine what a frustrating conversation this was for Jesus. He must have wondered if they would ever catch on?!

When they come ashore a blind man brought by his friends is waiting to touch Jesus and be healed. Jesus leads the blind man away from the town (Bethsaida) and then outside the city away from the crowds Jesus heals him. This is an interesting healing. It is the only one where Jesus takes two actions to effect the total healing. The man's eyesight is fully restored and Jesus in keeping with His desire that people keep quiet about these miracles send the man home saying, *"Don't even go into the village."*

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

The meaning for all of Christendom... beware the yeast of the Pharisees, seems to be a warning to beware the hypocritical manner of the Pharisees who do not necessarily practice what they teach their disciples to do. Also their scrupulous attention to human law even when it abrogates God's law is a second behavior disciples must avoid.

The exchange with Jesus and the disciples show that we may not be the 'swiftest' lot in the world but what we will see in Acts, empowered by Jesus, we will turn the world upside down.

The healing is curious in that it happens in two stages. Some people make a lot of hay about it being a progressive healing, using it to create a precedent for progressive healing today and the need for multiple prayer sessions for healing to be effective. I am not convinced that it is an appropriate take from this one lone incident in Jesus' ministry. Instead I wonder if it isn't a word picture for discipleship... how we begin to see things once Jesus touches our lives, but we do not yet have a clear view? Only with the continuing touch of Jesus will we be able to see things and discern things (spiritually) clearly. In other words, stay close to Jesus and continue to allow Him to reform you...

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

I take heart that the disciples are somewhat dullards. Why? Because I too take a long time to catch on. But Jesus never gives up. He keeps pouring in, helping me see. And like the disciples after Pentecost and the blind man after Jesus' second touch I, too, will be aided by the spirit to see clearly and thus be available and used by Jesus to extend His kingdom...

Bill, keep pressing into Jesus...

Saturday, December 19: Mark 8:27-9:1 NIV2011

²⁷ *Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"*

²⁸ *They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."*

²⁹ *"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"*

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

³¹ *He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.*

³³ *But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."*

³⁴ *Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."*

^{9:1} *And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death*

before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.”

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

There is so much in these few verses. Jesus takes the disciples to Caesarea Philippi. The setting is important. As a premiere Roman city it was adorned with images and sacred areas to the Roman Pantheon of gods. With that as a backdrop Jesus probes first who the populous believe Jesus to be. The potential answers swirling among people are John the Baptist or one of the prophets. We saw this earlier in the account of Herod’s beheading of John. After the general question Jesus sets His gaze on the disciples asking who they believe him to be. (Understand in this question Jesus is gaining a sense of if they are finally ‘getting it’, when it comes to Jesus.) Peter, the mouthpiece of the disciples, answers the Messiah. (We have reached the first of the two important declarations of the gospel... recall Mark 1:1.)

Immediately Jesus begins to instruct them on the Messiah’s fate, *the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.* The text notes that Jesus told them this plainly. This is not a parable understandable to only a few. He taught them this plainly!

Peter, as surely as he declared Jesus was Messiah, now rebukes Jesus. Surely suffering and death is not God’s Messiah’s fate! Wrong Peter. In as stinging a rebuke as happens in the gospel, Jesus says, *“Get behind me, Satan!”* and He goes on to explain this is in fact the way of God but Peter is thinking in human terms.

With this handled, Jesus speaks a short yet strong word about the nature of discipleship that He requires:

... deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Him.

...losing their lives for Him and for the gospel will save it.

If anyone is ashamed of me and my words... the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes....”

Strong words about true discipleship; but nothing more than Jesus Himself will do.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

First Jesus is clarifying that He IS God’s Messiah. He also redefines Messiah as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 as He begins to prepare His followers for what will happen in Jerusalem.

After defining Himself and His future, Jesus begins to teach the disciples His meaning of discipleship, denying self, carrying ones’ cross, losing one’s life to save it, and not being ashamed of Jesus and His teachings. This is a tall order... and significant requirements by Jesus.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

The Spirit is saying Jesus is Messiah and it is not enough to mouth words, I believe Jesus is Messiah. To be a follower and disciple a person must put his or her life in second place to Jesus. I must make my life and my comforts and my desires subservient to obedience to Jesus and advancing His mission.

Sunday, December 20, 2020 - Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the Living Hope website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@LivingHopeCT.org.

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