

## Gospel of Mark Chapter 8

1. I want to open this lesson with something I wrote back in my first lesson on this book. I stated in the first few lines of that first lesson that I am not sure why God wanted me to pick this book. I jokingly said that if anyone has any idea why God wanted me to study this book, let me know.
  - a) Now in Chapter 8, we are now at the half waypoint of the Gospel of Mark.
  - b) The interesting news (to me) is that God woke me up in the middle of the night a few days ago to work on this study and to tell me the purpose of the study of this book.
  - c) The message has to do with increasing my faith in God. While I've always had faith that Jesus is God and I've understood for a long time what it meant "on paper" to increase one's faith, well, let me just say I've had some new insights as I put this lesson together.
2. Well John, I'm happy for you that God is working on increasing your faith. What does that have to do with me and my life? Whether God wakes you up in the middle of the night or not, ☺ the idea if increasing one's faith is important to the life of every Christian believer. Let me explain:
  - a) I've stated in the past (and I still believe it's true) that faith is like a muscle. In order to make that muscle grow stronger, that muscle has to be used. If we ignore that muscle, it grows weak. If we use that muscle, it grows even stronger. That is how our faith works.
  - b) It's nice to have that "theory on paper". It's another to let it sink in and actually apply it.
    - i) For example, if one is physically in pain, to pray to God to help deal with that pain is literally an example of using one's faith "muscle".
    - ii) If one is praying for a situation to work out and is one saying in effect, "God, however this situation works out, is up to You and not up to me. No matter how it works out, I am trusting that Your will be done in this situation.
    - iii) Currently my business is slow. Growing in one's faith is to not worry about the situation, but trusting that God is working it out. That doesn't mean I just sit there and do nothing. I still take the necessary footsteps. The point is I don't worry about the results and I trust that God will somehow work it out.
  - c) Let me put it another way: The opposite of faith is to worry. The opposite of faith in God and faith in Jesus as His son is not "no faith", but worrying about how a situation will turn out. I am realizing that "worrying" is a sin to be confessed because when we worry, we are putting our trust in ourselves to fix a situation, and not God.
    - i) When God is not working things out on our timing or the way we want God to work, we tend to worry or worse, trust in other things. To have faith and to increase one's faith is to truly trust that God is working things out, His way and on His timing. We are still following Him no matter what happens in our life.
    - ii) This is why I've never been big on the "prosperity" Christian view. There are some Christians who argue that if we truly trust in Jesus, God not only provides for our needs, but He will make us financially well off. That is pure nonsense. God is not here to "increase our golf score" as I heard Hank Hanegraaff put it one time. We are here to live to make a difference for God and not the other way around.
  - d) God may or may not allow us to be financially successful (or whatever). God wants us to support our families and do the best we can. Still, the point of living the Christian life is all about learning to completely let go and again, not worry.
    - i) If you can let that sink in, well, God won't have to keep you up at nights. ☺ Further, you have just mastered a key point of this lesson.
    - ii) In other words, the Christian life is placed in God's hands. That doesn't mean we just sit there and not go forward. It means we don't worry about it and trust that God is working through our life to make a difference for Him in all that we do.

3. This leads me to Chapter 8. Last time I checked, we are in Chapter 8 of the Gospel of Mark.
  - a) My title for this lesson, if you haven't already guessed by now, is all about "increasing one's faith in God". It is about understanding how Jesus is capable of working in our lives if we are willing to let go and trust Him with all that we do.
  - b) The point is when we start to worry about something we should confess that worry to God. We put our trust that somehow, God will work everything out for His glory. We may not like how God works it out, but we trust that He is and move forward with the knowledge that if we give the situation to God, He is working it out for His glory.
4. At this time, let me give a summary of Chapter 8, and then I can tie it back to the lesson itself.
  - a) Most of the text (the first story) is about Jesus feeding a crowd of 4,000 men and probably an equal number, more or less, of women and children. This is a separate miracle from a feeding of 5,000 men back in Chapter 6. In Chapter 6, the crowd was a Jewish crowd. The crowd in this chapter is for the most part, a non-Jewish crowd.
  - b) OK, so Jesus is capable of miraculously feeding a large Jewish or a large non-Jewish crowd. What does that have to do with the issues I'm dealing with right now in my life? The answer is if Jesus is capable of helping people no matter their background, then yes, He is capable of working in our lives for His glory if we are willing to let go of the situation and trust in Him to work out the results.
    - i) That doesn't mean we stop taking the necessary steps or do our best to make good decisions. It means we let go of worrying about the results and trust that God is working things out His way, on His timing and for His purposes. No matter what the results, we can and should still worship Him as God and trust that He still loves us, has a plan for our lives and wants us to follow Him with our lives.
  - c) Getting back to the story, Jesus "in effect" started with 12 disciples. There were actually more followers, but it was still a small number in comparison to the number of people who saw Jesus' miracles and were willing to accept Him as the Messiah. The miracle in this story was not necessary for the benefit of the 4,000 men, but for the disciples. It was to teach His followers (yes, that includes us) to truly trust that He can work and will work in our lives if we are simply willing to give those situations over to Him.
  - d) In fact, the story of the 4,000 ends with Jesus getting in a boat with His disciples and He teaches them in effect to beware of the things that turn our hearts away from Him.
    - i) Jesus compared the feeding of the 4,000 and of the 5,000 (Chapter 6) to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisee's and Herod". What Jesus meant by that in effect is to beware of those things that turn us away from Him.
    - ii) The idea of the Pharisee's is to not put "man's rules and regulations" in place of God's desire for our lives. The idea of "Herod" is when we put our trust in people or the government and do not look to God to work things out for our lives.
    - iii) It is now roughly 2,000 years since the Pharisee's and Herod. The issues Jesus brought up are as true today as they were back then. People are still turning from God as they are trusting in their own "rules" or in other people to work things out.
  - e) By the way, there are other stories in this chapter as well. ☺
    - i) The next story is about Jesus healing a blind man. What is interesting is that Jesus works in "phases". The first time Jesus literally touched the man, he saw "trees moving like people". The second time (a few moments later) the formerly blind man now saw clearly. This does not mean Jesus did it wrong the first time. It just means the blind man lacked faith and Jesus worked on increasing His faith.
  - f) The final story is about Jesus explaining to His disciples who He is and what is His purpose for coming. This is one of the few times that Jesus clearly lays out His divine purpose of dying for our sins. The disciples were expecting Jesus the "ruling Messiah", not one who will die for their sins. One has to accept Jesus as both Lord (ruler of our lives) and Savior prior to truly allowing God to work in our lives for His glory.

5. OK, I've been yapping for two full pages now. Time to break down and start the text. Chapter 8 Verse 1: During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said,<sup>2</sup> "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat."<sup>3</sup> If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance."
- a) Let's start with the phrase "During those days another large crowd gathered." The first question is "what days?" Remember that Mark the Gospel writer was not one of the disciples nor did he travel with Jesus in "those days". This verse lends more proof that Mark's source was one of the disciples and we know from elsewhere, that was Peter.
    - i) Therefore, this is Peter telling Mark "in those days".
  - b) Now let's quickly move to the "where" question. Where was Jesus in those days? When we last left off in Chapter 7, Jesus and the disciples were on the east side of the Sea of Galilee in the "Decapolis" area, which were ten towns that were primarily non-Jewish.
    - i) Chapter 8 begins in effect with, "While we were in Decapolis, "this" happened.
  - c) Chapter 8 begins by telling a story of a large crowd gathering to Jesus and He is now worried that they are hungry and have nothing to eat. Jesus is worried that some of them will collapse on the way home due to hunger.
    - i) I was thinking about this situation. Personally, if I were listening to a great speaker for hour after hour, sooner or later I (or anyone) would be thinking about what to do for food or even, where do I go to the bathroom.
    - ii) Again, this is the famous story of Jesus feeding the "4,000". Again, remember that this is a separate event from Jesus feeding the "5,000". The main difference is the "5,000" was primarily a Jewish crowd, while this "4,000" is a Gentile crowd.
    - iii) I suspect that there were some food sources nearby and I believe most of the crowd lived nearby this spot where Jesus preached.
    - iv) My personal view of this is that Jesus preached during the day for three days and during the evenings, people went back to the local villages.
    - v) Also, one has to remember that there were no grocery stores where people could buy food for such a three-day outing.
    - vi) Given the large crowds in this story, I suspect there were people making the rounds who were offering to sell (or maybe give away) food to the crowd.
    - vii) I further suspect that by the third day, supplies of local food via "vendors" or whoever, was running out. That is why on the third day Jesus made this lack of food comment. I don't think that Jesus spoke non-stop for three days and three nights and people ignored their "body needs". I suspect that Jesus just preached to whoever listened and he spoke during the days. The locals did skip work for three days and on the third day they were running out of prepared food to eat.
    - viii) This also makes me wonder what Jesus was saying for three days. I suspect the teaching was a lot more than just repeating the phrase "I repent". It is interesting that none of the Gospel writers recorded what Jesus actually said during either this speech or the speech to 5,000. Given that this is a non-Jewish (a.k.a. Gentile) crowd, I suspect a lot of the teaching was an explanation of the Old Testament, in that there is a single God and He called a people (Jewish nation) for Himself to be a witness and then lead the crowd through a lot of the Old Testament.
    - ix) Let me end by saying I could be wrong on some of the details, as I was not there, but I suspect that this is how it happened. If you recall the story of the feeding of the 5,000 people, that was only a single day event. This is a 3-day gathering.
  - d) The final point before I move on is that notice that Jesus cared about their well-being and not just their salvation. If Jesus cared whether or not they had food to sustain themselves then yes, that is further proof that Jesus does care about our daily needs as well.

6. Verse 4: His disciples answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" <sup>5</sup>"How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied.
- a) These verses are "funny" in the sense that the disciples have already forgotten about how Jesus multiplied the food for the "5,000" and now didn't know how Jesus could possibly help this crowd. That is human nature to forget quickly the "supernatural" and to focus on the reality of the moment.
  - b) One also has to wonder whether or not the fact that this crowd was not Jewish, that the disciples would wonder about the food issue. In other words, it is acceptable for the Messiah of the Jewish people to "magically" provide food for that large of a crowd, but possibly the disciples thought that Jesus could not or would not do the same thing figuring that this large crowd was non-Jewish in its make up.
  - c) Notice Jesus asks the disciples how much bread they had on them. The disciples were not without some supplies as they traveled from town to town. Also remember that the word "loaves" is akin to what we think of as "pita bread" and not big loaves.
  - d) The lesson from these verses is that Jesus likes to work with whatever resources we have "in hand" and then use those resources for His glory.
    - i) In other words, if we ask Jesus how can we work through a given situation, I suspect His first response to us is "What do you have that I can work with?"
    - ii) The idea is to remember that if we have dedicated our lives to Christ then all we have, including all we own and what we have "on us", belongs to Him. Therefore, if Jesus asked us to give what we have "on us", He, (in a sense) is asking us to use what resources He has already provided to us in the first place.
7. Verse 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 set before the people, and they did so.
- a) I suspect (but cannot prove) that Jesus, through the disciples had the crowd sit in specific groups of 50 or 100, that way, the disciples could count the crowd size.
  - b) Jesus gave the order for the crowds to sit. I suspect this large crowd was gathered so close to Jesus that no one could sit down. Part of the reason to get so close was because there were no microphones back then. The crowd was in "tight" so most could hear what Jesus had to say. Jesus in effect, gave the command for everyone to spread out a little and sit.
  - c) Jesus took the seven loaves of bread that the disciples had and blessed them and gave them back to the disciples to then give out to this large crowd.
8. Verse 7: They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. <sup>8</sup> The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. <sup>9</sup> About four thousand men were present.
- a) The word "they" in Verse 7 are the disciples. They had a few small fish as well as the bread as part of their supplies traveling with Jesus. The text does not say whether or not the disciples just offered the fish to Jesus or He asked for it.
  - b) I suspect at this point is when the disciples realized that Jesus was going to do the same sort of miracle that He did when He fed the crowd of 5,000 at a separate occasion.
    - i) It's almost like a "light bulb" went off in the heads of the disciples when Jesus prayed over the bread and fish that they thought, "Oh, I get it now, Jesus is going to work the same way now with this crowd of 4,000 men (Verse 9) as He did with the crowd of 5,000 men that was back in Mark, Chapter 6, Verse 44." Ok, the disciples did not recite chapter and verse, but you get the idea. ☺
  - c) One more technical note: The size of this crowd was not just 4,000. For better or worse, only the grown men were counted in those days. Therefore, I suspect the crowd size may have even been double this amount if one includes women and children.

- d) The text says after everyone had eaten (the word for eaten literally means "stuffed"), then the disciples carried seven large baskets worth of leftovers back to Jesus.
    - i) The word for "baskets" is a different word than the one used back in Chapter 6 when Jesus fed the 5,000 men. In Chapter 6, the word for basket was like a small basket than woman carried on their heads or in their arms. Here in Chapter 8, this word for baskets refers to a very large basket.
    - ii) So where did the disciples get these baskets? I suspect that they got them from the crowd that was sitting down. In other words, at least seven people traveling to hear Jesus for the third day brought a large basket with their supplies. This supports my theory that at least some of the crowd went home at night and brought provisions for the next day. That is why baskets existed in that crowd.
    - iii) I could be wrong on the issue of where the baskets came from, as that is only speculation. The important point is the baskets were there and the disciples did use them to collect the leftover pieces of fish and bread.
  - e) The important point for the disciples to learn is that they are to trust Jesus with whatever provisions (supplies) they had on them and Jesus works with "what we've got" to make a difference for Him and for His kingdom.
  - f) So did this mean the entire crowd got saved? We have no idea. All we do know is that Jesus pulled a miracle here and that He cares about feeding those who are interested in following Him with their (our) lives.
9. Verse 9 (cont.): And having sent them away,<sup>10</sup> he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.
- a) I sort of picture Jesus saying to the crowd, "OK everyone, shows over, time to go home, and don't forget to pick up your souvenir bread and fish on the way out." (OK, I made up that last part. ☺) In reality, Jesus probably said in effect, "That is all I have to say to you and there will be no more feedings nor speeches. Now go home and think about what has happened here over the past three days."
  - b) At that point, before the crowd could ask Jesus to stay longer, He got on the boat with His disciples and now sailed to another point of the lake, which was called "Dalmanutha". The exact location of "Dalmanutha" is debated and unknown at this time.
  - c) I was wondering what the crowd was thinking as they saw Jesus leaving on the boat. Where they begging Him to stay and do another miracle? Where they asking Him to stay and preach a fourth day? We don't know. From Jesus perspective, He was done based on what He wanted to teach the crowd and what He wanted to show the disciples so therefore, the crowd had to accept the idea that Jesus was done.
  - d) Beginning in the next verse we move on to a new story.
10. Verse 11: The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven.<sup>12</sup> He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it."<sup>13</sup> Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.
- a) So, do you think a group of Pharisee's happened to be there when the boat landed, or (more likely) is there some sort of time gap between Verses 10 and 11? I don't know.
  - b) One also has to remember that not all the Jewish people living in that time era were Pharisee's or (the other religious group) the Sadducee's. Just like today, some people are more religious than others. The ones who focused heavy on their religious life probably joined either the Pharisee's or the Sadducee's "camp" in their views on God. However, I suspect a large portion of the Jewish population just went to services on Saturdays and then went about their lives as "good Jews". My main point here is that I don't want you to think that every Jew in Israel was a practicing Pharisee (or a Sadducee).
  - c) Anyway, Jesus' boat landed on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee and sometime (soon) after that time, some Pharisees began to demand to see a sign (a miracle).

- d) Notice that Jesus who has "just" feed the "4,000" and has done lots of miracles around Israel by this point in His life, refused to perform some sort of miracle when asked.
    - i) The point is Jesus won't perform miracles on demand. He didn't back then and He won't do it today either. The key purpose of miracles is to build up people's faith in God and to show how God is capable of working when people have some level of faith in Him. In other words, Jesus won't do a miracle for "miracles' sake".
  - e) What Jesus says to the Pharisee's in a sense is "You want a sign? Go study the Old Testament that you claim to know so well, as all of it speaks of Me and My ministry". It is Jesus saying in effect, "You want proof that I am who I claim to be? Well even if I perform a miracle here on the spot, you (the Pharisee's Jesus is talking to) still won't believe it even if you saw such a miraculous sign. Therefore, look at my life and compare it to the "typology" that is throughout the Old Testament and that is the proof that you desire.
    - i) That principal is as important today as it was then. If we want others to believe in Jesus, it is not a matter of them seeing miracles, it is a matter of believing the bible. If a nonbeliever sees a miracle, they may give God the credit for "five minutes", but there will not be any real change to their lives.
    - ii) Personally, I would much rather a non-believer read say, the Gospel of John, than I would such a person see a visible miracle. The bible has this amazing ability to convict people's hearts, far more than anything we (as believers) can write or say.
    - iii) Think of it another way: When we go through periods of doubts (we all do at times), it is the Word of God that re-convicts us of "God's truth". Therefore, during times of doubt, it is best not to ask for a "miracle" but simply to turn back to the Word of God and trust in that for our lives.
      - a) I remember talking to someone who was going through her own doubts about Jesus. I asked her, "Do you believe the Old Testament was written before Jesus was born? She said yes. I handed her my bible (which I had on me at that time) and said, please read Isaiah, Chapter 53. After she finished, her doubts for the moment were gone.
      - b) My point is not to show any weakness in faith on my friend's part. Lord knows I have my own moments of doubts at time and I too, have to turn to God's word to strengthen me to trust God.
  - f) Meanwhile, Jesus is still pretty "ticked off" that some Pharisee's asked for a miracle and He told them in effect to go "read their bible" and leave Him alone.
    - i) In Matthew's account of the same incident, Jesus said in effect, "No sign will be given except the sign that just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days, so shall the "Son of Man" be in the earth for three days". (See Matthew 12:40).
    - ii) Remember Mark's Gospel was written primarily to a non-Jewish audience, and therefore, Mark did not mention the reference to the Old Testament prophet Jonah.
  - g) At this point Jesus went back in the boat with the disciples. Jesus and His disciples went to the northeast area of the Sea of Galilee where the town of Bethesda was located.
    - i) For the moment, all we have to know is Jesus left this specific location as He had "made His point" to the Pharisee's and now Jesus is back at sea again.
11. Verse 14: The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. <sup>15</sup> "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."
- a) Jesus uses this time alone with the disciples (on the boat) as a teachable moment.
  - b) We know that there is some sort of time gap between the first story in Chapter 8 and the present moment simply based on how much bread there is on the boat. Remember that when Jesus and the disciples left the east side of the lake (feeding of the 4,000) they took up 7 big baskets full of food. Now Verse 14 says they only have one loaf with them. That means that the food of the seven big baskets was now gone.

- c) Jesus then mentions to beware of the yeast of Pharisees and Herod.
    - i) The disciples understood the fact that "yeast" or "leaven" (same thing) is what makes bread rise. I suspect the "pita-like" loaf of bread the disciples had on them did not contain yeast as it is not that type of bread.
    - ii) Therefore, when Jesus is describing the "yeast" of the Pharisees and Herod, Jesus is not describing literal bread, but something "rising" from their teaching.
  - d) Let's now ponder, what is the "yeast" of the Pharisees?
    - i) The Pharisees were a very religious bunch and rejected Jesus as the Messiah.
    - ii) Jesus biggest complaint about them (Chapter 7) is that they were making their own traditions to be more important than God's word. Therefore the yeast of the Pharisees is to not get caught up in one's traditions, but to focus on what does God's word actually say to practice and then "do likewise".
  - e) Next of course, is the question, "what is the yeast of Herod"?
    - i) This is a little more complicated in that the teaching of Herod was not stated anywhere in Mark's gospel to this point. Scholars believe it refers to those who accepted Herod as their ruler and were loyal and dependent upon Herod.
    - ii) I believe the "yeast of Herod" refers to people who were not that religious, but looked to "human government" more than they looked to God. This has nothing to do with those in government power. The point is that some people look primarily to human leaders to solve their problems as opposed to looking at God.
    - iii) Most people I know who are not very religious are also very outspoken about their political views as they look to the government as the primary source of happiness as opposed to the concept of God being in charge.
  - f) Putting this together, the two great "dangers" to someone following God is:
    - i) 1) Focusing more on human commandments than what God desires and
    - ii) 2) Focusing only on government help as opposed to asking God for help.
  - g) Meanwhile, this message has not yet sunk in, so Jesus goes on.
12. Verse 16: They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread."
- a) The disciples heard Jesus comment about the "yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod" and made the assumption that Jesus is somehow talking about lack of actual bread.
    - i) In other words, the disciples are focused on their current lack of food as opposed to thinking about what Jesus meant by His reference to the Pharisee's and Herod.
  - b) Before we knock the disciples for being "thick-headed", know that we're not much better.
    - i) Let's face it, when we hear a preacher talk, our first thought is usually, "Well, what does that have to do with my life, right now"? Since Jesus mentioned yeast, the first thing the disciples thought of was their own tummies. That is our nature to think that way as opposed to digesting (pardon the pun ☺) the deeper meaning.
    - ii) If we are hungry or if we know that our food supply is low, it is difficult to concentrate on the deeper meaning of what a speaker is saying.
    - iii) My point is I don't blame the disciples for not getting it at this point, and I assume that we would not be much better.
  - c) So why did Mark mention this part of the story? Let's face it, if Mark only wanted us to learn of Jesus' teaching, Mark would have skipped Verse 16 and simply focused on what Jesus meant by the "yeast" comment. So why mention this verse?
    - i) I believe the main reason is to get us to not focus on our "human needs" of what Jesus wants to teach us, but to get the "bigger picture". Just as the disciples were primarily focused on their specific human needs (food), Jesus wants us to set that aside that issue for the moment and focus on the bigger picture.

13. Verse 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? <sup>18</sup> Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? <sup>19</sup> When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. <sup>20</sup> "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." <sup>21</sup> He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"
- a) Jesus proceeds to tell the disciples (and us) to give some thought to the events of the last couple of chapters. In other words, the feeding of the 5,000 men and the 4,000 men (again, two separate incidents) were designed to make a teaching point to the disciples.
  - b) One thing that is important to learn is the number of "finished baskets" is key.
    - i) That is, when the disciples fed the 5,000 men, they collected 12 baskets full of fish and bread when everyone was done.
    - ii) When the disciples fed the 4,000 men, they collected 7 large baskets of food.
    - iii) So why is that significant? For a Jewish person, the number "twelve" is associated with the 12 tribes of Israel. The point is Jesus' provision for the large number of Israelites is in effect, sufficient (in a word picture) for all of Israel.
    - iv) The number "seven" to a Jew is associated with God's seven days of creation and on the seventh day God rested. (Genesis 2:2). Therefore the number "seven" is associated with God resting from all His work in "creation". The fact there were seven baskets collected from this large crowd of Gentiles points to the fact that God's resources is sufficient for the entire Gentile world (i.e., the whole world).
    - v) In other words, God is the "God of the whole world" (symbolized by the 7 baskets) and is also the God of the Israelites (as symbolized by the 12 baskets).
  - c) Jesus wanted the disciples to think about both incidents in terms of its symbolism and the fact that God is in charge, God provides for all and He is "big enough" to provide for the needs of all who ask of Him, regardless of their national background or "whatever".
    - i) With that said, that is the end of the "boat lesson". Mark does not spell out what He meant by "thinking about the incidents here" because He wants them (and us) to think about them and what it means to our lives.
  - d) Let's get back to the fact the Gospel of Matthew is not intended for the Jewish reader. Would such a non-Jewish reader understand the significance of the numbers "12 and 7"? Probably not. Still a reader could get the idea that Jesus is sufficient to supply for the needs of a very large group of Jewish people (feeding of the 5,000) and a very large group of non-Jewish people (feeding of the 4,000). Hopefully that knowledge helps people to see Jesus as both God of the Jews and also that He is God of the whole world.
    - i) This gets me back to my lesson title about what it means to have faith. Jesus was trying to teach the two great dangers to a believer!
      - a) One danger is to be like the Pharisee's and to focus on man's traditions over and above what God desires for our lives.
      - b) The other danger is to put trust in man (or government) and ignore what God wants for our lives.
    - ii) That's the main point Jesus is driving at: Teaching the disciples (and us) to keep our focus first of all, on the fact that God exists, God cares for our lives and more importantly to focus on what He wants and not what people want, be they religious or not religious when it supersedes what God wants for our lives.
  - e) OK, since I'm stressing what God wants, I better define it here. First of all, there is the basics: Believing that Jesus is God, that He is in charge of our lives, that He cares for our lives and we as Christians live to serve Him and make a difference for Him and His kingdom. That includes the concept of submission. It is to live our life believing He is in charge and we are trusting in Him to work through our lives to make a difference primarily to other believers but also to potential believers to be a witness for Him.

14. Verse 22: They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.
- a) OK, time for a new story. Again we have a time gap between Verses 21 and 22.
  - b) The story picks up with Jesus and the disciples back at Bethsaida. This is a town in the Sea of Galilee area where Jesus has previously preached.
  - c) A blind man was brought to Jesus and the people who brought the blind man begged Jesus to touch this man.
  - d) What is implied in the text is that the blind man was going along with this plan against his will. It would be like a blind man being dragged to some sort of "healing service" reluctantly as if to say, "OK, I'll go along with your plan, but I want you to know that I'm doing this for your sake and not for mine." ☺
15. Verse 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?"
- a) The next thing Mark mentions is that Jesus took this blind man and let him away from the village. I have to admit I wondered about why Jesus had to take the man outside the village. Why didn't Jesus just work with that man there and then?
    - i) I need to give credit to one of my teachers (Chuck Missler) who helped me understand this passage. This view is based on his teaching.
    - ii) If you read Matthew's Gospel (11:21), it mentions that Jesus put a curse on the town of Bethsaida, and this event took place after that curse. Since Jesus "cursed that town", it was necessary of Jesus to take this man out of that town to help him.
    - iii) If that is true, why didn't Mark mention that fact? I believe Mark's point is to show how Jesus worked to increase the man's faith. Jesus wanted to take this blind man out of town to work on his lack of faith and therefore, Mark didn't focus on the "cursed town" aspect.
    - iv) Even if I'm wrong on the "why" issue of Jesus going out of town, the important point is to focus on the miracle itself and why it took place.
  - b) Getting back to the text itself, the next thing Jesus did was to apply His spit to the man's eyes and asking the man "Do you see anything"?
    - i) First, a quick word about Jesus method: I don't believe there is anything special about Jesus "spit". The gospels go to a lot of trouble to mention the fact that Jesus used a lot of different methods to heal people. That is to get our focus off of the methods and onto Jesus' Himself. We can't duplicate any particular healing method, but just trust in Him to heal us.
    - ii) So if this method is not significant, why did Jesus use it? What I suspect is that Jesus is trying to increase the blind man's faith. By applying spit, the blind man would understand that Jesus is applying "Himself" to the man.
16. Verse 24: He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." <sup>25</sup> 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.
- a) To me, if Jesus is God, then Jesus should have no problem healing someone instantly and completely. Therefore, this story was always strange to me that Jesus spit on his eyes and then in Verse 24 it says that the blind man said it looked like "trees walking around". After Jesus put His hands on the man's eyes in Verse 25, his eyes were restored completely. (Again, I am indebted to Chuck Missler for his explanation of this miracle.)
  - b) Back to the problem: Why did Jesus have to work in stages? Why wasn't the man completely healed with the first "spit encounter"? ☺ What finally made sense to me is the idea that Jesus works on our "level of faith" and works to increase that faith.
    - i) Let me explain further. This blind man was brought to Jesus reluctantly. In other words, it was not the blind man's idea to come to Jesus, but he was brought by some friends. This blind man did not have faith that Jesus could heal him.

- ii) Given that fact, after the "spit moment", the blind man only saw "trees walking around". That tells us the formerly blind man was not born blind or else he would have no idea what "trees walking around" would look like.
  - iii) At this moment, the blind man was starting to have some trust in what Jesus was capable of doing. Jesus then put His hands over the man's eyes and the next thing we read is that he could see normally. In other words, the formerly blind man was now completely trusting in Jesus and now he could see clearly.
- c) That does lead back to my lesson title, and teach us that Jesus works on our faith on our level. At the start of this little story, the formerly blind man only had enough faith to agree to go along with his friends to see Jesus. Jesus then worked with what little faith the man had and got him to increase his faith a little and see "trees walking like men". Jesus got the man to increase his faith more, and then he could see clearly.
17. Verse 26: Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village."
- a) This little story ends with Jesus telling the formerly blind man to not go back to the village where Jesus first encountered him. That would be Bethsaida. The text does not say why Jesus forbids him to go back to that village. This leads to my "Bethsaida is cursed" theory.
  - b) The other theory is that Jesus is working as hard as He can to not be "thronged" by the crowds and therefore, Jesus is telling the man to go elsewhere so that those people who saw Jesus work with this man will not beg Him to do more signs and miracles.
18. Verse 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?"
- a) In Verse 27, we get another story that takes place in another town. The town of Caesarea Philippi is in northeast Israel and is a different town than the "coastal" Caesarea, which is a popular tourist destination when visiting Israel today.
  - b) At this town, Jesus makes the point of questioning the disciples as to "Who do the people say that I am?" Know that this is not a "marketing meeting" where Jesus is trying to get a feel for what the crowds think of Him. The purpose of that question is that Jesus wanted to make sure the disciples understood who He was at this point and to help the disciples to understand what is the purpose of Him coming to earth.
19. Verse 28: They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." <sup>29</sup> "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." <sup>30</sup> Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.
- a) Some commentators see the disciples "giggling" as they say "Some of the crowd wrongly thinks you are the prophet Elijah and some wrongly think you are John the Baptist who has risen from the dead." We as the disciples know better. Here is where Peter makes the famous confession that Jesus is the Messiah.
  - b) The main point of this section is not that the disciples understood that Jesus was the long awaited promised Messiah to Israel and God of the world. The main point is that the disciples still didn't get the idea that Jesus had to die for the sins of the world.
  - c) That is why Jesus started this conversation. Not to get a "marketing response" from the crowd or even to get the disciples to confess that Jesus is God. The purpose is to help the disciples understand just what "is" the Messiah (king) and what is His purpose.
  - d) The text ends with a warning by Jesus not to tell anyone about Him. Isn't that a contradiction of the "Great Commission" (Matthew 28:19) where Jesus commands us to go into the world and tell everyone about Him? Yes it is. If nothing else, it teaches us that some commands given by Jesus are just for a specific time period and some are "eternal" in that they apply to all of us.
    - i) Jesus wanted His disciples to be quiet at this point, not so they couldn't spread the word about who Jesus was. It is so the disciples would "shut up and listen" to what Jesus is about to teach them about His role in this life.

- e) Let me put this another way: God does not want us to spread the gospel message unless we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us. That only happens when we are a believer. Can God work through a nonbeliever to convict people and spread the Gospel message? Yes He can and Yes He does. Still, the primary job of spreading the word about Jesus is given to the church to do, which is you and me.
20. Verse 31: He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.
- a) Here is actually the key verse of the whole chapter. It explains the purpose of Jesus coming to the earth and the fact the religious leaders of Israel will reject him. It also lays out the fact that Jesus must be killed and rise again in three days.
  - b) Why must Jesus be rejected by the Jewish leaders? The answer is if they accepted Him, they wouldn't let Him die for the sins of the world.
  - c) Did Jesus want the Jewish leaders to accept or deny Him? The answer is to accept Him.
    - i) The point is Jesus understood His destiny and that every effort He would make to get the religious leaders to accept Him, will not work.
    - ii) If that is true, why try in the first place? The short answer is that Jesus needed to show the world and the religious leaders who He was and what was His purpose.
    - iii) In other words, their rejection of Jesus wasn't for a lack of a proper explanation or a lack of miracles to back up Jesus' claim that He is God.
    - iv) The next time you or I start thinking "too bad for them", stop and remember some of the times in our own lives where we were not trusting in Jesus as our Savior.
  - d) One of my Jewish friends used to ask me if I blame the Jews for killing Jesus. My answer (God gets the credit for this) is that I said nobody killed Him, Jesus freely choose to give His life for my sins. If you want to blame somebody for killing Jesus, blame me, as He died for my sins. (Credit for that last sentence also goes to Chuck Smith.)
    - i) My friend responded with, "So do you mean Jesus committed suicide?"
    - ii) I responded with, "It's more like a soldier falling on a grenade for my sake".
    - iii) To make a long story short, it didn't sink in, but I still like the illustrations.
21. Verse 32: He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.
- a) The main point here is that Peter and the disciples didn't "get it".
22. Verse 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 things of God, but the things of men."
- a) Without getting into a long discussion about how Peter was God-inspired to say that Jesus is the Messiah and how Peter was "Satan inspired" to say Verse 32, the point is that either "voice" can speak to us at any time. God's voice doesn't sound anything "special" and could sound as simple as our conscious talking to us. The same concept is true with Satan-inspired thoughts going through our minds.
  - b) So if the sound of both voices can sound the same to us, how do we tell them apart?
    - i) The short answer is "God's word" or even simpler, understanding how God works and what is God's desire for our lives. God would never tell us to do something that is contrary to His word or His will for our lives.
    - ii) Satan somehow inspired Peter to deny that Jesus should go to the cross. That is all the evidence we need that Peter spoke in a way that is "Satan-approved".
  - c) Of course, hindsight is always easier then the "present" or planning for the future. When in doubt about something, we should pray about it and see where God leads us. If we are still not sure and we have to make a decision, simply do our best to make a Godly decision and move on. If it is something God does not want us to do, believe me, He will find a way to get us to change our plans or our minds. Back to Peter, remember that despite his mistakes, God still loved Him and got him back on the right course. Keep that in mind when we are worried that our decision may not be God's will for our lives.

23. Verse 34: Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.
- a) The good news about Peter's mistake is that Jesus spends the rest of the chapter explaining Peter's mistake and understanding what God desires for our lives.
  - b) In the last five verses of this chapter, Jesus speaks to His disciples and anyone willing to listen. To put it simply, these last five verses are important for living the Christian life.
  - c) Jesus is saying in effect that if we want to be His disciples, the key is to deny what we desire and be willing to die (i.e., give up our desires) and do what He wants for our life.
    - i) In other words, it is back to seeking God constantly and asking Him what is His desire for our life at this moment. God rarely gives us long-term plans. He essentially likes to say to us in effect, "Here is what I want you to do right now". Once we accomplish that is when we get the next step. Often our problems is our refusal to do the "right now" part, and therefore we keep asking for more guidance which God will not give us as again, we have ignored His "right now" orders.
  - d) That in effect, is what it means to "take up our cross" and follow Jesus. It is not to literally go die on the cross like He did. The price for sin has been paid once and for all, so in the literal sense we don't have to do "likewise". On the other hand to live for God means to give up our desires for our life and do what God wants us to do. If you are not sure what that is, ask. I find that God will not turn down that request. If we don't get any answer (as opposed to the answer we want to hear), then it may be a simple matter of studying God's word, just moving forward in life and trust that He is leading us.
24. Verse 35: For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. <sup>36</sup> What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?
- a) Verses 35 and 36 are essentially more of the same "tough" medicine as Verse 34.
  - b) Jesus is saying in effect that if we want eternal life, we have to give up our desires for our lives and learn to live for His desires.
  - c) Does this mean we have to be perfect all the time? Of course not. The point is we are to constantly trust in Jesus and constantly desire to do His will. There will be times we fail. The key is simply to recognize when we are not doing God's will, confess it as wrong (no matter how often that is) and then try our best to do God's will at that moment.
  - d) Jesus in a sense is teaching not only how to have eternal life, but also how to live the best possible life one can possibly live on this earth. I can't think of a greater purpose in life than to live to make a difference for God in this life. That is what God is asking all of us to do. It doesn't necessarily mean we all have to quit our jobs and go be pastors and priests. It more likely means God wants us to live to make a difference for Him in the world around us right where we are at the present moment.
  - e) In other words, the reason God wants us to regularly seek Him in prayer and regularly read His word (and I'll add to regularly worship Him with other Christians) is so that we can know what is His will for our lives and understand what He desires for us. How God answers that question is going to be different for every person, but one can sleep well at night (except when He wakes us up in the middle of the night ☺) knowing that as long as we are seeking Him, we are eternally saved.
25. Verse 38: If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."
- a) So what does "ashamed of God" really mean? For the nonbeliever, it means to refuse to turn one's life over to God out of fear of what others would think of us for doing that.
  - b) For the believer, it is not something to worry about in terms of "Am I saved or not saved because I messed up in this situation right here". The key to understanding this verse is simply to ask ourselves "Do we have a heart for pleasing God, seeking Him and His word and His desires for our life?" If the answer is yes, just confess our bad moments to Him!"

- c) I hate to stop when I get on a roll, ☺ but the lesson is starting to run a little long, so I'll just summarize a lot of these thoughts about increasing our faith in the closing prayer.
26. Let's pray: Father, often we fail to do Your will out of fear of what other people might think or we are afraid of what the results will be. We ask that You increase our faith and trust in You so that we can be more obedient to the desires we have for our lives. Help us to remember that as long as it is our desire to seek You, we are saved no matter how bad we mess up. Help us to remember that You always love us and desire the best for our lives. Help us to stick close to You and yes, to do what You desire for us. Thank You for the fact that You are working to increase our faith when we ask, and thank You in advance for the wonderful results that will happen simply by trusting You through the situations we are facing at the moment. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.