

Session 17 Defining True Discipleship (Mk. 7-9; Mt. 15-17)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. In these passages, Jesus presented the nature of true discipleship. He exposed errors about food laws (Mk. 7:1-5) and how the Pharisees exalted tradition over the Scripture (Mk. 7:15-23). He explained what defilement is (Mk. 7:15-23), then healed the Syrophenician demoniac and a deaf man (Mk. 7:24-37). He fed 4,000 people and exposed the disciples' hardness of heart (Mk. 8:1-21). He healed a blind man just before Peter declared that Jesus was the Christ (Mk. 8:22-30). Next, He prophesied His death and then spoken directly on discipleship (Mk. 8:31-9:1). These events occurred in Galilee, Tyre and Sidon (Phoenicia), and Decapolis in the spring and summer of AD 29.
- B. In the first two years of Jesus' ministry, He taught the multitudes many different truths about the nature of God and the kingdom of God. In the last year of His ministry, He focused on revealing to the apostles *who He was as Messiah* and the *nature of discipleship*. Helping the disciples to gain spiritual understanding—being healed of spiritual blindness was a primary theme in Mark 6-10.

II. JESUS EXPOSED ERRORS RELATED TO BEING CLEAN (MK. 7:1-23)

- A. Jesus exposed errors in the Pharisees' application of food laws (Mk. 7:1-5; cf. Mt. 15:1-2). The leaders in the early church debated on how to apply the food laws found in the law of Moses.
- ¹Then the Pharisees...came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. ²Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. ³For the Pharisees...do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way...⁴When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches. ⁵Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?" (Mk. 7:1-5)*
1. This is the second time that a delegation of leaders came from Jerusalem to investigate Jesus (Mk. 3:22).
 2. This conflict was not about the disciples' hygiene, but their refusal to embrace religious purification rituals before eating. The Pharisees washed after visiting the marketplace to remove the spiritual defilement they claimed to have received by their contact with Gentiles.
- B. The tradition of the elders was the oral interpretation of the Mosaic law that was passed on from generation to generation. They regarded these traditions as commands from God. In AD 200, the rabbis compiled these "laws" into the Mishnah, which became the basis for the Talmud (AD 425).
- ⁶He...said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. ⁷And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' ⁸For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do." (Mk. 7:6-8)*

- C. Jesus accused the scribes of disregarding God’s command to honor parents by neglecting to care for their parents in their old age (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16).

¹⁰For Moses said, “Honor your father and your mother”...¹¹But you say, “If a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban’” (that is, a gift to God), ¹²then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, ¹³making the word of God of no effect through your tradition...And many such things you do. (Mk. 7:10-13)

1. **Corban:** This came from a Hebrew word meaning “a gift dedicated to God.” It involved a solemn vow to dedicate money or property to God. This put the offering under a strict ban so that it could not be used for any other purpose—not even the support of their aged parents.
2. **Many such things:** The Corban vow was one of many ways that they manipulated the law.

- D. Jesus explained how a person is defiled or made unclean (Mk. 7:14-23). He exposed how the Pharisees exalted their traditions over Scripture. Christians are not mandated by Scripture to observe the dietary laws in the law of Moses (Acts 10:9-17; 11:5-10; Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8; Gal. 2:11-17; Col. 2:20-23). Paul declared that Jesus terminated that aspect of the Mosaic Law (Rom. 10:4).

¹⁴...and [Jesus] said to them, “Hear Me, everyone, and understand: ¹⁵There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man... ²¹For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, ²²thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye... ²³All these evil things come from within and defile a man.” (Mk. 7:14-23)

1. Jesus clarified what causes uncleanness—common foods do not. Jesus was not speaking medically or physiologically, but in terms of Israel honoring the food laws given by Moses.
2. Moses taught laws related to remaining separate from various foods that the Gentiles ate. These laws taught and symbolized the value of purity or the separation of their heart to God. These food laws in themselves did not impart purity to the heart. They were merely types and shadows and not the substance of purity (Heb. 10:1). These types were fulfilled in Christ.

- E. Jesus healed the Syrophenician demoniac (Mk. 7:24-30; cf. Mt. 15:22-28). Jesus withdrew to Tyre located on the Mediterranean coast about 35 miles from Capernaum. Jesus went to this Gentile region immediately after teaching that all foods are clean to show that *all people* are clean! Matthew added that Jesus declared that the woman’s faith was great (Mt. 15:28).

²⁴From there He...went to the region of Tyre and Sidon...²⁵A woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit...came and fell at His feet. ²⁶The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷But Jesus said to her, “Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.” ²⁸And she answered..., “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs...eat from the children’s crumbs.” ²⁹He said..., “For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter.” (Mk. 7:24-29)

²⁸Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, great is your faith!” (Mt. 15:28)

III. THE FEEDING OF THE 4,000 (MK. 8:1-10)

- A. Jesus fed 4,000 people at Decapolis—a Gentile region east of the Sea of Galilee (Mk. 8:1-9; Mt. 15:32-38). When He fed the 5,000, it spoke of His care for Jewish people (Mk. 6:34-44); and here in feeding the 4,000, He showed His heart for Gentiles instead of seeing them as unclean.

¹...Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, ²“I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. ³And if I send them away hungry...they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar.” ⁴Then His disciples answered..., “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?” ⁵He asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven.”... ⁶He took the seven loaves...broke them and gave them to His disciples...and they set them before the multitude... ⁸So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. ⁹Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. (Mk. 8:1-9)

- B. Just before He fed the 5,000, Jesus asked His disciples the same question about how many loaves they had (Mk. 6:38). This very question should have reminded the disciples that Jesus could easily multiply bread to provide for this great need. Jesus’ provision was again very abundant (Mk. 8:9).

IV. THE PHARISEES DEMANDED A SIGN IN THE SKY (MK. 8:10-12)

- A. The Pharisees demanded a sign in the sky to test Jesus (Mk. 8:11-12; cf. Mt. 16:1-4). This happened after Jesus crossed to the west side of the sea to Dalmanutha or Magdala (Mk. 8:10; cf. Mt. 15:39).

¹⁰... [Jesus] got into the boat with His disciples, and came to the region of Dalmanutha. ¹¹Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him. ¹²But He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, “Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation.” (Mk. 8:10-12)

- B. Matthew added that Jesus would give them only the sign of Jonah—Jesus’ resurrection (Mt. 16:4).

⁴A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. (Mt. 16:4)

- C. Jesus warned about error of the Pharisees and Herod (Mk. 8:13-21; cf. Mt. 16:5-12). Jesus crossed the sea returning to the east side (near Bethsaida). He exposed the disciples’ hardness of heart

¹³And He...and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. ¹⁴Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵Then He charged them, saying, “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” ¹⁶And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have no bread.” ¹⁷But Jesus...said to them, “Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? ¹⁸Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? ¹⁹When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?” They said to Him, “Twelve.” ²⁰“Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets... did you take up?” They said, “Seven.” ²¹So He said..., “How is it you do not understand?” (Mk. 8:13-21)

- D. The disciples were corrected several times for “hardness of heart” (Mk. 6:52; 8:17; 16:14). This does not speak of them being rebellious, but of not properly esteeming the things that God had said or did before their very eyes—not laying hold of the implications of divinely orchestrated events set before them. By the two feeding miracles, Jesus intended them to understand that He was God.
- E. I often review the “God story” in my life—individually and corporately. Our “God story” consists of the times He intervened in both subtle and overt ways. How He gave me promises, provision, direction, and protection. They are like “pearls” from heaven that we are to call to remembrance. We can lose sight of the “God story” in our life in the midst of the “noise” in our life. We must identify those pearls—they only come occasionally. Write them down and say them back to God. It causes gratitude and confidence to rise in us and helps us walk in the “God story” in our life.

V. PETER’S CONFESSION OF JESUS AS SON OF GOD

- A. Peter declared that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), the very Son of God (Mk. 8:27-30; cf. Mt. 16:13-20; Lk. 9:18-21). This happened while walking between towns near Caesarea Philippi (a Roman city at the base of Mt. Herman, 25 miles from Bethsaida) in the summer of AD 29.
²⁷Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, “Who do men say that I am?”²⁸They answered, “John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.”²⁹He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.” (Mk. 8:27-29)
¹⁶Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Mt. 16:16)
- B. **Christ:** The English word “Christ” is the English transliteration of the Greek “christos” that comes from the Hebrew word “mashiach” which is translated in English as “messiah” or “anointed one.”
- C. The apostles did not understand what kind of Messiah Jesus was—a suffering and dying Messiah. They were looking for a victorious, conquering king to liberate Israel from the oppression of Rome. Peter’s confession was accurate but inadequate—not understanding He must die to redeem Israel.
- D. Jesus gave His first prediction of His death in Caesarea (Mk. 8:31-33; cf. Mt. 16:21-23; Lk. 9:22). We see the disciples’ reaction to it (8:32-33). This is the first of Jesus’ three predictions of His death and resurrection (Mk. 8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34) and His return (Mk. 8:38; 13:26; 14:62).
³¹And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.³²He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.³³But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” (Mk. 8:31-33)
- E. **Began:** He “began to teach,” implying that the teaching about His death was new to them.
- F. **Jesus rebuked Peter:** Jesus called Peter “Satan” because He saw Satan as the ultimate source of Peter’s exhortation. Peter’s way of thinking was totally contrary to God’s will.

VI. THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP (MK. 8:34-9:1)

- A. Jesus defined the nature of true discipleship (Mk. 8:34-9:1; cf. Mt. 16:24-28; Lk. 9:23-27). He now explained that suffering was not something that only He must embrace, but the disciples also must embrace it. Jesus contrasted the person who seeks to save their natural life through denying Jesus and the one who endured persecution, even death, because of their commitment to Him (8:35).
- ³⁴When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.³⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? ³⁷Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father...”^{9:1} He said to them, “Assuredly...there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.” (Mk. 8:34-9:1)
- B. **The people:** Jesus called “the people” because this teaching was not only for the apostles, but for all who follow Him. He spoke of disciples as any who seek to “come after” or “follow” Jesus.
- C. **Deny himself:** To deny ourselves speaks of placing God’s plans, values, and ways above our own. It is not a call to rigorous asceticism, self-hatred, or seeking ways to punish ourselves for our failures. It is a call to embrace Jesus’ leadership in our life and renounce assuming the primary leadership over our life. It is to embrace God’s will over self-will and to resist sinful attitudes and actions. Self-denial includes giving up all that stands in the way of God’s will.
- D. **Follow Me:** This involves publicly taking a stand for Him, His purposes, and His ways—this involves bearing stigma before others who despise His leadership and may involve physical death.
- E. **Save his life:** Jesus used the word *life* (Gr. *psyche*) in two ways. The first use of *life* in each clause speaks of our physical life, and the second use refers to the person we are in the age to come.
1. Similarly, “to lose life” is used two ways. In the first clause, it speaks of the loss of eternal reward (for believers) or the loss of eternal life that was freely offered to unbelievers.
 2. In the second clause, it means the loss of physical life. Jesus was saying that if a person refuses to yield to His leadership by controlling their own life in this age, they will suffer the loss of something far more valuable in the future.
 3. However, if a person releases the control of their life to follow Jesus’ leadership, they will gain something of far greater value.
- F. Matthew added that Jesus will reward people in the age to come for their faithfulness (Mt. 16:27).
- ²⁶For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?... ²⁷For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father...He will reward each according to his works. (Mt. 16:25-27)

VII. THE TRANSFIGURATION: THE GLORY OF THE SON (MK. 9:2-8)

- A. Jesus' transfiguration foreshadowed His returning in glory at His second coming (Mk. 9:2-13; cf. Mt. 17:1-13; Lk. 9:28-36). Most agree that the transfiguration occurred on Mt. Hermon (over 9,000 feet above sea level) about 12 miles north of Caesarea Philippi. Jesus' statement that some would see the kingdom of God with power (Mk 9:1) was fulfilled in the transfiguration (Mk. 9:2-8).

¹And He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." ²Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. ³His clothes became shining, exceedingly white... ⁴Elijah appeared to them with Moses... ⁵Peter...said to Jesus, "...let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"... ⁷And a cloud ...overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Mk. 9:1-7)

²⁹...the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening.

³⁰And behold, two men talked with Him... ³¹spoke of His decease...at Jerusalem. (Lk 9:29-31)

- B. **Moses and Elijah:** Moses represented the law of Moses, and Elijah the prophets—they validated Jesus as Messiah and the necessity of His death. This experience proved that God's favor was still on Jesus and His messianic mission and reassured the apostles that Jesus' soon-coming death fulfilled God's plan, and it would encourage them to be faithful in their future persecution. God commanded them to "Hear Him"—as having more authority than Moses and Elijah—especially Him teaching about His death and their need to also embrace the cross in following Him.

- C. The second prediction of His death was on the road to Capernaum (Mk. 9:30-32; cf. Mt. 17:22-23; Lk. 9:43-45). Jesus took a secret trip thru Galilee. Again they failed to understand what He meant.

³⁰Then they departed...and passed through Galilee... ³¹He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him." (Mk. 9:30-31)

- D. The debate about who was the greatest (Mk. 9:33-50; cf. Mt. 18:1-14; Lk. 9:46-50).

³³... "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" ³⁴But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. ³⁵And He...said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." (Mk. 9:33-37)

- E. True disciples of Jesus must be prepared for the real choices involved in fully following Jesus. Jesus addresses the wisdom of removing anything that hinders our faithfulness to Him (Mk. 9:42-50). Many sacrifices in the Old Testament were offered to God with salt (Lev. 2:13). Jesus spoke of a "salt-sacrifice" when speaking of the sacrifices required at times in faithfully loving and obeying Him. The disciples must be seasoned with salt, like a living sacrifice offered to God (Rom. 12:1). In following Him, Jesus boldly called His disciples to sacrifice money (Mk. 10:21), relationships (Mk. 10:28), their life (Mk. 8:34f), and here the complete sacrifice of the sinful activity of the body.

⁴³If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched... ⁴⁹For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. (Mk. 9:43-49)