

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## MARK 7-8

Invariably humans take simple things, and make them more complicated than they're suppose to be.

This is especially true of our relationship with God.

We make *coming to God, walking with God, and pleasing God* more complexed than God intended.

The Jews of Jesus' day were the classic culprits.

Someone once summed up the American legal code, "**We have 35 million laws trying to enforce God's 10 commandments.**" And this was indicative of Judaism!

God's requirements were simple and straightforward.

But the rabbis and the Pharisees read into the Law innuendos and inferences that just weren't there.

In Mark 7 Jesus separates Scripture from tradition. He simplifies our relationship with Him. He gets us back to what's truly significant and eternally important.

We begin in verse 1, "**Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault.**" These Jerusalem Jews were not sincere seekers of truth - they were legalists on a mission - theological hit-men. These were Pharisees with fangs. They were jealous of Jesus' popularity, and were hunting for accusations to use against Him.

Verse 3, "**For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the**

**tradition of the elders.”** Exodus 30:19-21 called for the priests to wash their hands before they came to the altar, and offered a sacrifice. But over time what was intended for the priests, was applied to all the Jews. Everyone performed ceremonial wash-ups.

Even today, when you visit the Wailing Wall, just outside the entrance is a large sink and spigot. Jews are expected to wash their hands before they pray.

*But if the Bible didn't command this emphasis on hand washing; then where did it originate?* Mark tells us it came from, **“the tradition of the elders.”** The Pharisees exalted their traditions above God's Word.

The rabbis taught that in addition to the Law, God gave Moses further instructions - and rather than record them he passed them along by word of mouth.

The rabbis believed these traditions were the key to correctly interpreting the Law. To some rabbis the *oral law* was more important than the *written law*.

Near the end of the second century AD, the rabbis and scribes gathered these oral traditions - recorded and codified them - in a book called **the Mishnah**.

Verse 4 describes the Jewish obsession with ceremonial washings, **“When 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.”** The Mishnah has a whopping 35 pages on washing - *under all kinds of scenarios...*

Here's an example, "Take one and a half eggshells of water, and pour it over your hands..., letting the water drip only to your wrists and no further. Then, flip your hands over, pointing them downward while yet another one and a half eggshells of water was poured over them. Finally... rub your right fist into your left palm, then your left fist into your right palm." And on it goes... The Jews were expected to not only washed their hands before a meal, but between each course.

They were obsessed with ceremonial hand washing and took drastic measures to enforce their rules.

One rabbi was excommunicated for eating bread before washing his hands... An imprisoned rabbi in Rome almost died from dehydration because he used his daily ration of water for washing instead of drinking... A Rabbi Eleazer wrote, "He who expounds the Scriptures in opposition to Jewish tradition has no share in the world to come." In other words, keeping their traditions were essential to getting to heaven...

This is why it bugged the Jews that Jesus couldn't have cared less for their ceremonies and traditions.

"Then 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?"

He answered and 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.' And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of

men.”” Jesus had two problems with their Pharisaical hand scrubbing...

First, **their cleansing was outward rather than inward, physical rather than spiritual.** So what if you clean up a body that's perishing - and ignore the spirit that's dirty and defiled? Jesus quoted Isaiah, the Jews talked a lot about loving God, but their heart was far from Him.

His second beef is that **they passed off man-made commandments as doctrines of God.** In Jesus' eyes this was spiritual forgery. They were counterfeiters.

I wonder if Jesus were here today if He wouldn't have the same two problems with His Church?

I grew up in a religious environment that was preoccupied with external purity. It wasn't Jewish - *it was Baptist* - but we worried about similar stuff... *not hand washing - but hair cutting, and clothes wearing...*

Holiness was confined to abstinence - **don't drink, smoke, cuss, or chew - or run with women who do.** It was about outward compliance, not passion for God.

I've known people who were proud that they looked the part, yet harbored prejudice toward people of another race... Folks who never got drunk on alcohol, but were drunk on envy and pride... Jesus said later, they were like whitewashed tombs (*outwardly pretty*), but full of dead men's bones (*inwardly corrupt*). True holiness is more than a white-wash. It's a deep clean.

And these same people elevated man-made traditions equal to or above God's Word. Note the Jews in verse 8, **"For 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." And He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition." Even today *church traditions* get mistaken for *divine commands!*

*Dress codes, frequency of communion, styles of music, infant baptism, even the display of Christian symbols* - these are traditions not orders from God.

Once, we had a well-meaning usher ask a young man to take off his hat in the service. *I understood his thinking... removing your hat is a traditional show of respect.* But what's our tradition isn't necessarily God's instruction. I believe God was just happy the guy was in church. Our taboos might not be a problem for God.

Jesus was against passing off man's traditions as God's commandments. Let's not misrepresent God.

In verse 10 Jesus gives an example of how the Jews were exalting tradition over God's Word, "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'

"But 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) ("*Corban*" means "gift") then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.'" Jewish tradition said what was *given to God* couldn't also be *given to men.*

Of course, Scripture taught that adult children should respect their aging parents, but according to this tradition if a child dedicated his wealth to God - called it "*corban*" - then it couldn't be given to their parents.

This allowed them to freeze their assets and circumvent their responsibility. Tradition was being use to break the Law, not keep it. It excused greed.

In verse 14, "When (Jesus) had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand: There 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. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Here Jesus offers another critique on Judaism.

Under Jewish law certain foods were "*unclean*." It was a sin to consume them. But Jesus is saying that sin doesn't originate in what we consume - but in what comes out of our heart. *What is it that consumes us?*

*At the heart of the matter is the matter of our hearts.*

A man lusts not because of the woman in the low-cut blouse, but the desire was already there. She just set it off... Don't blame your temper tantrum on the slow-poke in the fast lane. He might've lit the fuse, but you explode because your heart was packed with TNT.

Which reminds me of the little boy who asked his mom, "*Mommy, why do all the idiots and morons only come out when daddy drives?*" *What's in your heart?*



True righteousness flows from the inside out, not the outside in. That's why Christianity is not about what we can do for God, but about God's Spirit working in us.

Verse 17, "When (Jesus) had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" Under the Law pork was an unclean food, but bacon isn't our enemy. It slides down your digestive track and gets eliminated.

It shortens this life, but it doesn't effect your eternity.

"And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye..." *Ever been given an evil eye? (demonstrate).* When you get that kind of a look you know there's something going on inside that person. An *evil eye* is the result of evil brewing in *the guy*.

Jesus continues His list, "blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man." *Adultery, fornication, theft, deceit...* isn't the result of an opportunity that came looking for you.

You were looking for an opportunity. And since the problem is within, that's where the solution begins...

God wants to change our hearts. The mouth speaks, the hands do, the feet go... where the heart leads.

Verse 24, “From there (Jesus) arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon.” These Phoenician cities were Gentile territory. He was seeking a break from the action - a respite from the crowds that thronged Him.

“And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it...” The Bible doesn’t tell us this, but I’m sure Jesus shut the blinds. *And how do I know this house had blinds? Haven’t you heard of Phoenician blinds?*

Of course, even with the blinds shut, verse 24 tells us, “He could not be hidden.” I love that thought. Jesus is the light that cannot be covered. He always shines.

“For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet.” Jesus’ season of solitude gets interrupted by a caring mother with a demon possessed daughter.

“The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.” Matthew tells us when she first approached Jesus, “He answered her not a word.”

Apparently, Jesus wanted to see the persistence of her faith. His silence was a test of the woman’s faith.

Often we misinterpret Jesus’ silence in our lives. It doesn’t mean He’s not home, or He’s busy. It could be He’s testing the persistence of our faith. Notice again verse 26, “she kept asking Him to cast the demon out.” Maybe, Jesus is waiting to see if we’ll keep asking!



“But 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.” At first glance, it sounds as if Jesus is rude - that His words are a rejection of this woman.

He refers to the Jews as “the children” - and Gentiles as “the little dogs.” In Jewish cities dogs were unclean animals - scavengers. But the Gentiles kept *little dogs* as household pets. They'd feed them with table scraps.

Here Jesus is teaching a principle taught elsewhere. The Gospel and all its blessings were intended for both Jews and Gentiles - but Jews first, then Gentiles.

Here, Jesus is restating the privileged status of the Jews. They get filled first... but that's not to exclude the Gentiles. And here He tests a Gentile's faith. Does she believe there's still enough food at God's table for Jew *and* Gentile? *Is there enough food for even a little dog?*

“And she answered and said to Him, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs.” She knows she lacks the privileged status of a Jew - but God's crumbs are better than the world's main entrées. And even without the pedigree, she trusts there's enough of God's mercy to go around.

Verse 29, “Then He said to her, “For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter.”

And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.”

If the crumbs from God's table were miracles, what amazing blessings is He putting on the table for those kids who've been bought with the blood of Jesus?

Verse 31, "Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee. Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him."

His speech impediment was the result of his hearing deficiency. It's hard to articulate what you don't hear.

"And (Jesus) took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."

*What a strange procedure to effect a healing!*

Next time you pray for a friend, try this... *stick your finger in their ears, spit on their tongue, then shout out a word with a lot of consonants...* This was strange!

Realize, Jesus healed people in different ways...

At times He spoke the word and it was done.

At other times He touched the person with His hand.

Once He smeared mud on a blind man's eyes, and told him to wash it off in the pool of Siloam...

The point is, God's methods are as varied as snowflakes. Just about the time you think you've got *our creative Creator* figured out He blows the mold.

When the church tries to reduce God's power to a formula, that's when God finds another way to work.

Here, though Jesus' method was strange you can't argue with the results. Verse 35 reports, "Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly."

"Then (Jesus) commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak." I love the phrase, "He has done all things well."

Jesus was never sloppy. Whatever He did, He did it with excellence. If it was worth doing, it was worth doing well. And this should be true of His followers.

Whether it's *making a living* - or *playing on the worship team* - or *teaching Sunday School*. If you want to be like Jesus, strive for excellence in all you do.

Did you hear about the doctor who placed his overweight patient on a diet? He told him, "I want you to eat regularly for two days, then skip a day. Eat for two days - then skip a day. Repeat this pattern for two weeks... At your next visit you'll be five pounds lighter."

When the man returned he stepped on the scales, and the doctor was stunned. He'd lost twenty pounds.

The doctor asked him, "You lost twenty pounds just by following my instructions?" The guy nodded, "Yes, but I thought I was going to drop dead every third day."

The doctor asked, “Did you get faint from hunger?” The man answered him, “*No, it wasn’t from hunger. It was from all that skipping you told me to do.*”

Well, in Mark 8 we find a multitude of people that’s weak and weary. They’ve been skipping for three days. The crowd has been so captivated by Jesus’ teachings and healings that they haven’t bothered to eat...

Verse 1, “In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar.”

Apparently, there were some firefighters in the crowd, since we’re told they came “from afar.” (joke)

Hey, spending time with Jesus was so thrilling nobody wanted to leave and fetch food. They were afraid of missing out on a miracle while they were away. But now they’re famished. Jesus is afraid they’ll pass out on the way home. They need a snack.

“Then His disciples answered Him, “How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?” The disciples looked around - there’s no grocery store, or even a Waffle House in sight. Where are they going to find grub for 4000 families?... *And if you were with us in chapter 6, this all sounds familiar...*

Jesus is about to feed 4000 families with seven loaves and a few fish. Whereas a few days earlier He fed 5000 families, with five loaves and two fish...

There are skeptics who believe this was really just one incident recorded twice, with minor alterations.

And the primary reason for suggesting this is the disciples reaction. If they'd just seen Jesus work this miracle why are they now doubting He can do it again?

And my answer is, never underestimate the stupidity and denseness of Jesus' disciples - *myself included*.

Just because we witness a miracle one day, doesn't guarantee we'll believe God for a miracle the next day.

Faith is never automatic. It's a choice we make to believe God despite our constantly changing circumstances... It's been said, "[Faith is a daily deal.](#)"

And understand, though the two miracles appear similar - their settings were very different. The feeding of the 5000 occurred on the west side of the Sea of Galilee - in Jewish territory. While Mark 7:31, tells us that the feeding of the 4000 took place on the eastern shore of the lake - in the area of the Decapolis.

Galilee was occupied by Jews - while the ten cities of the Decapolis were populated by Gentiles. Hellenistic, or Greek culture, dominated the Decapolis. Remember the herd of swine on the eastern shore - it was Gentile-land. You'd never see pigs on the Jewish, west bank.

Only two types of people lived in the Decapolis: *lawless Gentiles* and *compromising Jews*. Which explains why the

disciples were reluctant to believe Jesus would work another miracle of multiplication...

It was one thing to believe God would work a miracle for faithful Jews – it was another thing to believe He'd do the same for hog farmers and Roman collaborators.

And this is the dilemma faced by lots of church-folk...

They think God blesses the faithful, the people with a spotless past - but not the forgiven with a sordid past.

All God's miracles are done for folks who don't deserve them! They're provoked by *His grace*, not *our goodness*. It doesn't matter what side of the lake - or the railroad tracks - you're from, it's about God's mercy.

Verse 5, "(Jesus) asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven." So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and they set them before the multitude." Note, Jesus didn't distribute the bread Himself. He gave it to the disciples for them to pass it out. This is how Jesus works today.

We're His hands. It's our job to take the Bread of Life and distribute it to those who are hungry and needy.

As we noted with the feeding of the 5000, Jesus blesses the bread, and distributes it, but before He gives it, He first breaks it. This is what He does with us.

Before we can be used He breaks us of our pride and self-sufficiency. He first makes us digestible.



It's amazing how throughout the Bible, God uses broken things. Gideon's broken jars... Mary's broken flask... Even our salvation has come through Jesus' broken body. Brokenness is a tool in God's tool chest.

Nobody goes far with God who resists brokenness.

Verse 7, "They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before them. So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments." Here the word translated "*baskets*" is "*spuris*" which means "*hamper*."

This is the word used in Acts 9:25. Paul was lowered over the city wall in a "*spuris*." Apparently, a "*spuris*" was a basket large enough to hold a grown man.

When Jesus finished feeding the 4000 there were enough leftovers to fill seven of these hampers. They'd given Jesus *seven loaves* - now they get back *seven hampers-full*. *Jesus is saying you can't out-give Him.*

It reminds me of Proverbs 11:24, "There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty." In essence, hoard it and you lose it, but give it and watch it grow! Jesus can turn our loaves into hampers-full.

"Now those who had eaten were about four thousand." Matthew 15 tells us the 4000 were men. Add women and kids, and Jesus fed at least 12,000.

"And He sent them away, immediately got into the boat with His disciples, and came to the region of Dalmanutha." Back across to the western shore.

Verse 11, "Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with (Jesus), seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him. But He sighed deeply in His spirit, (a definite sigh of frustration) and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation." He worked countless miracles. Multiplying fish and bread - calming a storm - raising a girl from the dead - healing the sick - casting out demons.. *What other sign did they need?*

Sadly, some folks are spiritual ambulance chasers. They're not interested in faith. They're sensationalists who just want to see miracles for miracles sake.

Here's the truth we need to realize - **the only thing signs and miracles produce is the desire for more signs and miracles.** God's miracles are the product of our faith, they don't produce faith. Romans 10:17 tells us, "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." The study of God's Word causes faith to grow.

Verse 13, "And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

Throughout Scripture leaven, or yeast, is a type of sin. Leaven corrupts by puffing up and inflating - and so does sin - sin pumps up our pride. In the Gospels Jesus talked about three different types of leaven...

The *leaven of the Pharisees* was **legalism**. The Pharisees bound God's people to a strict adherence to the Law of Moses... The *leaven of the Sadducees* was **liberalism**. The Sadducees compromised with the pagan world around them... The *leaven of Herod* was **political leverage**. The Herods sought political muscle.

Jesus saw legalism, liberalism, and political leverage as leaven - as sinful forces. All three were corrupting influences on God's people. **Jesus relied on love!**

Jesus wanted to talk about these factors when He brought up the subject of leaven, but the disciples were still thinking the previous day's events - the multiplying of the bread. Verse 16, "And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have no bread."

Apparently, the disciples are thinking Jesus is about to scold them for failing to pack a loaf of bread.

"But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?" The miracles of Jesus were always intended to communicate spiritual truths. But the disciples continually fixated on the *miracle* itself, and let its spiritual *meaning* sail over their heads.

The lesson for us is don't waste God's miracles...

Too often we enjoy God's blessing, or marvel at His deliverance, and miss what He's saying... He loves us. He's not through with us. He has a purpose for us.

Like the roofer, on top of the house, nailing on shingles. His feet slipped, and his body was sliding down the pitch of the roof, headed for the edge. That's when he shouted, "God help me!" Suddenly, his pants got caught on a nail. It stopped his slide. That's when he said, "Never mind God, a nail just caught me." He'd missed the point. *Don't you waste God's miracles!*

Jesus said, "And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." "And when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?" And they said, "Seven."

This should silence any doubts about there being two miracles of multiplication. Jesus describes two different events... Yet, even if there had been *five* such miracles, it still doesn't mean the disciples would've gotten the point. Thus, we're told in verse 21, "So He said to them, "How is it you do not understand?"

"Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything."

Again, Jesus heals through some bizarre behavior.

In the Gospels, Jesus opened the blind eyes of at least seven different people... In John 9 He healed a man by putting mud on his eyes... Here he spits in this man's eyes...

In Mark 10 He heals blind Bartimaeus by just speaking a word... You can't put Jesus in a box. He works in different ways with different people.

Our problem is we expect Jesus to work in everyone the way He worked in us. This is how denominations start. Rather than let God be God, we rally around like experiences... There's the **Church of the Muddists**, **Assembly of the Spitdistis**, and the **First Speakists**. Actually it's the same Savior using different methods.

After Jesus spits in the man's eyes we're told, "And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking."

Obviously, this man was not born blind. He'd seen in the past, since he describes the people he sees as walking trees. He goes from no sight - to gross shapes. Yet he still lacks sharper definition - a refined vision.

"Then (Jesus) put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly." This is a vital account since it illustrates *a gradual healing*. Most of Jesus' healings seem to be complete and instantaneous, but not here.

Jesus touches and prays for this man twice. Verse 25 tells us, "(Jesus) put His hands on his eyes again..."

This is why it's important we keep coming back to Jesus when we're seeking Him to heal us. This man begins with *no sight* at all - then he receives *partial sight* - and then finally, he receives *perfect sight*.

This blind man goes from *no sight* - to *partial sight* - to even *perfect sight*... and that's *out-of-sight!*

And this is a picture of our salvation... Before I knew Jesus my spiritual eyes were blind to the things of God.

Yet when I repented of my sin and trusted Jesus - He opened my eyes to His light. I could see... not with the sharpest, clearest definition... but at least I could see...

Since then, I've grown in my discernment. My sight continues to improve. In fact, the day is coming when I'll have perfect sight. 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known." The Christian life is a sight-giving process.

And this is where our faith gets tested. It's not faith if you can see all the details. Today, I know God. I'm no longer blind. But I still don't see everything clearly.

Thus, I need to trust Him even when I can't see Him.

Verse 26, "Then (Jesus) sent him away to his house, saying, "Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone in the town." Again, Jesus didn't want to stir up a riot.

"Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi..." Jesus now travels north from the Galilee to the mountains of southern Lebanon.

"...and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, "Who do men say that I am?" So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And this is the most strategic question you'll ever get asked - *what do you believe about Jesus?*



In fact, He's asking us, "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter passes this exam with an A+. He gets it right. "Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." "Christ" is the Greek word for the Hebrew "Messiah" - the coming Savior promised by the Hebrew prophets.

Verse 30, "Then He charged them that they should tell no one about Him." Again, Jesus' gag order is related to His concern that His popularity in Galilee will create problems that could circumvent His mission.

Soon His disciples will go and tell the world, but for the moment they need to keep His identity under wraps.

Verse 31, "And 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. He spoke this word openly."

Realize, Jesus' trip to Caesarea Philippi marked a turning point in His ministry. He used this occasion to refocus the perspective of His disciples.

Think of it this way, up until now it's been the first of two semesters in the school of Jesus... Part one was *His identity*. For the first semester of His ministry He was teaching and showing His disciples *who He is*...

Who else can *raise the dead, calm the storm, cast out demons, heal the sick, multiply fish and bread, and walk on water*... Jesus is obviously the Messiah.

But now He's shifting gears. He's changing His focus from *who He is* - to *where He's going*... Call this second semester,

*His Destiny*. Until Caesarea Philippi the focus was *His Identity* - now it's *His Destiny*.

The Jews in general - even the disciples - were convinced Messiah would come to reign and rule. But now Jesus presents a different vision of His mission...

The path He's traveling leads *to a cross, before a crown - to a gory death, before a reign of glory - first to a tree, then a throne - a grave, then to greatness...*

This is Jesus' focus for the rest of His ministry.

**“And Peter took (Jesus) aside and began to rebuke Him.”** On the one hand, we're floored with Peter's brashness - that Peter would rebuke the Master.

But think about it from his perspective... He's been on a miracle ride. He's excited. The multitudes are in the palm of Jesus' hand. Momentum is on their side. Peter is thinking of a *coronation* – not a *crucifixion*.

Peter can't believe He's shifting gears... This seems like they're going backwards. This has to be a mistake.

**“But when (Jesus) 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.'”** Peter's highest high and lowest low take place just minutes apart. He gets an A+ for the first semester. He's sure of *Jesus' identity*.

But his second semester starts out with a big fat, F.

Peter knows who Jesus is - but He has no clue where He's going or why. You could say, Peter thought he was the *Pope*, but he turned out to be a *dope*.

For the rest of His time on earth, Jesus tries to teach His disciples that you get to the celebration, the victory, the salvation... by traveling the path of the cross.

This was true of Jesus, and it's also true of us. **It's one thing to embrace *Jesus' identity* - it's quite another to embrace *His destiny*. Yet Jesus calls us to do both.**

Jesus teaches His disciples that there's not only a cross in His future - there's one in their's as well if they want to follow Him. Verse 34, **“When 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.”**

Understand, to deny yourself is not to deny your God-given talents, or abilities, or even godly desires. Jesus is simply telling us to stop living for ourselves.

**Don't live for yourself.** His glory, not ours, is the goal. **Don't live by yourself.** We're made for fellowship with God. And **don't live in yourself.** Lean on His strength and wisdom, not your own. This is **“denying yourself.”**

**“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.”** Here is the paradox of the Christian life...

Life is like a glass of milk. It's a perishable commodity. Hold on to you life for too long and it sours. The only way to keep a glass of milk is to drink it up.

And this is true with our lives. Live it for Jesus and it'll live on. Hold on to it for yourself and it will spoil.

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” This world is not what it’s cracked up to be. Don’t throw away your integrity for cheap thrills and moldy bread. *Why give up what lasts forever for what’s going to leave you empty tomorrow?*

Verse 38, “For 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 with the holy angels.” Every believer needs to be willing to stand up and be counted! If we stand up for Jesus, He’ll stand up for us.

When the first representative signed the Declaration of Independence he sprawled his signature across the page in large and flowing letters. John Hancock said he wrote his name in giant print so King George could read it without putting on his glasses. Hancock wanted the British monarch to know exactly where He stood.

Today, when you sign a document, people say, “Put your John Hancock right here.” It’s a way of saying, that by adding your signature you’re taking a stand.

And this is what Jesus says to us. *“Take a stand for Me on earth, then I’ll stand for you in the life to come!”*