

GOD WITH US

Part 8: JESUS

Message 9 – The Training of the Disciples

Introduction

When Jesus chose disciples, He declared His purpose for them: *“Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men”* (Mark 1:17). Later, when He formally named “the 12” to be His closest disciples, we read of His method for developing them: *“He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach”* (Mark 3:14). As we walk through the gospels, we see Jesus doing life with these men. They learned by being with Him and watching how He lived, how He walked with His Father, and how He treated people. Then, as things progressed, He sent them out in pairs to do ministry in His name. They learned by doing the ministry themselves.

Today, Jesus trains us, His disciples, in much the same way. We spend time *being with Jesus*. We read His Word and spend time with Him (and His people) in fellowship and prayer. Our character and values are shaped as we are *with Jesus*. Then, as we enter into life-ministry experiences, we learn by *doing*. We learn as we experience things through trial and error, as we are trained by other more seasoned people, and as we see God using us and shaping us for His purposes in our sphere of influence.

Broadly speaking, there are 4 major areas that Jesus wants to shape in His disciples, then and now: Our **hearts**, our **love** for people, our eternal **perspective** and our belief that we can **change the world** with His power. There are many stories of Jesus’ interaction with His disciples that show Him working in these 4 areas of their lives.

Of all the gospel writers, **Mark** placed the most emphasis on the training of the twelve disciples. Peter was behind the production of Mark’s gospel. (Mark was Peter’s secretary and assistant. Tradition tells us that Mark’s gospel is a collection of sermons that Peter preached in the city of Rome.) Perhaps it was his own stubbornness and slowness to learn things that caused him to encourage Mark to emphasize stories showing how *slow* the disciples were to *learn* about Jesus and what He was capable of doing in and through them.

We will focus this commentary on a sequence of events in Mark's gospel that show how Jesus was training His men, and how they were *not* all that quick to learn. The sequence is found in Mark chapters 6-8. It goes Bread-Boat-Bread-Boat . . . Boom!

Bread: The feeding of the 5,000: Mark 6:33-44

The feeding of the 5,000 is the one miracle recorded in all 4 gospels. It was a powerful demonstration of Jesus' power. But Mark emphasizes how it was *a teaching tool for the disciples*. Notice first how Jesus allowed the disciples to feel the need of the people:

When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and it is already quite late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat" (6:35,36).

Here we see Jesus shaping the disciples LOVE FOR PEOPLE – and a desire to meet their need with compassion. Today, Jesus wants us to notice and feel the deep needs of people all around us . . . and He wants to show us how we can be used by Him to meet people at their point of need. Do you notice anyone in your life right now who has deep needs for help?

Once the disciples saw the need, Jesus took the next step: He challenged *them* to meet the need (instead of Jesus just telling the people to go buy food, as the disciples suggested):

But He answered them, "You give them something to eat" (6:37).

This was a moment of consternation for the disciples. They did not have nearly enough money to feed such a large multitude. Jesus allowed the disciples to experience *their own inadequacy*:

And they said to Him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?" (6:37).

Jesus next asked them to take an inventory of what they had:

He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" And when they found out, they said, "Five, and two fish" (6:38).

They had found a young boy among the crowd with his own little lunchbox of fish and bread. Bringing this to Jesus, they realized their own meager resources. Jesus then told them to get the people ready for dinner!

And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all (6:39-41).

Note how the need was met by Jesus, yet through the hands of the disciples. They were seeing that Jesus could use them to meet the needs of others, IF they trusted in Him to provide. They could literally be used to CHANGE THE WORLD if they would become the hands through which Jesus performed His mighty deeds. The same is true today. God uses people, ordinary people, to do the extraordinary. Changed by Christ – Changing our World. That's what Jesus wants to do IN you and THROUGH you.

Finally, the disciples sat down, weary from serving a vast multitude.

They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. There were five thousand men who ate the loaves” (6:42-44).

How interesting: When the disciples were finished serving everyone else, they looked at each other and noticed they were each holding their own basket of ‘fish and chips!’ They sat down to eat along with everyone else. Jesus had not only met needs of others *through them*; He had also *met their needs in the process*.

What should the disciples have learned here? He was trying to shape their HEARTS. The lesson is simple to put in writing; but it is much harder to learn in real life. Jesus is faithful to use us in amazing ways, far beyond our own abilities and resources. At the same time, he is faithful to meet our needs as we give our lives for His purposes in the world. He wants to use us and provide for us, if we are willing to be His hands and feet in this world. Are you willing to let Jesus feed the multitudes through your hands? Does your HEART have eyes of faith to see what Jesus can do?

Boat: Jesus walks on water: Mark 6:45-52

Before we study this next incident, jump to the last verse as Mark records it – v.52. It reads: “... *for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.*” In other words, the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus walking on water

are connected as lessons *for the disciples*. The latter miracle was intended as a follow-up lesson to the former miracle.

Notice that Jesus “*compelled*” them to get into a boat without Him.

“Immediately Jesus compelled His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray” (6:45,46).

He obviously wanted them to attempt to make the journey across the Sea of Galilee *without His help and/or presence*. But this should have been no problem for them. Several of them were professional fishermen who had spent their lives navigating these very waters.

“When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them” (6:47,48).

On this particular night, “*the wind was against them*” as they struggled at the oars trying to make it across the Sea of Galilee. The “*fourth watch of the night*” was between 3 a.m. – 6 a.m. In other words, they had been rowing hard *all night* and were going nowhere. Notice the phrase, “*He intended to pass them by.*” Jesus was going to walk on water right past the disciples as they struggled along (probably with a friendly wave and a “*See ya on the other side!*”)

But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, “Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid.” Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened (6:49-52).

Yes, it was a miracle that Jesus walked on water. But the greater miracle needed to happen in the hearts of the disciples. *They had not gained ANY INSIGHT from the miracles of the loaves. Their hearts were hardened.* Jesus would not give up on them. He would continue to press these lessons home until they got them.

He was trying to soften and shape their HEARTS. How does hardness of heart impact our learning from Jesus today? He does things for us, and we do not acknowledge His provision; we do not give Him the credit. He does the impossible, and we worry about how we are going to make it through another day. Are you failing to gain insight from the things that Jesus has been doing in your life? Is your heart hardened in some way, to the lessons of Jesus?

Bread: The feeding of the 4,000: Mark 8:1-10

Not long after the above events, Jesus performed a second miraculous feeding of a multitude. The parallels with the previous feeding miracle are obvious. First, Jesus invited His disciples to see and feel the need of the people

“In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, “I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat” (8:1,2).

This time, however, Jesus boxed His disciples in by showing them that there was *no option* but to *feed them right there, right then*:

“If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance” (8:3).

The response of the disciples to Jesus’ quandry is funny (and sad):

His disciples answered Him, “Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?” (8:4).

You can almost see them looking dumbfounded at each other asking the question: WHERE will ANYONE be ABLE to find ENOUGH? Did they even notice that *JESUS* the feeder of the 5,000 was standing right in front of them?

Jesus is always inviting us to see life through the lens of ETERNITY. He wants us to shape our PERSPECTIVE so that we begin to evaluate problems and possibilities through the lens of God’s ability to manifest His kingdom among us, here and now. What problem or possibility are you currently facing? How does your perspective change when you bring Jesus into the equation?

Jesus repeats the lesson almost verbatim from the feeding of 5,000.

And He was asking them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven.” And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people. They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well (8:5-7).

Once again, the disciples experienced the *sufficiency* of Jesus to meet the needs of people *through them*. And again, they experienced *His provision for them also*:

“And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces. About four thousand were there; and He sent them away” (8:8,9).

The word for “baskets” here is different from the word for baskets in the previous feeding of the 5,000. These are large baskets – the point being that the disciples were left with 7 large baskets of food, more than enough to feed the 12 of them.

“Repetition is the mother of all learning.” Often, Jesus will take us through the same lesson over and over again, until our HEARTS grasp what He wants us to learn. Has God been trying to teach you something? Are you noticing a pattern where He keeps bringing you up against the same wall, again and again? What do you think He might be trying to teach you? Is your heart open?

Boat: The argument over ‘no bread’: Mark 8:10-16

After a brief spat with the Pharisees, Jesus got into a boat again to cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. One the way, He said something about the “leaven” (false teaching) of the Pharisees.

“Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side. And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. And He was giving orders to them, saying, “Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread (Mark 8:13-16).

When He said “leaven” the disciples started thinking about “bread” and their stomachs started growling! They became distracted as to what Jesus was saying about the Pharisees and they began to discuss the fact that *they had forgotten to take food for their journey*.

Boom!: Eight Straight Questions about their hearts: 8:17-21

Remember, Jesus was shaping their hearts, their love for people, their eternal perspective, and their belief that they could change their world. All of this comes together now in one big lesson. This is where Jesus lowers the BOOM and calls them out with 8 rapid-fire questions (that must have left them speechless)!

And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?” They said to Him, “Twelve.” “When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?” And they said to Him, “Seven.” And He was saying to them, “Do you not yet understand?” (Mark 8:17-21).

Having eyes, do you not see? Having ears, do you not hear? Now we find one of the great examples of the literary artistry of these gospel writers. Through the selection and arrangement of their materials, they reinforced their points for their readers. *Mark has placed two unique miracles before and after this incident in the boat.* The first miracle was the healing of a man **who had ears that could not hear** (Mark 7:31-37). The second was the healing of a man **who had eyes but could not see** (Mark 8:22-26). Moreover, the healing of the blind man occurred *in stages*, rather than all at once. *These two miracle stories are only found in Mark’s gospel.* Clearly Mark was trying to drive home the point: Jesus was trying to bring **spiritual hearing** and **spiritual seeing** to the disciples . . . but they were slow to get it . . . it was happening in stages.

Their HEARTS needed to soften. Their LOVE for people needed to increase. Their PERSPECTIVE on eternity and the kingdom of God needed to be enlarged. Their belief that they could be used to CHANGE THE WORLD needed to become a conviction. The reason these disciples did go on to turn their world upside down (see Acts 17:6) is because they finally got it. Through several years of being with Jesus and doing things in His name, they realized that they could be used to change their world. And they did! How about you? It’s really no different today. Jesus wants to shape us and mold us to be used powerfully for His purpose, in our lifetime. Are you willing to be taught by the Master?

Discussion Questions

1. What stands out to you most from the way that Jesus tried to shape and teach His disciples?
2. What stands out most from the way the disciples learned (or failed to learn) what Jesus was teaching them?
3. Jesus was shaping them in four major areas:
 - The hearts (character, beliefs).
 - Their love for people (compassion, care).
 - Their eternal perspective (seeing things through God's eyes).
 - Their belief they could change the world (God uses ordinary people to do the extraordinary).

How is God at work in your life, shaping you along these lines?
4. What is the single hardest lesson for you to learn from Jesus (something hard to believe, trust, or grasp from Him)?

JESUS

10. TRADITION CRASHER: Why the Religious Leaders Hated Jesus

STUDY AHEAD

“He who hates Me hates My Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both Me and My Father. But this is to fulfill what was written in their LAW: ‘They hated Me without a cause’” (John 15:23-25)

The 4 gospels give many examples that showed how Jesus, God’s Son was on earth to display the true heart of God to the world. In doing so, He had completely exposed and crashed through the religious system of the Jewish leaders. This caused anger, hatred, jealousy, vengeance and ultimately killing Jesus. Study the examples in preparation for the message on ‘Tradition Crasher’.

1. Jesus crossed their lines.

- Matthew 9:9-13 Jesus spent time with tax-collectors and sinners.
- Luke 10:25-37 Jesus made a Samaritan the hero in His parable.
- *How does the love of Jesus toward societal outcasts impact you?*
- *What types of people are you prejudiced toward today?*

2. Jesus rejected their male arrogance.

- Luke 7:36-50 The woman who came to Simon’s house.
- Luke 13:10-17 A woman healed in the synagogue on Sabbath.
- Luke 8:1-3 The women disciples of Jesus.
- *Women were viewed as objects, not equal to men. How did Jesus raise their value?*
- *Who seems to have supported the disciples most?*

3. Jesus nullified their traditions.

- Mark 7:1-13 (esp.vv.8,9).
- Mark 2:23-28 and 3:1-6 (note esp. v.6).
- *What freedoms did Jesus demonstrate?*
- *What did He accuse the leaders of? How did they react?*
- *What did Jesus say was the original purpose of the Sabbath?*
- *For Sabbath’s original intent read: God in creation-Gen 2:3; Moses & the Israelites after Egypt-Exodus 16:23-30; The 4th commandment-Deut. 5:12-15*

4. Jesus rebuked their hearts.

- Matthew 12:22-29 Over their claim He was empowered by Satan.
- Matthew 12:30-32 He warned them of the 'unforgivable sin.'
- Matthew 12:33-37 He called them a brood of vipers!
- Matthew 12:38-42 Over their desire for more miracles.
- *What miracle had Jesus just done that caused Him to be accused of working for Satan?*
- *V.25 says "Jesus knew their thoughts", so what did Jesus explain about their faulty reasoning?*
- *Who did Jesus declare was empowering Him, v.28?*
- *So, what can we conclude about 'the unforgivable sin?'*
- *Where did their viper-like words come from? What warning did Jesus give to us all, v.35,36?*

5. Jesus stirred their envy.

- John 11:38-48 Raising Lazarus from the dead
- Matt.21:8-11; John 12:17-19; Receiving praise as the Messianic Son of David during the Triumphal Entry
- Ultimately, they delivered Him up because of envy (Mt 27:17,18)
- *What were they most envious about?*
- *Who knew why the Jewish leaders were trying to kill Jesus?*

6. Jesus claimed to be their God!

- John 5:16-18 Jesus called God "His own Father."
- John 8:55-59 Jesus claimed to be "I AM", who spoke to Moses.
- John 10:30-33 Jesus claimed to be One with the Father.
- *What angered the leaders most about Jesus' claims?*
- *Why do you think they could not accept Jesus claims to be God?*
- *Do you? Yes/no? Explain your answer.*

Summary: This study ahead quoted John 15:23-25.

"They hated Jesus without a cause."

- Read these verses right beforehand: (John 15:18-22).
- *What did Jesus warn His disciples of?*