

Mark 8

Read Mark 8:1-10 : We assume that by following God, we should be able to avoid many of life's unpleasant predicaments. We can assume that obedience will yield a more trouble-free life. That is certainly what the Jews believe. In reality, God knows how to improve us and *steel us* for higher callings and increased satisfaction. Consider our example of, Abraham, who traveled a long distance to an unknown destination to meet God. Abraham was met with family issues and also famine. He had to relocate and thought he was going to lose his wife. Likewise, the story of Job, David, Daniel, and Joseph.

In this case the crowd following Jesus ran out of food, away from home. If the people had not ran out of food, there would be no miracle or story here. There are many things and hassles in life that appear at first to be curses. The pages of the bible and our inspiration comes from hardships and deliverances...not normal daily life.

Jesus is surrounded by seekers. Of what? Salvation or bread? They have come for healings and miracles. That is what is referred to as *fishing for men*. I grew up as a young boy in the country living between two rivers. I spent many days fishing. To catch fish, you need to understand their appetite, not what they look like on your plate. People would be healed and fed; and hopefully at least a small percentage would become saved and become followers.

Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ They immediately left their nets and followed Him. (Matthew 4)

Jesus used what was on hand and multiplied it. I have found that God may not do too much if I shrink back and remain a spectator. In my life, God seems to want me all in, trying as hard as I can. It normally turns into a situation where someone else will *save the day* and do the deed, but it was triggered by me giving it my all, though my attempt may have been in vain.

I recall when our kids were in private Christian school. They needed a baseball field, without a budget for one. A group of parents started rototilling and shovel work, ready to just tamp in sand onto cleared soil. It would have been a fairly pathetic field. A wealthy friend happened to drop by. I think that he was shaking his head; as he said that he would just bring in professionals and pay for it himself. That has been a pattern for my life. No effort = no result. Full effort may fail on my part...but somehow it gets done...every time.

I have similarly seen God multiply what is available. We paid bills that were mathematically impossible. For a few years, our citrus growing business

experienced tragedies such as: wildfires, water district allocation shutoffs.. Our business burned down, leaving no debt repayment capacity. It appeared that we would have to take our kids out of Christian school and lose our home. We kept our heads down and put a full effort into it. Miraculously, again, friends helped us catch up on our mortgage and set me up with an additional career...which I remain in 21 years later. I call this phenomenon 'failing forward'. It is like running full speed into the dark, trusting that God will keep me going. God does not like procrastination, when a tiny thing can be done. When I do not know what to do next, I do the tiny and insignificant thing in front of me. That always leads to the answer. I can remember wrestling with questions on the structural steel erection sequence on some complex structures. I picked up a broom and swept the concrete building slab. Before finishing the slab, I had my answer, clearly.

If the clouds are full of rain, They empty themselves upon the earth; And if a tree falls to the south or the north, In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie. ⁴ He who observes the wind will not sow, And he who regards the clouds will not reap. (Ecclesiastes 11)

It seems that hardships result in better testimonies and more miracles. It's humbling to fail forward in the Kingdom; but that is probably why we toss our crowns at Jesus' feet. They really don't belong to us by merit.

the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: ¹¹ "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created." (Revelation 4)

The next issue is: Would I walk for three days, until I was faint, with no food to meet Jesus? Is it more accurate to say that I will go to join the saints if it fits into my schedule? What drives my schedule?

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19)

Read Mark 8:11-21: How do you know if you are going in the right direction? If the fake religionists come out and attack and accuse you; that is good. Here is a perfect example from last week. Our Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, started a monthly church service in the Pentagon where people pray for the troops. He was attacked by fake pastors claiming something about forcing religion on the troops. Nobody was required to attend. The troops would not even be in this location.

Regardless, Jesus used comparison teaching methods (parables), as well as contrasting methods (addressing religious criticisms). These envious and fraudulent Pharisees (religious police) would ask for a sign that he was legitimate.

That is not how we check for legitimacy. It is also interesting that when given a sign; it changes nothing. Signs are usually a test to fail; not a test to pass. Besides, a visible sign sort of eliminates the faith requirement.

²⁰ Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Corinthians 1)

The leaven of the Pharisees is the puffing up of self-importance. It is to inject yourself as essential to something which is already doing fine. It is to require homage to be paid to you, like a king.

Read Mark 8:22-38: Jesus healed this blind man. He must have had sight previously to know what trees look like. Eye diseases were very common, due to the available hygiene. Even Paul had a terrible eye infection that he could not get rid of.

It is interesting that some people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist. That helps us understand why John had to be taken out of the way. He is a voice calling attention to Jesus, not himself.

Why would Jesus tell people not to broadcast that he was the Messiah? It is one thing to search the scriptures and conclude it is Jesus. That's great. It is a whole different thing to become more accountable without any likelihood to act upon it. That is very bad. In addition, Jesus could not escape the crowds to carry out his father's agenda. Jesus did not do shotgun-blast evangelism. Everything was targeted from prayer.

Jesus began to prepare his disciples for the cross. They tried to dissuade him. There is a difference between sympathy, and God's will. Jesus warned them to not discourage him from his mission. Peter probably thought that he was a great humanitarian. Jesus told him that Satan was working through him.

Jesus tells them that the road ahead would require that they drop some personal preferences and get more into the Kingdom lifestyle. That calling inevitably will bring you to your knees. We need to really see that God is delivering us. That can only be done with skin in the game.

The most unhappy people are often those who have all that this world offers. There is some excitement at the prospect of achieving your goals; but they all end up with some level of disillusionment. Beyond that, they can cause anxiety, because now you have something to lose.

The distance from the head to the heart is only 18", but it might as well be 1,000 miles.