

How To Develop Your Faith
January 10, 2010
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Here are some questions to think about:

Why do you support the sports team you cheer for?

Why do you lean toward the political party you vote for?

Why are you a Baptist and not a Methodist or Presbyterian?

I think there are basically two reasons why we've formed opinions in these areas:

- Either you think that way because someone else influenced you to think that way or..
- You looked at the situation and made a decision for yourself

Here is a more intimidating question

When it comes to your FAITH, why do you believe what you believe?

As she was leaving high school and moving to college our daughter Annie discussed with us her desire to learn more about defending her faith and her political views. She said she wanted to be able to articulate reasons that were stronger than "because that's what my Mom and Dad believe."

In Mark chapter 8 we see three instances of Jesus using the circumstances around him and his disciples to make them and us consider how we DEVELOP OUR FAITH.

- Is our faith based on TRADITION or TRUTH?
- Is our theology (what we think about God) GROWING or STATIC?
- How can we be OPEN TO SPIRITUAL TRUTH so we can DEVELOP OUR SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING?

Before we read these three passages in Mark 8...let's do a quick summary of what happened in Mark 6 & 7:

- Remember last week Jesus fed the five thousand; and walked on water yet still his disciples didn't totally "get" who he IS?
- Then in Mark 7 as his popularity among the masses was growing, his conflict with the Jewish religious leaders ESCALATED
- So the Pharisees and scribes followed Jesus looking for ways to discredit Him
- They saw that the disciples were eating without the "ceremonial washing" of their hands and they challenged Jesus on this
- 7:3 – They were not concerned with hygiene but "the tradition of the elders."
- In verse 8 of chapter 7 Jesus said: "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."
- In other words: you value TRADITION over TRUTH
- Then he made a statement that basically declared all food as CLEAN
- He said in verse 15: "Nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean."

- Still the disciples didn't get it. And in verse 18 Jesus explained (someone read 7:18-23):

18 "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? 19 For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")

20 He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' 21 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' "

- Jesus continued to amaze people with His healing ministry
- A Gentile woman's daughter is healed without Jesus even touching her
- A deaf and mute man is healed
- And verse 37 sums up the headlines about Jesus throughout the land

37 People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

- Then as we begin chapter 8 there's another hungry crowd (four thousand this time) and Jesus again multiplies the food
- That brings us to verse 11...the villains in our story...the Pharisees are lurking in the corner.

Mark 8:11-13

11 The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. 12 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." 13 Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

- Do you and I demand a "sign" before we'll fully trust Jesus? Is that what true FAITH is?

Hebrews 11:1-6 (New International Version)

1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Our Lesson Commentary Says:

"Jesus could have performed some definitive sign of His authority. He did not, however, because Jesus never forced belief on anyone. He demanded trust without proof. That is real faith."

- Some people want Jesus to prove who He is **SPECTACULARLY**. Jesus only proves it **PERSONALLY** and **DAILY** to those who **TRUST HIM**.
- Even if He had given a “sign” the Pharisees would still likely have rejected Him because they were only interested in Jesus if He fit into their **TRADITIONS**.
- How can growing up in the church possibly **HINDER** our **SPIRITUAL GROWTH**?
- If our theology (what we think about God) doesn't develop as we wrestle with scripture; we might value tradition over truth.
- Our understanding of Jesus should not be determined by our traditions but by **BEING OPEN TO SPIRITUAL TRUTH** that is learned from time with God's Word enlightened by the Holy Spirit.
 - Why do we read passages of scripture more than once?
 - It's a lot like eating...as we live our lives we get weak and need **FRESH NOURISHMENT**
 - It's a lot like bathing...as we live our lives we get dirty and need a **FRESH CLEANSING**
 - Another reason: The Holy Spirit can show us something **NEW** every time we read a passage if we are **OPEN TO SPIRITUAL TRUTHS**
 - If we're not careful we may “skim over” parts of scripture because we think since we've read it before we've “got it down.”
- If the extent of our theology (what we think about God) is what we learned as kids in Sun. School; we will be spiritual weaklings.

Only when we are open to Spiritual Truth will we be able to develop our Spiritual understanding. Only by wrestling with God's Word can we learn what He's saying to us about how to live our lives.

- Jesus and the disciples get into the boat and if we jump back up to verse 14 it says the disciples **FORGOT TO BRING BREAD**
- Can you imagine what their discussion was like?
 - YOU were supposed to get the bread Peter!
 - No catering is **YOUR JOB** John!
 - Jesus is gonna get upset...we keep running out of bread and it's **YOUR FAULT!** No, **YOU'RE IN CHARGE OF BREAD!**
 - Can you see Jesus shaking His head?
 - I just produced bread to feed five thousand and then four thousand and these guys still don't get that I can produce as much bread as I want!
- So Jesus uses the second miraculous multiplication of food as another teaching lesson for the disciples who still didn't get it

Mark 8:16-21

16They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread."

17Aware 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? 18Do you have

eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? 19When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

"Twelve," they replied.

20"And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"

They answered, "Seven."

21He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

- How many times do you and I get so focused on a shortage of material resources that we forget Jesus' CONSTANT CARE of us?
- It's easy to do in these days of economic turmoil!
- Jesus says TRUST ME and we say SHOW ME
- Jesus says I'LL PROVIDE and we say HOW?
- I'll admit, this is an area for struggle with me
- There's this tendency to ask: "What about this? And what about this? And what if THIS happens? How will you provide? How will you deliver? How? How? How?"
- Jesus says STOP FOCUSING on HOW and focus on WHO. WHO I AM.
- Didn't I feed the five thousand? Didn't I feed the four thousand? Weren't there leftovers?
- Verse 21: "Do you still not understand?"
- He may not multiply the material things you and I have but he's promised never to leave us or forsake us.

Psalm 37:25 (New International Version)

25 I was young and now I am old,
yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken
or their children begging bread.

That is SPIRITUAL TRUTH from God's word.

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Mark 8:27-33

Peter's Confession of Christ

27Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

28They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Christ.[a]"

- What is plagiarism?
 - Definition: The unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work.
 - Question: Are my beliefs about Jesus based on personal experience or on what I've heard others say?
 - Example: When you recommend a great place to go on vacation? A great restaurant? A great movie? "Oh, I haven't actually been there; eaten there; seen that...but I believe it's great!"
- Jesus' question: "Who do YOU say I am?" can only be answered by personal experience. Otherwise our testimony is "spiritual plagiarism". Otherwise we're just repeating what someone told us instead of finding out for ourselves through time in God's Word and time with our Lord.
- How do we get that personal experience?
 - Time in the Word
 - Time with the Lord

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Verses 30-33

30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus Predicts His Death

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. 32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

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."

- Peter was nothing if not PASSIONATE! You can't say He wasn't BOLD in what he believed and he wasn't bashful about telling Jesus what he thought
- Have you ever heard the old saying about someone: "He may not always be right but he's NEVER UNCERTAIN?" We could say that about Peter.
- Peter knew what he believed and was zealous about it
- What's wrong with that? Why would Jesus call him a tool of "Satan"?
 - He was zealous...but he was WRONG

- His own BELIEFS were getting in the way of TRUTH
- These men didn't want Jesus to die a horrible death!
- He put human preference over God's will
- How many times have we done the same thing?
- How many times in my life have I said: "Lord, if you'll just give ME the pen I can write a great plan for my life!" "Lord, if you'll let me I can write a great SCRIPT for this play I'm in called life!"
- And how many times have I looked back on how God has worked and said "Thank you Lord you didn't let me get NEAR the pen that writes the SCRIPT of my life!"
- If He had my how my life would be a mess!
- If He had given me what I thought I wanted the way I wanted it LOOK WHAT I WOULD HAVE MISSED!

That great Theologian Garth Brooks said it pretty well:
 "Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers"

- Peter's long-held beliefs got in the way of SPIRITUAL TRUTH
- How about you and me?
- Do we have some LONG-HELD BELIEFS that need to be shaken up by SPIRITUAL TRUTH?
- Do we need to read the Word so it can ROCK OUR WORLD?

Only when we are open to Spiritual Truth will we be able to develop our Spiritual understanding. Only by wrestling with God's Word can we learn what He's saying to us about how to live our lives.

What's the takeaway?

- Some people want Jesus to prove who He is SPECTACULARLY. Jesus only proves it PERSONALLY and DAILY to those who TRUST HIM.
- If we close our minds and keep them closed to the truth about Jesus, we cannot develop our Spiritual understanding. We can't let TRADITION keep us from TRUTH.
- Only when we are open to Spiritual Truth will we be able to develop our Spiritual understanding.
- Only by wrestling with God's Word can we learn what He's saying to us about how to live our lives.
- Spiritual Understanding isn't an "add water and stir" "instant" "microwave" process.
- It only comes through an OPEN HEART spending time with the WORD and time with the LORD