

The Gospel of Matthew
Week Nineteen
Matthew 15:28-16:23

Day One

29 Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. 30 Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. 31 The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel. 32 Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."

vs. 29&30 – Matthew takes us from what is modern Lebanon back to the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus returned to His home area and “set up shop” on a mountainside. Jesus did not need a building and He did not have to announce His whereabouts. People found out and followed Him. I was at a business conference recently and the main speaker said, “Many of you are working too hard. You are pursuing business instead of business pursuing you.” I thought that was profound. The same can be true for ministry. **Are you pursuing work or ministry or are they pursuing you?**

When you are in your purpose, you don’t have to go looking for fulfillment; it comes looking for you. Jesus did not make any effort to let people know where He was or what He was doing. He just showed up and good things happened. **Where do you show up and good things happen?**

After all the healing that Jesus had already performed, you would think that the crowds would diminish, but they did not. There certainly were many physical needs in Jesus’ time. They brought the sick to Jesus and laid them at His feet. Jesus could not have gotten away from them if He wanted to, which He did not. Jesus did not fail to perform whether in private or public settings. He healed every problem that was brought to Him.

I maintain that only the One who created these people could be the One to heal them so comprehensively and completely. The massive healing encounters prove that Jesus was God.

v. 31 – Look at the scope of Jesus’ healing ministry. Blind eyes were opened, deaf ears unstopped, mute tongues loosed, missing or twisted limbs restored, and lame legs walking. That is the power with which Jesus conducted His earthly ministry. As mentioned in an earlier study, many want to debate truth, but no one has ever presented their truth with the power to heal that Jesus did. This is what distinguishes Jesus’ message from any other spiritual teacher, guru, leader, or prophet.

v. 32 – We now discover that Jesus conducted this healing clinic over a three-day period. Jesus wanted to feed the people and we know from Matthew 14 that He could accomplish this with the smallest quantities of food. Jesus was testing His disciples to see if they would pick up on the hint. He was hoping someone would say, “Yes, Lord. Just like we did with the last crowd. How do you want to do it this time?” Jesus was giving them another chance to operate in faith. **Is Jesus giving you another chance? What are you doing with that chance?**

Day Two

33 His disciples answered, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?" 34 "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied, "and a few small fish." 35 He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. 36 Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. 37 They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 38 The number of those who ate was four thousand, besides women and children. 39 After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.

v. 33 – If this was a test, the disciples failed miserably. Jesus had already performed one miracle with a few loaves and fish, but the disciples failed to connect that miracle with the needs before them. I was in Nigeria earlier this year and wanted to talk to the Lord about my lack of finances, but He refused to hear about it. My point is that God has been so faithful in providing for us that the problem wasn't my lack, but my inability to connect His past provision to my present need. I didn't need to pour my heart out to Him about the lack; I needed to thank Him for provision that had not arrived but was on the way. **Do you see the difference? Can you apply that to your own life at this point in time?**

v. 34 – They actually had two more loaves than in the previous case. God's provision for you doesn't depend on what you or others have. It is based on God's power. Jesus had them do an inventory of food supplies so they would know God's power, not so they would be reminded of what they did not have.

vs. 35&36 – Jesus had control of the crowds. He directed them to sit, had the disciples distribute the food, and later dismissed them. He blessed the bread and it multiplied. Jesus knows how to organize a meeting and make sure that everyone is taken care of! I have often said that one man or woman can preach one message and 100 people can leave and say, “That message was for me!” That is the ability of God to care for all your needs.

vs. 37&38 – Jesus did not simply provide a snack to hold the people over until they got home. He satisfied their hunger completely. God is able to provide in abundance and in a way that meets everyone's needs. This miracle once again proved that there is no lack in God. Christians are not subject to the same economic rules as others. God can provide for them in the worst of times because nothing limits God.

To reinforce this point, the disciples picked up seven baskets of leftovers after feeding 4,000 men with families after Jesus blessed seven loaves. In the previous multiplication, they picked up 12 baskets of leftovers, having fed more than 5,000 people from five loaves. They actually had more from less in the first instance. Our God is not limited to do great things with a little. **So what little do you have that can be a lot if you just give it to Jesus to use for His purpose and glory?**

v. 39 – There was no pattern to Jesus' movements in Galilee, except that He went according to the Father's pleasure.

Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these (John 5:19-20).

What will do today that is in line with the Father's good pleasure? Where will He take you so that you efforts will help further His kingdom?

Day Three

16:1 The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. 2 He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' 3 and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. 4 A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away.

v. 1 – The Pharisees were not happy with the answers that Jesus gave in their previous encounter, so they returned requesting a sign from heaven to reveal and confirm His identity. One can understand why Jesus refused to give them a sign. They were asking in unbelief and not faith. They would not believe even if they received a sign. Plus, Jesus had already done so many remarkable things, all the Pharisees had to do was interview those whose eyes were opened or limbs restored to receive all the signs for which anyone could ask. Finally, their request sounds familiar to the one that Satan made of Jesus in Matthew 4. Satan wanted Jesus to hurl Himself off the Temple to create a spectacle that would prove His divinity and God's promises. Jesus refused Satan and now He refused Satan's emissaries, the Pharisees.

vs. 2&3 – Jesus said that the Jews could discern the signs that indicated what the weather was going to be, but could not do the same for the spiritual climate. Jesus had already performed so many miraculous signs that anyone who had a will to see the truth would see. The Pharisees did not so they could not.

v. 4 – One gets the sense that Jesus was trying to avoid the Pharisees every chance He got. It is not good when God avoids being around someone. The Pharisees had alienated God with their unbelief and hardness of heart. I would imagine that we could be guilty of doing the same thing. Therefore God get to the point where He doesn't want to be around us.

Jesus called the Pharisees part of a wicked and adulterous generation, adulterous in the sense that they had loves and loyalties other than God, like prestige, money and power. Jesus indicated that a sign was coming, and we know from hindsight that the sign was the resurrection, The Pharisees could not comprehend what Jesus was saying but then again, neither could His disciples. The difference was that the disciples were positioned to eventually understand because they had faith. The Pharisees were not so positioned, and resisted what God did through Jesus throughout the New Testament accounts. **Is there something you don't understand now, something God said or did? Is there something in your past walk with the Lord that still causes you to shake your head in confusion? What is the answer to your situation?** It's faith! Trust God no matter what and you will eventually come to peace with that situation.

Day Four

5 When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. 6 "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 7 They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread." 8 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? 9 Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? 10 Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? 11 How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 12 Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

vs. 5-7 – Jesus began to talk to the disciples about avoiding the thinking and influence of their religious leaders. At the same time, the disciples had forgotten to bring some bread for the journey. Since their mind was on the bread, they misunderstood what Jesus was saying about spiritual influence. When your mind is preoccupied, it is easy to misinterpret what God is saying to you. The disciples concluded that Jesus was rebuking them for not having brought some bread. **How many times have you come to a wrong conclusion about something God said in His word? Is the misunderstanding due to worry about your personal provision?** It is so important that we maintain right thinking, because wrong thinking causes us to come to wrong conclusions about God and His message to us.

vs. 8&9 – Jesus called them “little faiths.” They were preoccupied with bread, after Jesus had twice produced bread for a multitude from just a few loaves. God has provided for you again and again. **Are you still worried about your future and how you will**

“make it”? **Don’t you still understand?** God is able to take care of you! As Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, you can seek God’s kingdom because He knows what you need and will provide for you. Stop worrying about tomorrow and about what you will eat, wear or how your retirement will work out. God will make a way!

How good is your memory where God and His provision are concerned? Jesus asked, “Don’t you remember? Don’t you understand?” Those questions may be directed at you as well.

vs. 10-11 – Jesus reasoned that it made no sense for them to be upset that they did not bring bread with them. After all, He had proved that He could create bread from nothing if He had to, so why would He be anxious about bread? The disciples missed the point because they were focusing on their needs instead of on God. If you focus on your needs, you will “miss” God as well.

Jesus repeated His initial statement to be on guard against the leaven of the Pharisees. When you examine that statement, it isn’t even close to the meaning that the disciples had first attached to it. That is how “far off” we can be when our thinking is wrong. We can come to wrong conclusions that aren’t anywhere near the meaning that God intended.

v. 12 – Finally the disciples understood. Jesus urged them to avoid the influence of their leaders. All leaders exercise influence, which Jesus likened to leaven. Jesus warned that the influence of the Pharisees and Sadducees was bad. There are some leaders today who also have bad leaven and should be avoided as well. Just because someone bears the title “leader” doesn’t mean that his or her leadership is godly, especially in the Church. **How can we tell the difference?** It is simple: **do the leaders draw you closer to Jesus or to some system that talks about Jesus? Do those leaders leaven you with Jesus’ words and life, or their own words and life?** Be careful not to follow those who talk about Jesus but who lead you to a place where Jesus can talk to you about Himself.

Day Five

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" 14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

v. 13 – I have been to the region referenced in this verse and it is out of the way, almost to Lebanon. Jesus was truly on the move, for he went from Galilee north to Tyre and Sidon, then back to Galilee and now north once again. I have to believe this was an attempt to avoid the Pharisees, the religious Gestapo of Israel. Their attacks on Jesus were increasing, causing Him to spend more time defending His actions or answering their silly questions. Jesus also wanted to spend time training His disciples and the account following is part of that training.

Jesus asked His disciples who people thought He was. The disciples had just evidenced a lack of understanding about bread and the leaven of the Pharisees, so Jesus had to make sure they understood who He was. I like the fact that Jesus was not assuming anything. He had to be direct or risk investing in men who did not understand who He was or what He was doing. **How direct are you when faced with a problem or with some confusion?** I have found most church people hesitant to ask questions to bring clarity or to clear up tension or confusion. I hope you are not among those who have that tendency.

v. 14 – The disciples gave Jesus feedback of the ridiculous reports that were circulating about His true identify. Some people said He was John the Baptist. **How could Jesus be a man who was His contemporary?** John had not been dead for long, so how could Jesus and John have existed at the same time and now Jesus be John? Others said that Jesus was Elijah, the one to come before the Messiah. Still others said that Jesus was one of the prophets. Notice that all three answers tried to fashion Jesus after someone in the past, someone from Israel's history. No reports gave Jesus an identity of His own, only an identity from Israel's past.

The people struggled to see Jesus outside of their culture that they understood. Judaism had pressed them into a mold, and it affected how they thought and processed information. Culture has done the same thing to you and me, and we must do the best we can to step back, as Jesus and the disciples were doing here, to assess how culture has affected our concept of God and our walk with Him. **Are you ready to fact that issue in your own life, honestly and openly?**

Notice how honest the disciples could be with Jesus. They reported the foolish things to Him with freedom and without fear. There was no hold back and no anger on Jesus' part. **Do you have to hold back with leaders in your life? Are you a leader and, if so, do people have to hold back when talking with you out of fear?** This wasn't the case with Jesus.

v. 15 – Jesus was not looking for information but revelation. He shifted the question from who do men say that I am to who do you, My disciples, say that I am. And he answer to that question is the foundation for anyone's relationship with the Lord. If Jesus is only a prophet, that is how you will relate to Him. If He is a guru, the same holds true. If He is the Son of God, however, then that requires a whole other level of commitment. **Who is Jesus? Do you know? Can you explain it to other believers? Can you explain who He is to those who don't believe? Is Jesus asking you the same thing He asked those disciples? What will you say?**

v. 16 – Peter was the first to speak up, not just because that was his nature, but because he had something to say. Peter had revelation that Jesus was the Christ! You would think that this was an easy question for the disciples because of all they had seen and heard. Jesus had shown them that He was the Christ and He had told them through His answers to John and the Pharisees. Yet there was no guarantee that they knew. Jesus had to hear it for Himself and Peter was the one who said it.

Day Six

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." 20 Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

v. 17 – You and I are blessed any time the Father chooses to reveal something to us. Here Jesus acknowledged that Peter didn't just figure out this truth on his own; the Father showed it to Him according to His good pleasure. **Do you realize how blessed you are to see something from God's word, or to understand something about God or His Son, Jesus?** I am back in school at this point in my life and I am blessed to be learning what I am. God has chosen to teach me at my age and I am eager to learn. Thank You, Lord, for the privilege of knowing more about You.

v. 18 – Now begins one of the most discussed and confusing passages in the gospels. What did Jesus mean when He told Peter that he was the rock upon which He would build His Church? Furthermore He said that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The Catholics interpreted these statements as proof that Peter was established as the first pope. While I reject that interpretation, I am not going to analyze all the Greek at this point, for it is beyond the scope of these devotionals. Let it suffice to say that Jesus was saying that His church would be founded and based on the confession that Peter had made – that Jesus was the Christ, the Holy One of God.

Those who are truly part of Jesus' gathering of people called the Church are the ones who have confessed that He is the Lord and Christ. "Membership" is based on a personal revelation of who Jesus is. Anything less than that is inadequate to build or sustain a church.

What I find more important here is Jesus' promise that the gates of hell would not overcome the Church. It is easy to miss the essence of what Jesus said there. He did not say that hell would not *try* to overcome the Church; He said that hell would be unsuccessful as it tries again and again to overwhelm and defeat the Church.

I have seen many people underestimate the intensity of warfare surrounding a confession of faith in Christ. If they put their trust in Jesus, they will not be defeated, but it will seem like at times defeat is inevitable. That, coupled with the intensity of warfare against the Church in general, has made the Church's survival doubtful many times.

The gates of hell will try like hell to overcome the Church. **Have you underestimated the intensity of the attack at times? Has this discouraged you? Can you see that this is part of the overall plan of attack, to dishearten God's people into giving up? Do you need to adjust your thinking to the fact that attack is inevitable rather than**

impossible? Your attitude and thinking are critical where this issue is concerned. You must be realistic and not idealistic where the forces of evil are concerned.

v. 19 – Here is another difficult verse, which has been debated and studied endlessly. **What did Jesus mean when He talked about binding and loosing? How much authority does this give the believer who professes faith in Christ? What are these keys to which Jesus referred?**

It seems that the disciples would have a relationship with the Father that would enable them to move and act as one with heaven's will, when their intent and heart was to extend the kingdom of God. When they would forgive, it would already have been forgiven in heaven. When they would heal, it would be the same. If they would declare anything, it was something that was already done in heaven.

A confession of faith in Christ would give the believer a connection with heaven that was not a carte blanche to do or say anything they wanted, but would unite them with the Father in such a way that they were working in tandem to advance the kingdom of God. Does this make sense at all? When I look at the acts of the apostles in the early church, I see that they preached (see Acts 2), healed (see Acts 14:3), condemned (see Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, Paul with the proconsul and magician in Acts 13:9-12)

v. 20 – After this great meeting and revelation, Jesus warned them not to tell anyone who He was. There are some insights that are just for you and no one else, at least at the time that you receive them. Sometimes you are simply to meditate on or pray about the insight you obtain from the Father.

Day Seven

21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. 22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" 23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

v. 21 – The disciples had just discovered, from Jesus' own words, that He was the Christ. As if that wasn't enough revelation for one day, Jesus went on to explain that He had to go to Jerusalem and be killed, only to be raised again from the dead. Now we see why Jesus took them so far away from the crowds. They had to have this most serious talk and have time to process it away from their Jewish cultural pressures.

It is interesting that later the disciples acted as if they had never had this conversation with Jesus. When He died and they were huddled in fear in the upper room, it doesn't seem that anyone reminded them of this meeting and discussion. You can understand why Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith at that time. He predicted what would happen, but they did not believe or remember it!

I have been at home for six weeks as I write and being at home for me means no income. Yet I feel like I have a wonderful chance to trust the Lord. Too often in the past, I have acted like the disciples in this case. God promised He would provide, but I didn't believe Him! I fretted, wondered where I had gone wrong and pleaded with God to do what He promised to do. I forgot His past provisions and promises. He always provides, although not according to my timetable. Yet this time I am determined to take Him at His word, trust in Him and rest. **How about you? Are you fretting, or not taking God at His word, as the disciples did in this verse?** You can make a decision to think differently today if that is the case.

v. 22 – Peter was full of confidence and some pride after he had given the correct answer to Jesus' question as to who He was. Peter decided then to become Jesus' counselor. When Jesus predicted His death and resurrection, Peter took Jesus aside and began to tell Him that He was incorrect. This would never happen to the Messiah, the Chosen One of God! **Who can be God's counselor? Who can give Him advice?** Peter tried and I have, too.

I have presumed I knew what God would and could not do. I have confidently boasted that I knew the mind of Christ on certain issues when I did not. I had opinions, but I didn't know, but I acted like I knew. I *hoped* that certain things would or would not happen, yet I spoke with such certainty. This has caused me no small amount of anxiety and even anger, when I was proved wrong, after being convinced I was right. **Has this ever happened to you?**

v. 23 – Jesus must have shocked Peter with His response. He referred to Peter as Satan and told him to fall in place behind Him! Peter was not speaking the mind of God, but was speaking the will of the devil. **Can you imagine that?** One minute Peter is speaking the revelation of God, the next the revelation of the devil! Good insight once isn't a guarantee of ongoing insight, that's for sure!

While we have not seen his opposition since Matthew 4, we see here that the devil was still opposing Jesus in more subtle ways. This proves the validity of what Jesus said: The gates of hell would not prevail but would certainly try to do so. Jesus dealt ruthlessly with Peter's rebuke, since it was directed at the very purpose for which He came – to give His life for His sheep. You cannot deal with the devil in halfway measures. You must oppose him firmly (but you don't have to yell at him). **Where are you encountering devilish opposition at this point in time? How do you intend to deal with it?**