

CHAPTER 26: The Gospels Part 4

Up to this point most of Jesus' miracles and messages have been for the benefit of the people in Galilee. That is where He has been operating. By now most of them have heard about Jesus and are aware of His message, **“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.”** (Matthew 4:17) They have personally witnessed His miracles and heard Him teach, like the Sermon on the Mount. But for the most part, the Galileans remain unchanged and spiritually apathetic.

So, Jesus speaks up and pronounces judgment on them. **Then Jesus began to criticize openly the cities in which He had done many of His miracles; because they did not repent. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida [Galilean cities]! If the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon [Gentile cities], they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes...”** (Matthew 11:20-21) Jesus' ministry does not exist merely for the people's entertainment. Like their prophets of old had done years ago, Jesus calls for them to repent and turn to God.

His harsh rebuke is followed by an open invitation: **“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke on you and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy to bear, and My load is not hard to carry.”** (Matthew 11:28-30) Here Jesus' contrasts the heavy burden placed on the people by the religious leaders who had added all sorts of legalistic requirements to the law with His “easy to bear” yoke. Jesus' says that no matter how sinful a person may have been in the past, it is not too late to turn to Him for rest and relief. This truth is vividly illustrated in our next story.

A Pharisee named Simon invites Jesus to dinner at his house. While Jesus is reclining at his table something unusual happens. A woman of questionable reputation, likely a local prostitute, enters the house. She's crying. The woman, whose name we're not told, proceeds to anoint Jesus' feet with an expensive perfume. Simon reacts to her critically.

Now when [Simon] saw this, he said to himself, “If this man [Jesus] were a prophet, he would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.” (Luke 7:39) What Simon doesn't realize is that Jesus DOES know who she is. But He also knows the woman's heart. She is contrite and she deeply regrets her sinful past. She wants to be forgiven. She wants to be shown love and grace and to move forward with her life. So Jesus uses this as a teaching moment for Simon

and his self-righteous friends. **Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” He replied, “Say it, Teacher.”** (Luke 7:40)

Jesus then gives them this parable: **“A certain creditor [a money lender] had two debtors; one owed him five hundred silver coins, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon answered, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.”** (Luke 7:41-43) Jesus said, “You’re right.” In this parable the two debtors represent sinners. The creditor, the money lender, represents God. He forgives the one debtor much more than the other. Jesus’ point is that all people are sinners. We are all debtors in a sense to God. Some, like the woman at Simon’s home, may be deeper in debt to God because they sinned more. But Jesus reminds Simon that he too, religious or not, is a sinner and God is in the business of forgiving sins.

Jesus then turns to the woman and tells her, **“Your sins are forgiven... Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”** (Luke 7:48, 50) Here Jesus demonstrates love and compassion. He graciously forgives a repentant sinner. He exemplifies the heart of God. **But those who were at the table with Him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?”** (Luke 7:49) Simon and his religious friends appear to have completely missed Jesus’ point.

The animosity between Jesus and the Pharisees continues. Jesus heals a demon-possessed man who is both blind and mute. First He casts out the demon and then He restores the man’s sight and speech. The crowds are amazed by this. They speculate that Jesus is the promised Messiah – they ask, **“Could this be the Son of David?”** (Matthew 12:23) “Son of David” is a term for the Messiah.

Hearing the people saying this about Jesus gets the Pharisees all riled up. They can’t deny that Jesus has the power to cast out demons. They just saw Him do it. Instead what they do is they attribute Jesus’ power to Satan. Of course Jesus ridicules this notion: **“Every kingdom divided against itself is destroyed, and no town or house divided against itself will stand. So if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?”** (Matthew 12:26) In other words, “What you’re saying makes absolutely no sense! Why would Satan do that?”

Jesus says that they ought to be praising and glorifying God for what they have witnessed. By attributing the work of God to Satan the Pharisees are in essence blaspheming the Holy Spirit. He continues... **“For this reason I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven. But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”** (Matthew 12:31-32) This is a very serious charge.

Some of the Jewish religious leaders respond to Jesus: **“We want to see a sign from You.”** (Matthew 12:38) This is a strange statement considering that Jesus has been showing them sign after sign since He began His ministry! You wonder, where have these guys been?

But He answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish for three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.” (Matthew 12:39-40) Jesus obviously believes the story of Jonah and the huge fish (Jonah 1) to be a true story and not just a tall tale. Just like Jonah was inside the fish for three days and came out, so He (Jesus the Son of Man) will be in the earth three days and come out. Jesus had made a similar statement before while in Jerusalem. There He talked about “raising up” the temple of His body in three days. It isn’t really clear what Jesus is talking about. Perhaps He’s talking about some sort of a bodily resurrection. Whatever the case, Jonah serves as a prototype of something that will happen later to Jesus. This is the only sign the religious leaders are going to get. Maybe then they will believe.

When someone makes an outrageous statement, a prediction like Jesus just made, you may conclude one of several things about them. The individual is either (1) telling the truth even if you don’t fully understand it; (2) lying or (3) crazy or (4) possessed with a demon or something.

When His family heard this they went out to restrain Him, for they said, “He is out of His mind.” (Mark 3:21) Jesus’ own family is beginning to wonder about Him! If you had been standing in the crowd listening to Jesus that day, what would you have thought?

As resistance to Jesus by the religious elite stiffens He begins to speak more and more in parables. In the parables Jesus draws comparisons from ordinary everyday things and life experiences to teach deep spiritual truths. The parables are one of Jesus’ favorite teaching methods. They are simple, easy to understand, easy to remember, and they are interesting.

For example, in the Matthew 13 Parable of the Sower Jesus reveals that there will be various responses to the same sower sowing (planting) the same seed. The sower is God’s messenger and the seed is the message, the good news of salvation. The soils represent those receiving the message. Jesus mentions four types of soil indicative of four types of people.

Some of the seed falls beside the path and the birds come along and eat it up. This seed represent those who hear the word but then Satan comes and snatches the word away. Some of the seed falls on stony ground. This seed represents those who hear the

word and receive it with much joy. But because they have no firm root, when the cares of life arise they are overwhelmed and quickly fall away. Some of the seed falls among the thorns and is choked out. This seed represents those who hear the word but all the vain things of this world including the desire for material things chokes out the word. Finally, some of the seed falls on good soil. This seed represents those who hear the word of God, believe it by faith and allow it to change their lives. So then, you can have the same message preached but have totally different reactions to it.

This is just one example of a parable. There are about 40 such parables presented in the Gospels. Each one drives home a different spiritual truth. We'll mention a few of these parables as we make our way through the story.

Jesus' popularity continues to grow and the crowds around Him increase. Jesus urges His disciples to cross over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. They get into their boat and set sail. Jesus is weary from a long day of teaching and He falls asleep in the boat. Suddenly a strong storm comes up and the sea becomes rough. The surging waves threaten to capsize their small boat. The disciples, many of them seasoned fishermen, fear for their lives. **They came and woke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we are about to die!" So He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they died down and it was calm. Then He said to them. "Where is your faith?" But they were afraid and amazed, saying to one another, "Who then is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him!"** (Luke 8:24-25)

The boat arrives safely near the town of Gerasa on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus and His disciples are met by two demon-possessed men who live among the tombs there. When they spot Jesus... **They cried out, "Son of God, leave us alone! Have you come here to torment us before the time?"** (Matthew 8:29) The demons know who Jesus is and that He is about to cast them out. **A large herd of pigs was feeding some distance from them. Then the demons begged Him, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs."** (Matthew 8:30-31)

And He said, "Go!" So they came out and went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep slope into the lake and drowned in the water. The herdsmen ran off, went into town, and told everything that had happened to the demon-possessed men. (Matthew 8:32-33) The townspeople go to check out this report for themselves. They find the men who had been demon- possessed sitting around and acting normal. Also, they must have seen the dead pigs floating in the water. This whole scene frightens the people and they request that Jesus leave.

So Jesus and His disciples get back into their boat and push off from the shore. One of the men who had been demon possessed begs Jesus to go with Him. But Jesus tells the man, **"Return to your home, and declare what God has done for you."** So

he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole town what Jesus had done for him. (Luke 8:39)

When Jesus and the disciples return home the people are there to welcome Him back. They have been eagerly waiting for Him. **Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came up, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at His feet. He asked Him urgently, “My little daughter is near death. Come and lay your hands on her so that she may be healed and live.” Jesus went with him, and a large crowd followed and pressed around Him.** (Mark 5:22-24)

While on the way to Jairus’ house, suddenly Jesus feels some of His power leave Him. He turns around and surveys the crowd. He asks, **“Who touched My clothes?”** (Mark 5:30) With such a large crowd pressing in on Him it could have been any one of any number of people.

Then the woman, with fear and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. (Mark 5:33) This woman tells Jesus how she had been suffering for 12 years from a hemorrhage. She relates how she had gone to many doctors but none could help her. When she heard Jesus was coming she rushed off hoping to be able to touch His clothes and be healed. This is what she did. As soon as she touched Jesus her bleeding stopped and she could feel her body being healed. **[Jesus] said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”** (Mark 5:34) This is a significant moment. Jesus has just healed someone who did not ask to be healed but simply believed that Jesus could heal her if she touched Him.

Meanwhile back to Jairus. The crowd parts and someone gives Jairus the terrible news. **“Your daughter has died. Why trouble the Teacher any longer?”** (Mark 5:35) Jesus looks the tearful Jairus in the eyes and says, **“Don’t be afraid; just believe.”** (Mark 5:36) And they continue on toward his house.

When they reach the house Jesus takes three of His disciples, Peter, James and John, inside with Him. He sees a group of mourners in the girl’s room and asks them, **“Why are you weeping? The child is not dead, but asleep.”** (Mark 5:39) The mourners laugh at Jesus because they know the little girl is dead. Jesus puts them all out of the room. He enters taking with Him the three disciples and the girl’s parents.

Then, gently taking the child by the hand, He said to her... “Little girl, I say to you, get up.” The girl got up at once and began to walk around (she was 12 years old). They were completely astonished at this. He strictly ordered that no one should know about this, and told them to give her something to eat. (Mark 5:41-43) This is the second time Jesus has brought a dead person back to life.

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed Him, shouting, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” When He went into the house, the blind men came to Him. Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this? They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.” Then He touched their eyes saying, “Let it be done to you according to your faith.” And their eyes were opened. (Matthew 9:27-30) The two men go out and begin telling everyone they see what Jesus did for them.

As they were going away, a man who could not talk and was demon-possessed was brought to [Jesus]. After the demon was cast out the man who had been mute spoke. The crowds were amazed and said, “Never has anything like this been seen in Israel!” But the Pharisees said, “By the ruler of demons He casts out demons.” (Matthew 9:32-34) The Pharisees know better than this. But they continue their false and senseless narrative because of their extreme hatred of Jesus.

Everywhere Jesus goes people are being healed. Demons are cast out. Blind people have their sight restored. Mute people are able to speak. The dead are being raised to life. All sorts of diseases are being cured. Jesus’ popularity with the people of Galilee reaches an all-time high!

Then Jesus went throughout all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them because they were bewildered and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:35-36)

While the first two years of Jesus’ ministry have been successful, there is still more work to be done. Jesus perceives the great need of the people, both spiritual and physical. This deeply burdens Him. **Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.” (Matthew 9:37-38)**

Jesus then does something very practical. He commissions His twelve disciples to go out in pairs. They are to go in teams and do what Jesus has been doing. This will expand His ministry outreach and it will give the disciples experience. Jesus equips them for ministry by giving them authority over demons and diseases. Their mission is to go and preach the same good news message that Jesus has been preaching. They are to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and cast out demons. They are to travel lightly and depend on the hospitality of strangers. Jesus warns them, however, that not everyone will accept them. Along the way they may experience resistance. But they are to trust God and not fear men. So, for a short period of time the disciples head

out in pairs. **Then they [the disciples] departed and went throughout the villages, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.** (Luke 9:6)

While the disciples are away, Jesus continues His own ministry of teaching and preaching. The crowds follow Him wherever He goes. It is during this period that Jesus receives the tragic news that John the Baptist has been executed in prison by Herod Antipas. Jesus is fond of John and makes this statement about him: **“I tell you the truth, among those born of women, no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist.”** (Matthew 11:11a) This is high praise indeed! Then Jesus adds this very interesting statement... **“Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.”** (Matthew 11:11b) Moved very deeply by John’s death, Jesus withdraws to a secluded place to be alone.

Word about Jesus and His disciples spreads and it reaches the highest level of local government. Herod Antipas hears about the ministry of Jesus. Being superstitious he wonders if Jesus could be John the Baptist who has risen from the dead. Herod becomes more and more curious about Jesus.

After several weeks the disciples return from their mission endeavors. They meet up with Jesus at a predetermined location. **Then the [disciples] gathered around Jesus and told Him everything they had done and taught.** (Mark 6:30) Jesus takes His disciples to a mountain several miles from the city of Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Here He meets privately with them away from the crowds.

But the word gets out about where Jesus is located and a large crowd makes their way out to Jesus.

When Jesus sees the crowd coming in His direction He prepares to feed them. However, the only food items available are five barley loaves and two fish. With the closest city several miles away and not enough money in the treasury to buy food, Jesus instructs His disciples... **“Have the people sit down.” (Now there was a lot of grass in that place.) So the men sat down, about five thousand in number.** (John 6:10) The crowd numbers 5,000 men not including women and children.

Then Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed the bread to those who were seated. He then did the same with the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were all satisfied, Jesus said to His disciples, “Gather up the broken pieces that are left over, so that nothing is wasted.” So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces from the five barley loaves left over by the people who had eaten. (John 6:11-13) This is the only miracle that is recorded in all four gospels.

When the people witness this landmark event for which there is NO reasonable explanation, they begin to speculate among themselves that Jesus must be the long-awaited Messiah – the one Moses talked about! They make plans to take Jesus by force and set Him up as their king. What a great king Jesus would be. He can feed the people. But Jesus wants no part of this. It's not why He came.

Jesus instructs His disciples to head on back home in the boat without Him. He'll catch up with them later. Jesus disperses the crowds and withdraws up the mountain to pray. The disciples walk down the mountain to the Sea of Galilee and get into their boat. They start across the sea back toward their home base of Capernaum. Out of nowhere a storm rises. A strong wind begins to blow and the sea gets rough.

The disciples are in their boat heading home. They have been caught in the middle of a storm and their progress is quite slow. Several hours and three miles into their journey they see a figure walking around on the sea. At first, they think it is a ghost and are frightened. Then they hear a familiar voice. **But [Jesus] said to them, "It is I. Do not be afraid."** (John 6:20)

One of the disciples, Peter, is so excited to see Jesus. **Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, order me to come to You on the water." So He said, "Come." Peter got out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus.** (Matthew 14:28-29) But when Peter takes his eyes off Jesus and looks around at the tumultuous conditions, he begins to sink. He cries out, **"Lord, save me!"** (Matthew 14:30) Jesus reaches out His hand and catches Peter. He says to Peter, **"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"** (Matthew 14:31)

When they went up into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God." (Matthew 14:32-33)

Then another miracle happens... **immediately the boat came to the land where they had been heading.** (John 6:21) Just like that, incredibly, they are back in the port of Capernaum!

Almost two years into Jesus' ministry, everything seems to be going well. Oh sure, the religious leaders hate Jesus, but most everyone else seems to be responding favorably to Him. The people are following Jesus in droves. They listen attentively to His preaching. They come to Him for physical healing. They want to see the next miracle that Jesus is going to perform. The people view Jesus as the Messiah and even want to make Him their king. The disciples recognize Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus is extremely popular, especially in his home region of Galilee.

But all of this is about to change. And it happens one day at the synagogue in Capernaum.

The enthusiastic crowd that witnessed Jesus feed the 5,000 men the day before catches up with Him at Capernaum. They want to see another miracle. They might even get another free meal!

Jesus challenges their motives for seeking Him. When the crowd insists that Jesus provide bread for them like He did before, Jesus presents Himself as the “bread of life.” It is His long Bread of Life discourse that turns public opinion against Jesus. He makes the following claim... **“I am the bread of life. The one who comes to Me will never go hungry, and the one who believes in Me will never be thirsty.”** (John 6:35)

Jesus continues... **“For I have come down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of the One who sent Me. Now this is the will of the One who sent Me – that I should not lose one person of every one He has given Me, but raise them all up at the last day. For this is the will of My Father – for everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him to have eternal life, and I will raise Him up at the last day.”** (John 6:38-40)

Jesus then says that to eat the bread of which He speaks is to believe in Him, **“the living bread that came down from heaven.”** (John 6:51) Jesus uses language that the people do not fully comprehend. He talks about eating the flesh of the Son of Man (referring to Himself) and drinking His blood! Some of the people find this teaching to be offensive or just plain difficult to understand. Others simply refuse to believe it. The result from Jesus saying all of this...

After this many of His disciples quit following Him and did not accompany Him any longer. (John 6:66) Just one day before the crowd had tried to make Jesus their king. Now many in that same group turn on Him and walk away. His fringe followers leave. **Jesus then turns to His twelve disciples... Jesus said to the twelve, “You don’t want to go away too, do you?”** (John 6:67) This is a critical moment in Jesus’ ministry.

Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that You are the Holy One of God!” (John 6:68-69) What a statement!

Jesus’ ministry continues, but now it becomes more difficult. Opposition to Him grows. The Jewish religious leaders, led by the Pharisees, hate Jesus and their hatred is stronger than ever. They are beginning to exert their influence on the Israelite nation, on the common people. They succeed in turning public opinion against Jesus.

This Holy One of God is increasingly being rejected by the very people He came down from heaven to save!