

CHAPTER 27: The Gospels Part 5

In the first two years of His ministry Jesus has experienced a great deal of success. But as He enters the third year He will face increasing opposition. The Jewish religious leaders have been Jesus' primary source of opposition. This will not only continue but it will escalate. The religious establishment rejects Jesus' claims. They consider Him to be a demon-controlled blasphemer. They dislike Him so much they want to kill Him. While Jesus' popularity among the people continues, the religious leaders' influence on them is becoming stronger. During the next year they will succeed in turning many of the Jewish people against Jesus.

From this point on in His ministry Jesus will travel more and more outside of Galilee. Capernaum will still be His home base but He will travel north to Tyre and Sidon and then up to Caesarea Philippi. He will also travel south to Jerusalem and Judea to the region of the Decapolis which is south and east of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus' sermons get longer and He begins to teach more in parables. The content of His messages gets deeper as He approaches the end of His ministry. He talks a lot more about the coming judgment and the kingdom of God. These are the main subjects of His later parables.

As we pick up the narrative Jesus is still in Galilee. Once again here come those Pharisees...

Now the Pharisees and some of the experts in the law who came from Jerusalem gathered around [Jesus]. And they saw that some of Jesus' disciples ate their bread with unclean hands, that is, unwashed. (Mark 7:1-2) The Jews had a long-standing tradition of washing their hands before they ate. **The Pharisees and the experts in the law asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with unwashed hands?"** (Mark 7:5) "Why don't they follow our traditions?"

[Jesus] said to them, "Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. They worship Me in vain, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.'" (Mark 7:6-7) Jesus accuses them of placing their oral religious traditions and rituals above God's written Law.

Jesus then explains that a person's "uncleanness" (that the Pharisees seem to be so concerned about) doesn't come from food eaten or from unwashed hands. It's not something outward. It's something inward. It comes from a rebellious heart. What is in a person's heart is expressed outwardly by their words and actions. He said, **"It is what comes out of a person that defiles him."** (Mark 7:15)

Jesus travels north and makes a rare appearance in the predominately Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon. **A Canaanite woman from that area came and cried out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is horribly demon-possessed!" But [Jesus] did not answer her a word. Then His disciples came and begged Him, "Send her away, because she keeps on crying out after us." So He answered [the woman], "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."** (Matthew 15:22-24) In other words, "My ministry focus is on My own people, the Jews."

But the woman is persistent. She continues to ask Jesus for help. So Jesus finally responds: **"It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."** (Matthew 15:26) In other words, "I need to feed the Jews before I feed you Gentiles." To this the woman gives a classic response... **"Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."** (Matthew 15:27) In other words, "I'm not expecting a full meal from You, Lord. I'll gladly settle for whatever scraps You can throw my way."

Jesus is impressed by this Gentile woman's faith in Him. What a contrast her faith in Him is to the total lack of faith by the Jewish leaders! **Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, your faith is great! Let what you want be done for you." And her daughter was healed from that hour.** (Matthew 15:28)

From Tyre Jesus and His disciples travel along the coast to Sidon. Then they head down to the region of Decapolis. Wherever Jesus goes He attracts crowds. It seems as though everyone has heard about Jesus. **When He left there, Jesus went along the Sea of Galilee. Then He went up a mountain, where He sat down. Then large crowds came to Him bringing with them the lame, blind, crippled, mute, and many others. They laid them at His feet, and He healed them. As a result the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing, and they praised the God of Israel.** (Matthew 15:29-31) While the intrigue and curiosity about Jesus and what His next miracle will be continues, this crowd seems to recognize that His power comes from God.

After three days up on the mountain, Jesus feels compassion for the large group of people that had traveled out to see Him. They are hungry and have nothing to eat. Jesus discusses feeding them with His disciples. Now remember, it wasn't that long ago

that Jesus miraculously fed a crowd of 5,000 men. These same disciples were there. They had witnessed what Jesus did with their own eyes. But, inexplicably... **The disciples said to Him, “Where can we get enough bread in this desolate place to satisfy so great a crowd?”** (Matthew 15:33) How soon they forget!

Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” They replied, “Seven – and a few small fish.” (Matthew 15:34)

Now let's just stop right there and think about this situation. We are told later in this passage that the crowd numbers four thousand men, not counting women and children; and we have just been given the inventory of food available: 7 loaves of bread and a few small fish. Recently the disciples had witnessed Jesus feed a crowd of five thousand men with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish (more people with less food). After everyone had enough to eat they picked up 12 baskets full of leftovers. So what's the problem? Why are the disciples asking “where are we going to get food for these people?” They apparently have very short memories. They seem to have completely forgotten what Jesus did! You can understand why Jesus gets so exasperated with His disciples.

As He did before, Jesus has the crowds sit on the ground. And like before Jesus takes the bread and gives thanks. And just like before the disciples distribute the food to the crowd. **They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.** (Matthew 15:37) Here on a mountain in Decapolis Jesus duplicates a miracle He had done previously. But He feeds a whole different crowd. This mass feeding is no less amazing than the one before. It offers further proof that Jesus is God because He is able to create an abundance of food out of very little. There is no physical explanation for this. It is obviously a God thing!

From Decapolis Jesus and the disciples make their way across the Sea of Galilee to the city of Bethsaida. On the way Jesus offers a word of warning. **And Jesus ordered [His disciples] in the boat, “Watch out! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod!”** (Mark 8:15) What exactly does Jesus mean by this? Jesus is warning of the growing corruption of Israel's religious leaders (the Pharisees) and its political leader (Herod). Yeast pictures the spreading of wrong ideas, the influencing of the people with false teachings and false notions. Because of their influence, like yeast in dough, it doesn't take much to permeate the whole society. Jesus sees the Pharisees as religious phonies who pretend to love God but really do not. Jesus sees Herod as a man full of himself and interested only in the material things of this world. So Jesus warns His disciples to steer clear of their sinful influences.

Jesus reminds His forgetful disciples of God's provision. God does not just give enough. He gives MORE than enough! **Jesus said to [His disciples]... “Do you still**

not see or understand? Have your hearts been hardened? Though you have eyes, don't you see? And though you have ears, can't you hear? Don't you remember?" (Mark 8:17-18) Jesus has the disciples recall the two recent miracles where He fed the large crowds. He reminds them of what they started with and of all the leftovers they picked up. In both cases God provided an overabundance of food to feed the crowds.

The boat arrives at Bethsaida. While they are in that city a blind man is led to Jesus. Jesus spits on the man's eyes and lays His hands on him. The man can see, but things are a bit out of focus. So Jesus touches the man's eyes with His fingers and then the man begins to see clearly.

Jesus and the disciples then take a long road trip. They journey far to the north to Caesarea Philippi which is up near Mount Hermon, the highest point in Israel. **Then Jesus and the disciples went to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. On the way He asked His disciples, "Who do the people say that I am?" They said, "John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you [disciples] say that I am?"** (Mark 8:27-29a)

At this point Peter speaks up and he gives his famous confession of faith. **Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** (Matthew 16:16) Good answer, Peter! Jesus goes on to tell Peter: **"On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."** (Matthew 16:18b) In other words, this profound truth that Peter just declared – that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God – this is the "rock," it's the foundational truth upon which Jesus will establish His church. By the way, this is the first mention of the church in the Bible and Jesus Himself introduces it. .

Up to this point in all of His preaching and teaching Jesus has never openly identified Himself as Israel's long-awaited Messiah. He hinted at it to the Samaritan woman at the well. But then later He commanded the demons to be quiet and not reveal who He is. Jesus now instructs His disciples not to tell anyone that He is the Messiah. Jesus has no intention of conforming to any pre-conceived ideas about Him being some sort of political figure. When the time is right He will reveal Himself.

As they walk further Jesus begins to tell His disciples the true nature of His mission. **From that time on Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.** (Matthew 16:21) So now those previous references that Jesus made about raising the temple of His body in three days and coming out of the earth after three days make more sense. Here He talks plainly about His upcoming death and a bodily resurrection "on the third day." But hearing Jesus actually say all this must have surprised the disciples.

So Peter took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke Him: “God forbid, Lord! This must not happen to you!” (Matthew 16:22) Peter, who had twice before made bold statements of faith, completely misses the mark here...

But [Jesus] turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, because you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but on man’s.” (Matthew 16:23)

Why does Jesus react so harshly to Peter? Jesus knows that Satan’s goal is to detour Him from completing His mission of redemption. This was one of Satan’s temptations of Jesus when He was out in the wilderness for 40 days. Jesus knows that His mission is going to require Him to die and then be resurrected. Peter unknowingly is embracing Satan’s plan rather than God’s plan.

Jesus teaches the disciples that following Him from here on out will NOT be easy. It will require that each one of them surrender their entire lives to Him. **Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wants to become My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what does it benefit a person if he gains the whole world but forfeits his life? Or what can a person give in exchange for his life?”** (Matthew 16:24-26) This is a tough teaching and a profound thought and one the disciples and everyone who wants to follow Jesus needs to carefully consider.

Several days later Jesus and His disciples arrive at a high mountain, very likely Mount Hermon. Jesus takes Peter, James and John with Him up the mountain. **And [Jesus] was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light. Then Moses and Elijah also appeared before them, talking with Him.** (Matthew 17:2-3) Why Moses and Elijah? Moses represents the Law. Elijah represents the Prophets. Here Jesus is displayed in radiant glory standing right alongside them.

Peter is so thrilled by what he sees! He is caught up in the moment. He makes what seems like a silly suggestion – build three shelters, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. But what is on Peter’s mind is the biggest Jewish celebration of the year which is coming up, the Feast of Tabernacles. What Peter basically suggests here is, “Hey, let’s just celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles right here in this place, right now!”

At this point God interrupts Peter. **While [Peter] was still speaking, a bright cloud over-shadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is My one dear Son, in whom I take great delight. Listen to Him!”** When the disciples heard this, they were overwhelmed with fear and threw themselves down with their faces to

the ground. But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” He said. “Do not be afraid.” When they looked up, all they saw was Jesus alone. (Matthew 17:5-8)

You can just hear the disciples now – “What an experience! Wait until the other disciples hear about this!” But Jesus interrupts them. **As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Do not tell anyone about the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”** (Matthew 17:9) Jesus again refers to His resurrection. He knows that His disciples and the people have a wrong expectation of Him. They don’t understand His mission. They are all still thinking political Messiah. Jesus is preparing them for what’s going to happen, but they don’t quite grasp it yet. They have preconceived ideas.

They rejoin the other disciples in a nearby town. When the crowd standing with the rest of Jesus’ disciples spots Jesus coming, they rush over to Him. One of the men in the crowd has with him his boy who is possessed by an evil spirit. The disciples had not been able to cast the spirit out. So the man says to Jesus, **“But if You are able to do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”** (Mark 9:22)

Then Jesus said to him, “If you are able? All things are possible for the one who believes.” Immediately the father of the [demon-possessed] boy cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:23-24) Jesus rebukes the evil spirit and tells it to come out. The spirit shrieks, throws the boy into violent convulsions and comes out. The boy lies motionless on the ground. He appears to be dead. But Jesus takes the boy by the hand and he stands up.

After everyone has gone home the disciples ask Jesus why it is that they could not cast the evil spirit out of the boy. **He told them, “This kind [of evil spirit] can come out only by prayer.”** (Mark 9:29) This goes back to a lesson Jesus had recently taught them, to depend totally on God. Even though Jesus has given His disciples power and authority to cast out demons, they still MUST rely on God. This is accomplished only through their constant communication with God through prayer.

Jesus and His disciples finally make it back home. **When they gathered together in Galilee, Jesus told them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill Him, and on the third day He will be raised.” And they became greatly distressed.** (Matthew 17:22-23) Once again Jesus predicts His death and resurrection. And again the disciples fail to fully understand what Jesus is saying to them and are afraid to ask for clarification.

In Capernaum the disciples argue among themselves about who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. **After He sat down, He called the twelve and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”** (Mark 9:35) Then Jesus places a child in the middle of the room and says, **“I tell you the truth,**

unless you turn around and become little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven! Whoever then humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a child like this in My name welcomes Me.” (Matthew 18:3-5)

Jesus goes on to teach His disciples the importance of maintaining a loving and caring attitude for others. They should not be a stumbling block to anyone who wants to come to God. Jesus uses an example from everyday life to drive home His point. In the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18) a shepherd is tending his sheep. One of the sheep strays off. The shepherd cares about all of his sheep so he goes out and searches everywhere for the one that is missing until he finds it. Then he brings it home. This is the way God feels about the people of Israel and this is the way Jesus feels – a deeply compassionate love. Jesus wants His followers to have this same compassion for those who are spiritually lost.

Just as important as the disciples’ relationship with other people is their relationship with each other. They are to exhibit God-like attitudes in their inter-personal relationships. They should show patience with each other. They should forgive the brother who wrongs them. **Then Peter came to [Jesus] and said, “Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother who sins against me? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, I tell you, but seventy-seven times!”** (Matthew 18:21-22)

Again Jesus uses a parable to make His point. This is the Parable of the Unforgiving Slave. Here is what happens: A king forgave one of his slaves a debt of ten thousand talents after he begged for mercy. This is an overwhelmingly large amount of money – thousands of dollars. The king then fully expects this slave to whom much has been forgiven to go out and have a forgiving spirit toward others. But that is not what happens. Instead this same slave refuses to forgive one of his fellow slaves a hundred silver coins, a far lesser amount of money than what he had owed the king. He grabbed and choked the other slave and refused to forgive him even after he begged for mercy. His actions were reported to the king.

“Then [the king] called the first slave and said to him, ‘Evil slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me! Should you not have shown mercy to your fellow slave, just as I showed to you?’ And in anger his lord handed him over to the prison guards to torture him until he repaid all he owed. So also My heavenly Father will do to you, if each of you does not forgive your brother from your heart.” (Matthew 18:32-35) The king in the parable represents God. Jesus’ message is clear. Those of us who have been forgiven much by God should reflect God’s character and, in turn, forgive others.

Jesus and disciples now travel down to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. Knowing the animosity the Jewish leaders have for Him, Jesus is careful not to draw public attention to Himself. He shows up halfway through the eight-day festival and begins to teach in the temple courtyard. **There was a lot of grumbling about Him among the crowds. Some were saying, “He is a good man.” But others, “He deceives the common people.” However no one spoke openly about Him for fear of the Jewish leaders.** (John 7:12-13) They know how the leaders hate Jesus.

The people are listening to Jesus’ teaching. They marvel at how much knowledge Jesus possesses. Here’s a man who has had no formal training. How does He know so much? **So Jesus replied, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.”** (John 7:16) Jesus then admonishes the religious leaders: **“Hasn’t Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law! Why do you want to kill Me?”** (John 7:19) Of course, while in front of the crowds, they pretend not to know what Jesus is talking about.

As Jesus continues to teach in the temple, the tension builds. The people begin to talk among themselves. **Then some of the residents of Jerusalem began to say, “Isn’t this the man [the leaders] are trying to kill? Yet here He is, speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. Do the rulers really know that this man is the Christ? But we know where this man [Jesus] comes from. Whenever the Christ comes, no one will know where he comes from.”** (John 7:25-27)

Then Jesus while teaching in the temple courts cried out, “You both know Me and know where I come from! And I have not come on My own initiative, but the One who sent Me is true. You do not know Him, but I know Him, because I have come from Him and He sent Me.” (John 7:28-29) So Jesus basically reinforces what the people have been saying about Him – that He is the Christ, the Messiah. The Jewish religious leaders want so badly to arrest Jesus, yet nobody dares to lay a hand on Him. Many in the crowd are beginning to believe that Jesus really must be the Messiah. They say... **“Whenever the Christ comes, He won’t perform more miraculous signs than this man, will He?”** (John 7:31)

Some of the crowd began to say, “This really is the Prophet!” (John 7:40) They refer to the prophet that Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 18. **Others said, “This is the Christ!” But still others said, “No, for the Christ doesn’t come from Galilee, does He?”** (John 7:41) Many of the people who are gathered show their ignorance of their own Messiah’s birthplace. As noted before, the prophet Micah said that it would be Bethlehem. Some of the more informed people in the crowd explain this to the others. **So there was a division in the crowd because of Jesus.** (John 7:43)

As the Jewish religious leaders are standing in the temple listening to all the various things the people are saying about Jesus, they realize the time has come to take action. They dispatch the temple police instructing them to go and arrest Jesus.

The temple police go to arrest Jesus. However they are unable to do it. **Then the officers returned to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why didn’t you bring Him back with you?” The officers replied, “No one ever spoke like this man!”** (John 7:45-46)

Nicodemus, the Pharisee who earlier came to Jesus at night, comes to Jesus’ defense. He reminds his fellow Pharisees that their own law establishes the guilt of a man only after first giving him a hearing and allowing him to defend himself. In frustration they reply to Nicodemus, **“You aren’t from Galilee too, are you? Investigate carefully and you will see that no prophet comes from Galilee!”** (John 7:52) This response just shows their ignorance of scripture because the prophet Jonah was from Galilee!

So at this point you may be wondering why it is that the religious leaders and those who oppose Jesus cannot get rid of Him. We know that they hate Jesus. They totally reject His claims. They want Him gone. But something is restraining them. That something is the hand of God. Consider the following verse... **So then they tried to seize Jesus, but no one laid a hand on Him, because His time had not yet come.** (John 7:30) For now God is protecting Jesus. God has a sovereign plan and timetable. Now is not the time.

But the religious leaders are not going to give up easily. They know that Jesus is still extremely popular with the people and so they need to be careful how they handle their “Jesus” problem. They decide to change tactics. Their new approach will be to publicly embarrass or discredit Jesus in front of the people.

Their new strategy is implemented the very next day. Jesus is in the temple teaching. **The experts in the law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught committing adultery. They made her stand in front of them and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. In the law Moses commanded us to stone to death such women. What then do You say?”** (John 8:3-5) They have Deuteronomy 22 in mind when they bring this charge. But they have apparently forgotten the part where it says the man involved in the act of adultery is also to be put to death. Well, this is all a setup. It’s a trap! If Jesus rejects the Law and lets her go then His credibility is shot. If He holds to the letter of the Law and says she should be killed then His reputation for compassion comes into question. So how will Jesus respond?

Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with His finger. When they persisted in asking Him, He stood up straight and replied, “Whoever among you is guiltless may be the first to throw a stone at her.” Then He bent over again and wrote on the ground. (John 8:6-8) We are not told what Jesus writes. There have been a lot of conjectures. Whatever it is or whoever’s name it is that Jesus writes down, well let’s just say that it strikes a nerve with these men. One by one all of the woman’s accusers file out leaving Jesus and the woman standing in the courtyard alone.

With her accusers gone... **Jesus stood up straight and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?” She replied, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “I do not condemn you either. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.”** (John 8:10-11)

Later that same day Jesus is back teaching in the temple. **Then Jesus spoke out again, “I am the light of the world. The one who follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”** (John 8:12) Jesus’ statement here is a direct claim to be the Messiah and here’s why: Isaiah 42 refers to the Messiah as God’s chosen servant, one whom God will send to His people. This servant will bring the blessing of salvation and will be “a light for the nations to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (Isaiah 42:6-7). This description is repeated later in Isaiah 49 when God declares that His servant will be “a light for the nations that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6). Then Isaiah 50, 51, 58, 59 and 60 are filled with the imagery of light with the message of salvation that God will send to Israel and the nations. So, light represents salvation. Jesus has come as their Messiah, to save them!

The Pharisees object to Jesus’ claim and there is an argument back and forth between them. **Jesus replied, “You people are from below; I am from above. You people are from this world; I am not from this world. Thus I told you that you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”** (John 8:23-24) It’s no surprise that the Jewish leaders don’t agree with Jesus.

They ask Him, **“Who are You?”** (John 8:25). Jesus’ answer is basically, “I’ve already told you who I am.”

Let’s stop right here for a moment and recall some of Jesus’ statements regarding who He is. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 that He is the One who provides spiritual life, eternal life. Jesus claimed to be equal with God in John 5. This is the reason the Jewish leaders initially wanted to kill Him. In John 6 Jesus said that He was the bread of life, bread that came down from heaven to satisfy spiritual hunger. Now, here in the temple Jesus has just claimed to be the light of the world, an obvious messianic

reference from the prophet Isaiah. So what is it that the Jewish leaders don't understand? Jesus has already told them who He is. They just do NOT believe Him.

The conversation grows more heated between Jesus and the religious leaders. Both parties claim God to be their Father and both say they are on God's side. But Jesus tells the leaders... **"If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I have come from God and am now here... You people are from your father, the devil, and you want to do what your father desires... he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I am telling you the truth, you do not believe Me... The one who belongs to God listens and responds to God's words. You don't listen and respond, because you don't belong to God."** John 8:42-47. Jesus is being brutally honest here and holding nothing back.

Things finally reach their boiling point when Jesus says, **"I tell you the solemn truth, if anyone obeys My teaching, he will never see death."** (John 8:51) The leaders then ask Jesus, **"You aren't greater than our father Abraham who died, are You? And the prophets died too! Who do You claim to be?"** (John 8:53) Jesus tells them, in essence, "I am the very fulfillment of God's covenant promise to Abraham. He looked forward to My coming!" Then Jesus says this, **"I tell you the solemn truth, before Abraham came into existence, I am!"** John 8:58. Jesus attaches Himself to the name of God revealed to Moses from the burning bush in Exodus 3 – **I AM that I AM**. Here Jesus is clearly claiming to be God. This is precisely the way that the Pharisees understand what Jesus just said.

Their reaction to what they perceive to be a blasphemous statement by Jesus is one of total outrage. Right there in the temple complex they attempt to kill Jesus. **Then they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out from the temple area.** (John 8:59)