

INTRODUCTION

Life is full of impossible situations. And everyone has different advice to pass on to you during tough times. Someone has said the best way to deal with your problems is to laugh at them. But someone else said that laughing at your problems is like changing a baby's diaper. It doesn't fix the problem permanently; it just makes it more bearable for a while.

Recently someone sent me an email that contained "Cowboy Wisdom." Here are some pearls of wisdom from the perspective of a cowboy:

1. Never slap a man who's chewin' tobacco.
2. Lettin' the cat outta the bag is a whole lot easier than puttin' it back in.
3. Never kick a cow chip on a hot day.
4. If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is stop diggin'.
5. Don't ever squat with your spurs on.
6. Never miss a good chance to shut up.
7. Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.
8. There's two theories to arguin' with a woman. Neither one works.

There's something better than laughing at your problems, or applying cowboy wisdom. When you introduce the Jesus factor into your impossibility, He transforms your impossibility into a possibility. When we come to the eighth chapter of Mark, Jesus has encounters with three different groups in a single day. First, He has to deal with 4,000 hungry Gentiles; then He confronts some skeptical Jewish Pharisees. Finally, He has to deal with the spiritual dullness of His disciples. There is a measure of impossibility in each encounter.

Mark 8:1-10. "During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, 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. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.' His disciples answered, 'But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?' 'How many loaves do you have?' Jesus asked. 'Seven,' they replied. He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so. They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. About four thousand men were present. And having sent them away, he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha."

To be able to trace the journey Jesus followed on this day, it's important to understand the geography of this part of the world. The Sea of Galilee is a freshwater lake shaped like a harp, thus it was given the name Lake Gennesaret, which is the Hebrew word for "harp." Jesus began his day on the Eastern side of the Sea of Galilee in the Decapolis area. These were ten Roman cities; it was Gentile territory. Then He and His disciples made the seven-mile journey across the lake to an area near Magdal, the home of Mary Magdalene. For many centuries, the location of Dalmanutha

was unknown, but excavations over the past five years have uncovered evidence that Dalmanutha was a large fishing village beside Magdal. We stood on the very excavation in progress a couple of weeks ago.

Then after an unpleasant encounter with the Pharisees, they get back on the boat and head to the northern part of the lake to the town of Bethsaida. With that introduction, let's learn three lessons from the three different encounters of Jesus that day.

1. LIKE THE 4,000, PEOPLE STILL SUFFER FROM SPIRITUAL HUNGER

You may be a little confused thinking, "Wait, Pastor, didn't we just read about Jesus feeding the multitude in Mark 6?" You're right. Last fall I taught a message called *The Miracle of Minnows and Muffins*. But this is a different miracle. In Mark 6, Jesus fed 5,000 hungry Jews people with five loaves and two fishes supplied by an unnamed boy. There were twelve baskets of leftovers. In this miracle, Jesus fed 4,000 hungry Gentiles. And there were seven loaves and a few fish—and no little boy. After the all-you-can-eat buffet, there were seven baskets of leftovers.

The truth we learn is that these people weren't just physically hungry. They were following Jesus because they possessed a spiritual hunger. So where did this mob come from? Why had they been following Jesus around the countryside for three days?

I think we can find the answer if we look back to Mark 5 and the poor man who was tormented by a legion of demons. Jesus cast the demons out into a herd of swine. This was in the same place, because pigs weren't allowed on the Jewish side of the lake. The Bible says this man went to all the cities of the Decapolis telling people how Jesus had changed his life. These people had known this man as a maniac who didn't wear clothes, lived among the tombs, cut himself, and couldn't be restrained with chains. They saw the amazing transformation, and they said, "I want what that man has!" They had a voracious spiritual hunger.

The same can be said of people today. God created us as body, soul, and spirit. With your body, you are connected to the world beneath you and you have physical appetites. With your soul, you are connected to the world of people around you and you have emotional, psychological, and social needs. All of God's animals have bodies and souls but we are the only ones in His creation who have a spirit. That's why you never see your dog or cat coming to church with you; they don't have a spirit. They don't have any knowledge of God. The Bible says in Genesis 2:7 that God breathed into man the breath, the spirit, of life. And from that day until now, humanity has been trying to satisfy this spiritual hunger.

It's sad to see how people try to satisfy their spiritual hunger. You might remember a new-age guru by the name James Arthur Ray. He wrote a book entitled *Harmonic Wealth*, which is just a lot of new age gobbledygook. He wasn't well known until he appeared on the Oprah show, and she enthusiastically endorsed James Arthur Ray.

With her promotion, he soon became a multi-millionaire and started leading spiritual retreats in which people would shave their heads and fast for 36 hours in the desert. The climax of the spiritual retreat was to spend time in the sweat lodge. On October 8, 2009, 55 of his followers,

each of whom had paid \$10,000, you do the math, entered a sweat lodge where the temperature rose to almost 200 degrees. Ray had told them they would feel like they were dying, but they were really being born again.

That day, three people really did die, and nineteen people were hospitalized. All of them were traumatized. One woman who died was Liz Neuman who had spent over \$100,000 to attend numerous James Ray gatherings. He was convicted of negligent homicide and is now out of jail after serving only 20 months. Once again, he is peddling his New Age babble—but this time without the sweat lodges.

It breaks my heart to see how people are searching, searching, searching for some kind of spiritual truth to fill this gnawing emptiness inside.

Life Lesson: Only Jesus can satisfy your deepest needs

Only Jesus can fill this God-shaped hole in your heart. Anything else is like trying to put a square peg in a round hole. There's a commercial that says, "Snickers really satisfies." Don't believe it. I tried eating a Snickers and I discovered that eating one just makes you want to eat another one!

We have physical needs, social and emotional needs, but our greatest need to fill this sense of spiritual hunger. If you are hungry, you can eat bread and be satisfied for a few hours and then you get hungry again. But Jesus can fill a spiritual need that will satisfy you for eternity.

When Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread, He said to Satan, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4) In John 6:35 Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry again." These 4,000 Gentiles would need bread again. But those who placed their faith in Jesus were satisfied for all eternity. Have you received the Bread of Life?

Now let's read about the second encounter of Jesus.

Mark 8:11-13. "The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. 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.' Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side."

The next lesson we learn is:

2. LIKE THE PHARISEES, PEOPLE STILL STUMBLE FROM SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

When Jesus arrived back on the western shore of the lake, there were some Jewish religious leaders who wanted to test Him. They demanded He perform a magic trick to prove His Divinity. Like in the passage last week, Jesus sighed deeply. Jesus sighed out of compassion just before he healed the deaf man. But this was more of a sigh of frustration. These religious leaders demonstrated the attitude; "I'll believe it when I see it."

We still have people around like that today. I call them "miracle mongers." They are begging God for some kind of sign. I was driving down the interstate a few months ago and I saw a billboard with a message from God that said, "Well, you did ask for a sign." We live by faith, not by signs!

I can remember talking to a pastor friend in Alabama years ago. He and his wife were having trouble getting along. In the conversation, he told me how he knew that he was supposed to marry her. When they were dating, one night he was alone praying and he asked God for a sign and if he was supposed to marry her. He said he looked up and saw a falling star. I rolled my eyes and told him that when you live by that stars, that's called astrology, not faith!

Life Lesson: Real faith never demands a sign; it always takes God at His word.

Do you remember the lady in Florida who cooked a grilled cheese sandwich and when she took it out of the frying pan, she saw the face of Mary in the bread? In 2004, she auctioned it on eBay. An online casino called Golden Palace bought it for \$28,000.

There's a water stain on a toilet in Mexico City that people claim looks like a blurry vision of Jesus. So many miracle mongers have shown up that the city had to close the toilet because thousands of people had made it into a shrine, laying flowers and gifts on the floor.

If Jesus had performed a miracle for those Pharisees, they still wouldn't have believed, because their eyes were blinded to the truth of God. Their ears were closed to the Word of God. Miracles don't produce faith.

What if we started seeing supernatural miracles occur here every Sunday morning, do you think more people would believe? Let's imagine, for instance, that every Sunday God gave me the ability to levitate and float around this room while I preached. We'd have bigger crowds but we wouldn't have more believers.

That's what Jesus taught in Luke 16. He told the story of Lazarus and the rich man. They both died and Lazarus went to heaven and the rich man found himself in fiery torment in Hades. He could see Lazarus in heaven with Abraham, so he called out and said, "Father Abraham, please send Lazarus to my home to warn my five brothers so that they will not come to this place." I've often said his statement proves people in hell are more burdened for lost people than we are. Abraham said, "Sorry, I can't do that." The rich man was persistent. He said, "But Father Abraham, I just KNOW if someone came back from the dead to warn them, they would see that miracle and they would repent!" Listen carefully to the words Jesus spoke next because it applied to the sign-seekers today. He said, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, [meaning if they don't believe the Bible] they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." (Luke 16:31)

So, if you don't get faith from miracles, where does it come from? It comes from the Word of God. The Bible says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17) Let me give you the Word of Christ that will produce faith: For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have

eternal life.” (John 3:16) Do you believe that? Faith in the Word of God and the God of the Word is the only currency that is accepted in heaven.

So Jesus and the Disciples got back in the boat and headed north. But they soon faced a third crisis. They worried because they didn’t have enough bread.

Mark 8:14-21. “The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. ‘Be careful,’ Jesus warned them. ‘Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.’ They discussed this with one another and said, ‘It is because we have no bread.’ Aware 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? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?’ ‘Twelve,’ they replied. ‘And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?’ They answered, ‘Seven.’ He said to them, “Do you still not understand?””

3. LIKE THE DISCIPLES, PEOPLE STILL STRUGGLE WITH SPIRITUAL IGNORANCE

These were the guys who had been with Jesus through numerous miracles, and they were worried about not having enough food. How clueless can they be? Jesus told them that He fed 9,000 people with a few loaves and fish and had nineteen baskets of leftovers. When He asked, “Do you still not understand?” I believe the disciples shook their heads!

Life Lesson: The symptoms of spiritual ignorance are forgetfulness and worry.

Jesus said, “Don’t you remember what I just did?” The disciples were guilty of spiritual amnesia. That is a condition that afflicts us when we face an impossible situation and we start wringing our hands worrying about what’s going to happen. Jesus says, “Don’t you remember how I have always provided for you? Don’t worry.”

The Bible says, “Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” (Psalm 103:2-5)

God is telling us: Don’t FORGET what I’ve done for you in the past, and don’t WORRY! We should all have the memory of an elephant when it comes to the blessings of God. A circus owner made money on his elephant by betting people that they couldn’t get the elephant to jump off the ground with all four feet. The people paid \$10 to try, and they would be paid \$1,000 if the elephant jumped. He made money for years because elephants don’t jump. One day in Nebraska an old farmer walked up to the elephant with a pitchfork and then walked beside the elephant and jabbed the pitchfork into his side. That elephant jumped.

So the elephant's owner simply changed the wager. He knew elephants only shake their heads from side to side, but they never nod. So for several years he made lots of cash as people paid \$10 to try to get the elephant to nod. One day they returned to the same Nebraska town. The same farmer walked up to the elephant holding a pitchfork. The farmer said to the elephant, "Remember me?" The elephant nodded. We should be like an elephant when it comes to the blessings of God: Don't forget, and don't worry!

CONCLUSION

Three groups and three impossibilities. The Gentiles were hungry. It's impossible for one man to feed all of them. The Pharisees were spiritually blind; they refused to open their eyes. The disciples spent time with Jesus, and saw His miracles, but yet they were clueless. That seems impossible.

What is your impossible situation? Turn it over to Jesus. In Matthew, Jesus told the disciples, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20)

E.M. Bounds was a man of great faith and prayer. He wrote: "Faith does the impossible because it brings God to undertake for us, and nothing is impossible with God."

Let's go back to the Pharisees for a moment. They demanded a sign. In Mark's account, Jesus just told them no sign would be given. But in both Matthew and Luke, they record the full response of Jesus. Let's read Matthew's account: "Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, 'Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.' He answered, 'A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'" (Matthew 12:38-41)

You may be familiar with the comedian Bill Engvall. He has made a good living from pointing out foolish questions that demonstrate the person asking the question deserves to wear a sign that says, "Not too smart." For instance he says he and his wife were moving from Texas to California so they were loading a U-Haul truck in front of his house. A neighbor stopped by and asked, "Hey, are you moving?" Bill replied, "Nope. We just pack our stuff up every couple of weeks to see how many boxes it takes. Here's your sign." Or the time he drove into a service station with a flat tire. The attendant came out and said, "Got a flat tire there?" Bill said, "Nope. While I was driving around these other three tires just swelled up on me. Here's your sign."

Jesus must have looked at the Pharisees and thought, "You've seen my miracles. You've heard my teaching, but you still don't believe? Here's your sign. It's the sign of Jonah."

I once asked a group of college students, "What is the sign of Jonah?" One kid answered, "A fish." I said, "Here's your sign." No, I didn't, but I wanted to. We don't have to wonder what the sign of Jonah is because Jesus told us. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a fish, Jesus will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth—a tomb. Just as Jonah showed

up alive on the beach near Nineveh, Jesus was going to walk out of the grave alive forevermore. Here's your sign.

The single miracle of Jesus that you **MUST** believe to be saved is His resurrection. The Bible says, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9) Why didn't the Bible say you must believe in the feeding of the 5,000 or the feeding of the 4,000, or that Jesus walked on water? It's because the resurrection of Jesus proves He is who He claimed to be, the Son of the Living God, alive forevermore.

Two weeks from today, we'll celebrate Easter. The day begins with a sunrise service at 7:00 a.m. in the Cathedral of the Pines cemetery. A few days ago I had a reporter ask my why we hold the service there instead of the Rose Garden, or a beautiful park. I said, "We celebrate the resurrection of Jesus in a cemetery because for 364 days a year, it is a place of sorrow and tears. But on one morning a year, we laugh in the face of death because Jesus has conquered death and the grave.

Here's your sign: Because He lives I can face tomorrow. Because He lives all fear is gone. Because I know He holds my future and life is worth the living **JUST BECAUSE** He lives.

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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