

Mark 8

An Outline

- I. Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand (8:1-13)
- II. The Yeast of the Pharisees and Herod (8:14-21)
- III. Jesus Heals a Blind Man in Bethsaida (8:22-26)
- IV. Peter Declares that Jesus is the Messiah (8:26-30)
- V. Jesus Predicts His Death (8:31-33)
- VI. The Way of the Cross (8:34-38)

Issues for Discussion

1. **Where can we get enough food?! (Mark 8:1-13)** – Had it not been only a little time since Jesus miraculously fed some twenty thousand people? (Mark 6:30-44) How could they ask this question? Then, when Jesus asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” (Mark 6:38), would they not have sensed a *déjà vu*? I believe the key is in Mark 6:52, where we read that the disciples “had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.” Jesus would confirm this lack of understanding in Mark 8:17-18,21:

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? Do you still not understand?”

Jesus’s words here should remind us about what He said about “those on the outside” in Mark 4:12, where He cited Isaiah 6:9-10, referring to the unbelieving remnant of Israel. They would be ever seeing but not perceiving, ever hearing but not understanding. In other words, the disciples’ failure to understand was also a failure to believe. This lack of understanding would pretty much persist until after the resurrection, when we read, “Then he [Jesus] opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). I do not think that the disciples had yet the Spirit-given frame of mind to either understand or truly believe. Rather than saying, “Do you still not understand?” Jesus could just as well have said, “Do you still have no faith?” (cf. Mark 4:40).

Amazingly, Jesus’s many miracles would not by themselves produce saving faith, either in the people or in the disciples. Such faith would not come except “through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). Even Peter’s famed confession was not spoken out of his own faith, as he was merely a vehicle through whom God the Father spoke (Matthew 16:17). This is clearly demonstrated on the same occasion when Peter was thereafter used by Satan (Matthew 16:22-23). This would also explain how this same Peter, who had such an amazing witness here, could later, three times with oaths, deny even knowing Him (Mark 14:66-72). For the disciples, and so with us, **saving** faith comes by effective hearing, and effective hearing

comes by the decree (i.e. sovereign will, divine choosing or drawing) of God –(Romans 10:17 *KJV*). In other words, we are able to CHOOSE God because He first CHOSE us, for “those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified...” And as certain as He saved us, He will glorify us: “those he justified, He also glorified (a proleptic aorist tense, showing a future event expressed in the past tense to signify its absolute certainty).” The only way that we are able to understand and believe spiritual truth, such as the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is that the Spirit enables us to do so (1 Corinthians 2:14). It is not because of our free will but because of God’s sovereign choice that we are saved: “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:30). Let us understand, just like the disciples, in ourselves we too have “no faith,” for we were “**dead** in our trespasses and sins” and “**by nature** deserving of wrath” (Ephesians 2:1-3). NONE of us by our free will would have chosen God (Romans 3:11). We would ALL have rejected Him (Romans 3:12; Isaiah 53:6). That is why apart from God’s saving grace, working through the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), enabled by the Holy Spirit, we would all remain justly condemned.

So let us not be too hard on the disciples. They are not given as a counter model for us to pat ourselves on the back because we believed and they did not. They were the best and most faithful representatives of their time, just as Adam and Eve were such of their time, and even they required Jesus to open their minds and the Holy Spirit to open their hearts so that they might understand and believe. Therefore, we have nothing in which to boast with respect to our salvation except this: to boast in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:31), who is both the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2 *ESV*).

2. **“How many loaves do you have?” (Mark 8:5)** – John’s Gospel records that Jesus already knew how He would feed the five thousand, but He asked the disciples in order to test them (John 6:6). We likely have the same scenario here, so we can ask, ‘What was Jesus trying to show?’ for it seems obvious that the disciples, as before, failed the test. Jesus was showing the disciples’ lack of understanding and faith even after experiencing the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand.

He asked about how much food they had because He wanted to demonstrate that there was no food to be found that could feed all the people. Remember, at the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus sent them out to ascertain how much food could be found (Mark 6:38). He did it again at the feeding of the four thousand. I do not think this was to give a lesson on giving to God, so that God would only do the miraculous when we bring Him an offering. That would not come from a natural reading of the text. It would be reading something foreign to the passage. The context does not support it. On the other hand, to simply see this as a way to show that there was really not enough food to feed the thousands of people fits the context and magnifies the power of God and expresses the greatness of the miracle.

I encourage my fellow ministers not to use this passage to teach on “tithing,” for it is bad hermeneutics (i.e. the science of explaining the meaning of Scripture) and may encourage others to use bad hermeneutics when interpreting Scripture.

But how profound it is that Jesus takes such pains, and often at that, to document the genuineness and greatness of the miracles of God. Mark notes that the people ate and were satisfied (Mark 8:8, “satiated,” “filled” - this word is used in Revelation 19:21 of birds gorging on

the flesh of generals). In other words, God fully met the need. There's no half-miracle here. No one was left wanting more bread or more fish. Seven basketfuls were left over (Mark 8:8), which also signified that the people ate as much as they wanted. God's miracles are always perfect and exceed expectations.

3. **"They asked him for a sign from heaven" (Mark 8:11)** – How amazing is this?! Jesus just fed four thousand men (not including women and children) from just seven loaves and a few fish, and they want another sign? This was the same reaction by the unbelieving Jews to the feeding of the five thousand: "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you?" (John 6:30). They wanted Him to do it again and to keep doing it ("always give us this bread" in John 6:34). Jesus said of these people: "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill" (John 6:26). In other words, they loved the miracles but refused the message. They wanted Manna from God but rejected the Man of God (John 6:27-29).

The message for us is not much different than what it was for the Jews in Jesus's day. Do we worship God for God or for His benefits? What if God did not bless you day after day, would you stop believing, worshiping and serving Him? Do you delight in Jesus or in what you can get from Him? What if Jesus asked you to do something hard or seeming absurd, as He did the Jews of His day – He said that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood (cf. John 6:52-60) – would you turn away as they did (John 6:66)?

Jesus told the Pharisees, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it" (Mark 8:12). Jesus had given them many signs, but they wanted still more. These very Pharisees had attributed the miraculous works of the Spirit to the devil (Mark 3:22). Giving more signs would do nothing for them. In the parallel passage in Matthew, Jesus added, "A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah" (Matthew 16:4). The sign of Jonah represented Jesus's death, burial and resurrection. It would be a final sign, confirming salvation for those who would believe and condemnation for those who refused to believe.

4. **"Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod" (Mark 8:14-21)** – Mark tells us that the disciples forgot to bring more bread for their trip. Jesus asked them to beware of the "yeast" of the Pharisees, the religious leadership, and Herod, the civil leadership. Matthew's Gospel includes the Sadducees. Yeast is what makes bread rise and a little of it has a pervasive effect. Jesus never spoke idly or without purpose. So here, He used "yeast" with purpose, likely to test His disciples. Would they think that He was referring to the fact that they forgot to bring bread or would they understand that He was merely using bread as a metaphor for the teaching of the Pharisees and Herod (Matthew 16:12). It would be the former. They had not understood the meaning of what Jesus did in the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand. Jesus pointed out the amount of the leftovers, demonstrating that He provided more than enough for the needs of the thousands of people. Why then would He be concerned about the disciples not bringing more bread for their small party to eat? Again, this passage is given to show that even Jesus's disciples did not understand or fully believe in Him.
5. **"I see people; they look like trees walking around" (Mark 8:22-26)** – Some use this passage to defend faith healers, whose healing is less than perfect. For example, the pastor of my last

church annually invited a faith healer from IHOP (not the Pancake House but International House of Prayer) to conduct a healing service. He himself claimed to have had his rotator cuff healed by this faith healer. It would be just six months or so after this that I heard the pastor complain again about the pain in his rotator cuff. I immediately asked him, "Weren't you healed of this?" I can appreciate the pastor's honesty when he responded that he did not know what happened. Even so, this pastor allowed several "so called" prophets to speak prophecies from his pulpit that would later be proven false. I found this both disturbing and irresponsible, but this church is notorious for such a cavalier approach to prophecy, healing and all manner of spiritual gifts. That was one of the reasons I felt I had to leave.

Coming back to the text, it was not that Jesus's healing was imperfect or that He had to do a do over. No, Jesus never did imperfect miracles. In this instance, Jesus performed two miracles. The first was the opening of the man's eyes so that he could see. The second was the opening of the man's understanding so that he could understand what he was seeing. What is more, it is not as though there was a great gap of time between the first miracle and the next. Again, Jesus told the healed man not to go into the village to spread news of his healing. Jesus still wanted to keep a low profile because His time had not yet come.

6. **"You are the Messiah" ... "Get behind me Satan" (Mark 8:27-33)** – Jesus ascertained from His disciples that the people were coming to the wrong conclusions about Him, thinking He was John the Baptist raised back to life or Elijah or one of the prophets. Peter stepped forward and gave the correct answer: "You are the Messiah." In Matthew 16, Jesus added that this was not Peter's words but God the Father speaking through him. Also, this was not the first and would not be the last such confession. Recall, the disciples also made such a confession in Matthew 14:33 at the occasion of Jesus's walking on the water. While much is made of Peter's confession, we have to remember that just a few moments later, Jesus would be rebuking Him for being an agent of Satan to deter Him from fulfilling the will of God (Mark 8:33). Some have tried to claim that this was the pivotal occasion of Peter's conversion, while others think it was Luke 5:8 when Jesus gave him a great catch of fish; however, both of these precede Peter's thrice denial of Christ, which he did with oaths, at the occasion of Jesus's trial and crucifixion (Mark 14:56-71). While the exact moment of the conversion of the disciples is unclear, I believe that whenever it was, it had to have been produced by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5 – "He saved us though the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."), and the Holy Spirit was not given until after the resurrection.
7. **"Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me" (Mark 8:34)** – Jesus spoke these words both to His disciples and to the crowds. Luke 9:23 records, "Then He said to them *all*." The word "whoever" suggests that Jesus meant for His call not to be limited but to be universal, not just to be followed by His disciples then but to be followed by believers throughout the ages. For all of the Twelve and many other disciples of that time, Jesus's words would not be a metaphor for a devoted but albeit easy, safe and prosperous life. It would mean suffering and death, where the cross was not a symbolic metaphor but a literal reality. Jesus encouraged this level of devotion by showing the greater worth of the eternal to the temporal, of life in heaven to life on earth, of preserving one's soul to preserving one's worldly goods. He added that whoever would be ashamed of Christ in this life, Christ would be ashamed of them when He came in His Father's glory with the holy angels. Paul would later echo this far greater worth of Christ in passages like Romans 8:18 and Philipians 3:7-9.