

The Gospel According to Mark

Lesson 7

Mark 8:1 – Mark 9:1

Weeks before the following event, the Lord fed five-thousand men at one time on the hillside of the Sea of Galilee. In addition to the five-thousand men, Jesus also fed their wives and children. Once again the Lord is teaching the multitude in a secluded place and the crowd is hungry.

The hungry crowd

Mark 8: 1 In those days again, when there was a great multitude and they had nothing to eat, He called His disciples and said to them, **2**"I feel compassion for the multitude because they have remained with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat; **3**and if I send them away hungry to their home, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a distance."

The draw of the Lord was amazing. For three days the people had been with Him in the secluded area and any food they might have brought with them was surely gone by now. The people were hungry and the Lord did not dare send them home with empty stomachs. Before, when Jesus fed the multitude with five loaves and two fishes, the people were clustered in groups of fifty and one-hundred on the green grass of the hillside. It was probably the spring of the year. It is quite possible that they are now in the midst of the heat of summer because the Lord is concerned about their fainting on their way home.

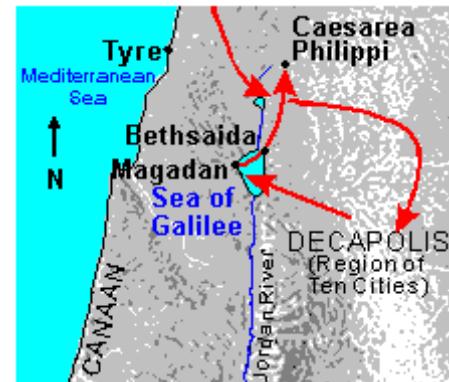
Feeding the four thousand

Mark 8: 4 And His disciples answered Him, "Where will anyone be able to *find enough to satisfy these men with bread here in a desolate place?*" **5** And He was asking them, **"How many loaves do you have?"** And they said, "Seven." **6** And He directed the multitude to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the multitude. **7** They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well. **8** And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces. **9** And about four thousand were *there*; and He sent them away.

The details of this second feeding are different from the first. Besides the number of loaves of bread, the unknown number of fish, and the seven baskets of food that were collected, the number of people in the multitude is only four thousand. This number includes men, women, and children, whereas the first feeding of the multitude counted only the men. It is a clear indication that the onslaught of the message of the Pharisees and scribes was working since the crowds were diminishing in number.

The argumentative Pharisees in Dalmanutha

Mark 8: 10 And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples, and came to the district of Dalmanutha. **11** And the Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. **12** And sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, **"Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation."**



Dalmanutha is the Greek name for the city of Magadan on the western edge of the Sea of Galilee. In Magadan, the Pharisees, as well as the Herodians who have joined them in their ambition to stop the ministry of Jesus, begin to question Him. The Matthew text adds the Sadducees to this group. As an argument, they sought a sign from heaven to prove His authority from God. Had they been blind to all the miracles He had performed in the past two and a half years? Had they ignored the feeding of the multitudes? Had they not spoken with the synagogue official whose daughter was raised from the dead? Now they ask for a sign from heaven. Were not all the miracles, in fact, signs from heaven? The deep sigh of Jesus came from the depth of His being. He was not going to give them any other signs other than what He did in His normal ministry.

The leaven of the Pharisees and Herod

Mark 8: 13 And leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side. **14** And they had forgotten to take bread; and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. **15** And He was giving orders to them, saying, **"Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."**

This time the seven baskets of leftover food were not put in the boats for the journey across the Sea of Galilee. One loaf of bread would not be enough to feed those who constantly accompanied Jesus. Jesus knew what they were thinking, but He had an important message to deliver to them about the Pharisees and the followers of Herod.

The warning of the Lord is **"Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."** Leaven is used here by the Lord in the same sense that Paul used the word in 1 Cor. 5:6.

"Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?"

Leaven always represents sin and the Pharisees and Herodians were set in their sinful ways. Just a little leaven would "leaven" the entire lump of dough. All the disciples were raised in the religious world of the Pharisees as well as the political world of Herod. Jesus was concerned that the sinful influence of the Pharisees and Herodians would permeate the lives of the disciples, nullifying what they had learned from the Lord. The Lord says to watch out for the leaven or bad politics of Herod. He

also says to watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees which includes both bad politics and bad theology.

Not enough bread

Mark 8: 16 And they began to discuss with one another *the fact* that they had no bread. **17** And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you discuss *the fact* that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? **18** HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR? And do you not remember, **19** when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." **20** "And when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him, "Seven." **21** And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

The disciples in the boat were oblivious to the words of the Lord concerning the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod; they were concerned only about where they would find their next meal. Jesus had just fed four thousand people with seven loaves of bread, and they were worried about how they would feed a couple of dozen people with one loaf of bread. Jesus' words in this passage show his frustration with His band of disciples. "Do you not see ...? Do you not hear...? Do you not remember ...?" The minds of the disciples were so preoccupied with the temporary needs of the moment that they could not catch a glimpse of the greater, eternal truths of God. The same Lord who fed the five thousand, and later the four thousand, with nothing more than a few loaves of bread and a few fish, could do the same for this little band of followers. Yet they were hungry and their physical need tainted their ability to see the wonderful provisions of the Lord.

Healing the blind man

Mark 8: 22 And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Him, and entreated Him to touch him. **23** And taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes, and laying His hands upon him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?" **24** And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I am seeing *them* like trees, walking about." **25** Then again He laid His hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly. **26** And He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."

About seven miles across the Sea of Galilee, the boats arrived once again at Bethsaida where Jesus would give sight to a blind man. The circumstances of this healing are puzzling. Jesus led the blind man out of the village. His healing happened in seclusion, not among the multitudes. In this passage we find the only record where Jesus partially healed someone and then completely healed him in a second act of mercy. It is a mystery that can be answered only through speculation. None of the Gospel writers reveal any reason for this gradual healing. After the man was completely healed, Jesus did not allow him to return to the town. Jesus' Galilean ministry is coming to a close and He is on His way to Caesarea Philippi. The

man could go home, but not by way of the village. Most likely, Jesus did not want the multitudes from Bethsaida to follow Him on His journey.

Jesus begins to teach about His coming death

Mark 8: ²⁷And Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸And they told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets." ²⁹And He *continued* by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "Thou art the Christ." ³⁰And He warned them to tell no one about Him. ³¹And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ^{32a}And He was stating the matter plainly.

Caesarea Philippi stood on the slopes of Mount Hermon. It was controlled by Herod Philip, not Herod Antipas who had beheaded John the Baptist. At this northern location, Jesus was out of the reach of the Pharisees and Sadducees as well as the political power of the Herodians. In Caesarea Philippi, Jesus could begin teaching His disciples about His coming death, hiding none of the details from them. He was speaking to His inner circle when He asked them not to tell anyone about Him in Caesarea. He wanted time to instruct them about the events of the next six months without the distraction of people seeking a miracle or healing. In other words, the Lord wanted private time to instruct His closest followers.

Peter rebukes Jesus

Mark 8: ^{32b}And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ³³But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Somehow, Peter must have determined that it was his responsibility to stop the Lord from teaching such pessimistic lessons about the future. Peter probably stood up and turned the Lord around to rebuke Him. Notice that Jesus turned back to the disciples and then rebuked Peter, calling him Satan. Jesus did not mean that he was the real Satan. Peter was being selfish, not wanting the Lord to complete His mission on earth. Peter wanted their lives to continue just as they were, to go on forever, if it were possible. Jesus had heard words like this before from Satan himself after the forty days in the wilderness three years before. Satan was not interested in the things of God. Likewise, Peter did not care about God's plan for the Lord. From here on out, the road would be difficult for those who wanted to follow Jesus. Each one of them would have to take up his cross to follow the Lord.

Take up the cross

Mark 8: ³⁴And He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ³⁵"For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it. ³⁶"For what does it profit

a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? ³⁷"For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

A crowd had gathered with the disciples around Jesus, and, as was the Lord's custom, Jesus began to teach them His profound view of life and death. The shadow of the cross was near the Lord, and the followers there that day would also face their own crosses. Peter was so short sighted that he thought the Lord would be with them forever, that the followers of the Lord could overtake the world. But the Lord's message was different from Peter's; we have to lose this world to gain eternity with the Lord. Yes, life with the Lord could go on forever, but not in the temporal bodies of this life. The road ahead would be difficult for the Lord's followers, especially in the coming months and years. They could not be ashamed of the Lord at any point for any reason at all. If they were ashamed, then when it was time for the Lord to come and get them, accompanied by His holy angels, He would cast them into eternal torment. Some believe that verse 38 is a direct reference to the Second Coming of the Lord. In this passage, it seems more logical that the Lord is speaking about the time of death that each person must face as he transcends from this life to the next.

The coming of the kingdom of God

Mark 9: ¹And He was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

The kingdom of God had been the central theme of the Lord's preaching. Remember His words in Mark 1:14-15.

Mark 1:14-15 And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

The kingdom of God was near to each of them. But He was not speaking of a kingdom bound by geographical lines, such as Israel or the Holy Land or even the Temple. Neither was He speaking of the political governments of the world or a nation, or even the Sanhedrin. He was not speaking of a group of people such as His disciples or the church. The kingdom of God is God's rule as sovereign Lord of all. As Lord, His kingdom transcends all government lines, all religious entities, and all peoples and tongues. The kingdom of God will look unimpressive at the beginning but will grow into the largest kingdom of the universe. Jesus taught about this kingdom in Mark 4:30-32.

Mark 4:30-32 And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? ³¹*It is* like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, ³²yet when it is sown, grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE."

The people of the earth do not build the kingdom of God; it is established by the work of God alone. Because people can do nothing to help establish the kingdom of God, what should be their response to the Lord's message about the kingdom? Mark 1:14-15 tells us the first thing to do; we should repent and believe in the gospel message of the kingdom. Mark 10:14 tells us to enter the kingdom of God like a little child.

Mark 10:14 But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Jesus invited everyone to be part of His kingdom. He invited them to open their lives to God and put their trust in Him as their Savior, Messiah, Healer, and Lord. He did not restrict His invitation to the respectable people, the wealthy or powerful, but He made sure everyone, from the highways and byways of life knew about His offer. The promise of His kingdom would be inaugurated with His sacrifice and His substitution for all sins on the cross. A few of those in His presence that day would see death before He died on the cross six months later, but the majority would see His crucifixion, His burial, His resurrection, and His ascension into Heaven.