

Testing, Testing, 1-2-3

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Date: 08 February 2026

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[0:00] Last time we were exploring the feeding of the 4,000, and we are just after that in verse 11 down to verse 21.

! And this morning I've entitled this portion of Scripture, Testing, Testing, 1, 2, 3.!

It will make sense, I hope, as we go throughout. Let me pray for a read. Lord, we thank you for your word. Your word endures forever.

Even the earth will pass away, but your word endures forever. And your word is full of life and spirit, living word. And we pray that as your word is read and spoken, that you would speak to us, that you would illuminate this in our hearts.

Your word is powerful. May it not return to you void. It never does. Lord, we thank you for your word this morning. Amen. Amen.

[1:13] Amen. Mark 8, 11. And he left them and went to the boat again and went to the other side.

from him a sign from heaven to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, why does this generation seek a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.

And he left them and got into the boat again and went to the other side. Now, they had forgotten to bring bread and they had only one loaf with them in the boat.

And he cautioned them saying, watch out, beware of the leaving of the Pharisees and the leaving of Herod. And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. Jesus, aware of this, said to them, why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?

Do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? They said to him, twelve. And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? And they said to him, seven. And he said to them, do you not yet understand? This is God's word. Pray that he blesses the reading of it.

[3:02] Well, do you have a friend or a family member or know someone who believes in conspiracies?

If you can't think of anyone, then it's you. I'm only kidding. But we've encountered these people who believe in conspiracies and go on about conspiracies. Some are more outlandish than others, but a common trait that you will find with these kind of people is a kind of blindness to any evidence that you might show them to the contrary. Now, I'm not trying to say anything this morning about conspiracies. I'm just trying to say something about humans. We are not as neutral or open-minded as we'd like to think. Any one of us can close our eyes and our ears to explain away a proof or to deny a truth. It's actually easier to deny a truth than it is to deny ourselves. It's easier to do that.

Easier to ignore a truth than to change. Pride can blind our eyes and unbelief will harden our hearts. Now, part of the reason for this with conspiracy folks and the like, it's not a lack of evidence, but it's a lack of trust. If they don't trust the person, then they don't trust the evidence.

And it doesn't matter how many proofs they're presented with. They will always explain it away.

They might say something like, you would have to do this or that for me to believe you.

But they make the bar so unrealistically high that they're actually saying, nothing will ever make me believe. Have you ever known people like that? Nothing will ever make me believe. You'll encounter people when you try and share the good news, something about the hope of Jesus. And they will come up with all sorts of barriers that they place. And you could take all these barriers down and at the bottom line, they just don't want to believe. They just don't want to believe. In fact, a good question to ask somebody who is asking for this and that and this proof and that proof, who's

struggling to believe, a good question to ask is, if Christianity were true, would you believe it? And incredibly, some people would still say, no, no. They don't want to.

[5:35] And this is what the Pharisees are saying to Jesus when they ask for a sign. And my first point of three points is, hard hearts will always dismiss the signs and demand more. Hard hearts will always dismiss the signs and demand more. Despite all that Jesus has already said and done, to some people, it's never enough. Never. This is as true today as it was back then. People hide behind intellectual arguments and use words like signs as an excuse for unbelief as though there's no evidence for God, which there is. It's not for a lack of reason or evidence that they don't believe in who Jesus is.

It's because their hearts are hard. That's the truth. Don't let yourself ever feel intimidated by the demands of people out there for more evidence. A hard heart will always dismiss the evidence. It's like conspiracy theorists. Nothing you show them will ever be enough. In the book of Acts, you'll remember when Paul was going about, he was going to the synagogue and from their own scriptures, reasoning with them and persuading them that Jesus was the Christ. And yet, do you remember the ones who actually believed him? It was the Bereans. And why? Because they went and checked for themselves.

But the ones who didn't believe didn't even bother to go and check their own scriptures for themselves. That's why they're called the good Bereans, because they actually went and checked. For these Pharisees in this passage, even if Jesus did give them some spectacular sign from heaven, it would not convince them, because their unbelief is due to hard hearts, not a lack of evidence, not a lack of signs.

They could have every sign in the world, and they would still not believe, because their hearts are hard. You see, in verse 11, if you look at verse 11, they weren't seeking a sign because they were sincerely searching. They were seeking a sign so that they could test Jesus. They wanted to test him.

[7:51] Now, do you remember when the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness? Three times he tempted him. Do you remember the middle time was he tempted him to test God? And Jesus said, it is written, you shall not put the Lord your God to test. And this verse that Jesus quoted is from Deuteronomy 6.16, and the full verse is, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test as you tested him at Massa. Do you remember where Massa is?

Do you remember what that account was? Well, let me fill you in. They tested the Lord at Massa in Exodus 17. During the Exodus, in Exodus 16, they grumbled about being hungry, and God gave them manna from heaven every single day, except the Sabbath. They collected manna. God provided manna every single day. And then in Exodus 17, they complained about water, and God gave them water from the rock. But it says they tested God. And it says that they tested God by saying, is the Lord among us or not? That's what they said.

That's what Jesus, when he was tempted to test God by the devil, Jesus quoted that, which was written about this group of people who tested the Lord by saying, is the Lord among us or not? And they said that after seeing all these plagues, after walking through the Red Sea, and as God was giving them bread, literally picking it up, bread from heaven every single day, and still they questioned whether God was among them or not. Do you see how both these groups, these Israelites during the Exodus, seeing these very things before their eyes, and asking, is the Lord among us or not? And these group of Pharisees over here, who are seeing Jesus doing an incredible bread miracle, and still asking the same kind of thing, is he really who he says he is? Is God among us? Is he the Christ? They're testing God.

They're doing it in the same way. One group is literally picking up manna from heaven every day, but still asking if God's among them. And the other group has God in human form before their eyes, feeding thousands, and still they test him for a sign to believe who he really is.

Ah, I don't know if he can believe that unless you give us another sign. How many signs will be enough? Just one more. It seems like in both these accounts, simply seeing signs and wonders will not make everyone a believer.

[10:48] Faith is not just about the eyes, it's about our heart. Many saw and did not believe, and yet some did not see and believed. In fact, this room is full of people who did not see and yet believed. And that's encouraging. It's encouraging to know that our faith is not hindered by not seeing. Your faith is never hindered just because you didn't see something.

In Mark chapter 7, just the previous chapter, the Syrophenician woman had only heard about Jesus. She never saw anything. She only heard about Jesus, yet she had great faith. Greater than these Pharisees who should have known better. The world does not need more signs. It doesn't. That's not the problem.

Don't allow anyone in their stubborn unbelief to make you think that there's a problem with the Word of God. There's no problem with the Word of God. They don't need more signs. There's no problem as if Christianity has no real evidence. Don't make anyone, don't let anyone make you think that, or don't let anyone make you think that your testimony is weak just because they don't believe.

It's a problem with their heart, not a problem with you or the gospel. The reason for unbelief is a hard heart. And it goes back to chapter 4 when Jesus described the different soils. And he says there's a ground that's so hard it will not accept the seed of God's Word. Jesus has been doing things that resemble Yahweh and Exodus, but the Pharisees who say they follow Moses are acting more like their forefathers who rejected Moses and tested God. In Acts chapter 7, Stephen said to them, You stiff-necked people, you stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit.

As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? Now, Jesus sighs deeply at this, and he cautions his disciples against the leaving of the Pharisees and of Herod. Now, the leaving of Herod, the unbelief of Herod has already killed John the Baptist, the final prophet, the one who spoke truth, the one whom he listened to gladly. Yet that little bit of leaving of unbelief in his heart caused him to put to death the last prophet. And the leaving of the Pharisees will soon encourage the people of Israel to start shouting to crucify their Messiah. This shows the horrendous danger of a hard heart.

[13:37] If your heart is hard, you will dismiss every sign, and you will end up wanting to reject the light and crucify the truth. That's what happens when you've got a hard heart. Jesus sighs deeply in his spirit, and he leaves them. And he gets in the boat. Verse 14, the disciples forgot to pack enough bread.

But verse 15, Jesus is still thinking about this unbelief in the Pharisees. If this kind of unbelief grows in your heart, you will end up doing the same as them. You will deny the very truth that came to set you free. Jesus said, watch out. Beware of the leaving of those Pharisees and the leaving of Herod. And so my second point is the leaving of unbelief is more dangerous than we realize. Jesus cautioned them of the dangers of this stubborn, hypocritical, hard-hearted, unbelieving attitude of the Pharisees and of Herod that resulted in leading the people of Israel to condemn the very Messiah who came to save them. If the leaders of the nation still did not believe, despite all the miracles Jesus did, that unbelief would act like yeast among the whole people of Israel. You see how the Pharisees, the leaving of the Pharisees corrupts the whole batch of Israel, and they begin shouting, crucify him. Beware of the leaving of unbelief.

But verse 16, the disciples hear the word leaving, and they think that Jesus is talking about physical bread. And most people reckon that the disciples actually think, and I think this comes from Matthew, they think that Jesus has given them into trouble for not bringing enough bread.

Come on, disciples, why did you not bring enough bread in the boat? Just think about that though. They've just seen Jesus feeding 4,000 plus women and children out of seven loaves. Is bread a problem for Jesus? Is having no bread in the boat really an issue for Jesus? You see, in Mark, in Mark's gospel, Mark records three boat scenes to show us the lack of understanding in the disciples. The first boat scene is back in chapter 4 when they're in the storm, remember that? And Jesus is sleeping, and they didn't understand who Jesus was.

He calmed the storm, and they said, who is this? Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him? And then the second boat scene is in chapter 6. After feeding the 5,000, Jesus walks on water, and he even says, I am. And yet it says they didn't understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. And the third boat scene is in our passage, chapter 8, where Jesus tells

them in the boat to beware of the leaving of the Pharisees and of Herod. And yet when Jesus tells them this, the disciples thought he was talking about bread. They think they're getting a row for not bringing bread. They don't understand. So the first boat scene is, who is this? The second boat scene is, this is who I am. And the third boat scene is, you still don't understand.

[17:22] How can they think that Jesus is bothered about a lack of bread? They've been shown twice how a lack of bread is no issue to Jesus. So Jesus says, are your hearts hardened? Having eyes, do you not see?

Having ears, do you not hear? Do you not remember? You see, the heart is not as open as we'd like to think it is. Sometimes an empty stomach will easily cloud our vision and affect our memory and distract us from seeing beyond our material needs. The disciples have already seen Jesus miraculously feed thousands on two different occasions. They should know by now that bread is not a problem for Jesus.

Jesus says, why? Why are you discussing not having bread? Do you not remember? Perhaps you've been a follower of Jesus for a long time, but have you ever been anxious about not having something you need? We've all been there. Surely in the time that we've followed Jesus, He has shown us a thing or two, once or twice, that He will take care of us. Nothing's too difficult for Jesus. Now, I don't know if you've noticed this. There's a surprise in the text. At least it was a surprise for me. This thing caught me by surprise. It's that Jesus doesn't ask them if they remember how many people He fed. That's not the question He asked them. Do you see that? The question is actually if they remember how many baskets were left over. Do you see the question there?

He says, do you not remember when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? Why is that the question rather than did you not see that amazing thing that I fed thousands of people? Why is the question about the leftovers? Well, as disciples, we may be so used to thinking about the needs of the people out there, the people who need Jesus, and we forget that we need Jesus always, all the time, even as disciples, we need Jesus. And we might be so used to thinking about the great big things that Jesus did, feeding five thousand, feeding four thousand, so much left over. Look at what Jesus can do. The big things, and yet we forget what He does for us.

He feeds the disciples as well. This is why the question is about the leftovers. Who do you think ate the leftovers? Twelve baskets, one for each disciple. Right back in chapter 6 verse 31, if you flick over if you've got a Bible. Chapter 6 verse 31.

[20:40] Just after the death of John the Baptist, Jesus said to His disciples, Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest for a while. For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. You see, even way back then, before He fed thousands of anyone, He was concerned that His own disciples got something to eat and got a little bit of rest. He's been trying to give them rest and food since even before the five thousand were fed. Yet every time they try, they get intercepted by a crowd. And so when Jesus says, Do you not remember how many baskets were left over?

What He is really saying is, Do you not remember how I took care of you as well? Do you not remember that? What are you worried about bread in the boat for? Do you not think I can take care of you?

Do you? So what are you praying for right now? What are you anxious about? What's on your heart this week?

What are you struggling with? What need do you have? You're in the boat, but you don't have any bread. What is the bread that you don't have? I mean, you probably know that God is well aware of it.

But I reckon that sometimes we need to be reminded that Jesus cares. Yeah, we know that He's sovereign. We know that He's omniscient. We know that He knows.

[22:08] But do we think that He cares? He really does care. Of course He cares. Remember back in Ruth chapter 2, we went through the book of Ruth.

I don't know if you remember this, but when Ruth is out in the fields and Boaz invites her in for a meal at lunchtime, interestingly, you know, in relation to the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000, it says that they ate and they were satisfied.

Well, in the book of Ruth in chapter 2, it says that this Boaz figure brought Ruth in and fed her, and she was satisfied, but it also says, and there was left over.

And she took that left over to Naomi. Naomi got fed too. Jesus knows what we need, and He really does care about us.

Do you remember in the first boat scene, in chapter 4, when they were in the storm and Jesus was sleeping, what was the question they ask Him when they wake Him up? Do you remember? Do you not care that we are perishing?

[23:17] They were asking whether Jesus cared or not. In chapter 6, when they're out on the sea, and Jesus is up the hill, it says that He saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them, and what did He do?

He came to them, walking on the sea, because He cared for them. And then in this third boat scene, in our passage, Jesus says, remember the leftovers?

He's not concerned about the 5,000 or the 4,000. He said, come on, come on Peter, come on John, come on Matthew, do you not remember the leftovers that were for you?

Bread's not an issue in the boat here. You see, the boat scenes not only show us the struggle of the disciples to understand who Jesus is, but it shows us the struggles of the disciples to see how much Jesus cares for them.

And that's part of discipleship. Part of our own discipleship is learning that Jesus really does care, especially when the wind is against us. How reassuring.

[24:27] When you feel like the waves are crashing into the boat, when you feel like you're perishing, Jesus cares. When you feel like any progress in your life is painful and the wind is blowing against you, Jesus cares.

When you feel like you're in the boat and there's no bread, you're hungry, you're in need, maybe even because of your own forgetfulness, Jesus cares. He'll take care of you.

He is in the boat with you. Isn't that incredible? Oh, he doesn't need to be, but he is in the boat with you. He didn't need to die for me and he didn't need to die for you, but he did.

Being a disciple of Jesus, we might spend a lot of time thinking about how other people need Jesus and we forget that we need him too. When he provided bread for the thousands of strangers, would he not provide bread for the ones that he chose, the ones he loves?

If he has compassion for the crowds, will he not have compassion for you? Oh, he does. Oh, how much he loves us. Somewhere along the way, I think we forget that Jesus actually wants to be in the boat with you, with me.

[25:41] Jesus wants to feed us, not just the 5,000. As disciples, he wants to draw away with each one of us personally, not just the crowds. If he can give us bread, he can give us understanding too.

If he takes care of our soul, surely he'll take care of our body as well and vice versa. And so when he fed the 5,000 Israelites, he provided enough to give the 12 disciples a basket of bread each.

And it was like he was saying to them, disciples, you are a picture of how I am saving the 12 tribes of Israel. No one is left out. The bread of life is for every tribe.

And then when he fed the 4,000 Gentiles, he provided enough for there to be seven large baskets left over, the number of completeness. It was like he was saying to them, you are to see that I am enough for the whole world.

You are to show them that the bread of life is for them too. It was like he was saying to the disciples, you are my messengers. Scatter the seed far and wide. Give the bread of life freely and generously to Jews and to Gentiles.

[26:52] And I'll take care of your needs along the way as well. Remember he said in Matthew 6, don't be anxious saying, what shall we eat?

Your heavenly father knows what you need, but seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you. Don't worry about physical bread when you're telling the world about the bread of life.

If we are always looking for a loaf or a sign, we won't convince anyone that we've found the bread of life for ourselves. In Exodus, the Israelites began to complain about the manna.

For a long time, they were eating this manna. And then they began to complain and they began to wonder about the things that they ate in Egypt when they were slaves.

We mustn't act like the bread of life is stale bread. Don't forget how sweet it is. That was the thing about manna. It was sweet like honey. How sweet is the bread of life?

[28:03] Or as Mr. Newton said, how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed? We need to remember that. Final point is that we already have everything we need to know who Jesus is and what he gives.

And so think about the people who are first reading Mark's gospel. They've never seen Jesus. They're living almost a generation afterwards. Gentile Christians living in Rome under pressure. They were not in the boat with Jesus. Likewise, we were not there when he fed 4,000. But having his word, having this, are we less equipped than the disciples in the story?

No, we're not. Having his word. Look at the Pharisees. They saw the miracles, but they demanded more signs. Look at the disciples. They were in the boat with Jesus, yet they did not understand. Does Jesus' word have less power for us than it did for them back then? No, absolutely not. We don't need more. We already have everything we need to know who Jesus is and what he gives.

[29:16] We have enough to know that we can trust him. And if we don't understand, the word of Jesus will help us. If we're struggling as disciples, his word will help us.

And when we're telling others about the bread of life, we mustn't think that we need something more than the word of God. You'll be surprised at how receptive people are, how responsive they can be, how powerful and sufficient God's word is.

When we are serving the word of God to others, it's not just like we're out there, just us and a Bible all alone. The spirit of God is behind it. The Lord Jesus himself is at work when his word, you know this, don't you, when you're out in the streets?

Absolutely. You know this, when you've shared, you know it for your own hearts and your own lives. And if people don't respond, if they refuse to believe, it's because of their heart. It's not because there's something wrong with the word of God.

Jesus' word is astoundingly powerful. Hebrews 1 says that he upholds the universe by the word of his power. There's nothing more powerful than that. His word can multiply the bread and it can transform hearts.

[30:31] It's what he does. He did that for me and you. If any one of us were in the book of Mark, how many times would Jesus be saying to us, do you not yet understand?

I think he would say, I think he would get sick of saying that to me. However, think about the 12 disciples as an example.

He is saying to the 12 disciples, and by the way, Peter is the one who's telling Mark this story. And the people who are hearing this story, Gentile Christians in Rome, they know Peter.

They know this giant of faith. And yet here they hear a story about Peter and the boat and Jesus saying, do you not yet understand? See, the great hope and the good news is that he does not leave us there.

He doesn't leave us in our lack of understanding. How good is Jesus? He's not only sufficient to feed us bread, he's sufficient to help us understand. The last thing that Jesus says in this passage is, do you not yet understand?

[31:40] And the next words of Jesus, a few verses on, when he lays hands on the blind man, he says, do you see anything? You see the connection there?

Do you not yet understand? Well, let me help you open your eyes. Let me open your heart. Let me give you understanding. That's no surprise. Jesus can open our hearts to understand just as easily as he can open eyes to see.

And prior to this, Jesus healed a deaf man. After this, Jesus heals a blind man. And this goes back to the quote, the Isaiah quote in Mark 4 where Jesus is talking about those who do not hear and those who do not see.

And so Jesus came to open ears and to open eyes so that we would know who Jesus is. And the disciples, they're no exception. They need that and we need that.

So, although seeing these disciples struggling to understand, we need to remember that Mark's readers, they will know the outcome of all of these disciples.

[32:45] They will know that Peter is a giant of faith. They probably know that he has given his life in Rome. Maybe they're at that level. Mark wrote these things down to keep Peter's story alive when Peter died.

So, they know the great Peter, the great apostle, pillar of the church, crucified for Jesus. They know Peter.

But how encouraging to see a Peter that was struggling as a disciple. And to know that if they're struggling, well, maybe they can end up like Peter.

Maybe their faith will increase. Maybe Jesus will help them understand. understand. The outcome for us is that anything we know has come from him.

And for anything that we've yet to learn, will he not graciously give us it? He cares about us more than we know. And so, the encouragement is how Peter grew in faith.

[33:50] And the warning is how unbelief grew in Judas. Two people, two different outcomes. Stick with Jesus.

If you let unbelief grow in you, you'll end up like Judas. But if you stick with Jesus, he'll give you understanding. Stay on the boat. Stay with Jesus. He will feed not only our bodies, but our souls. Throughout this book, Mark is trying to show us what true discipleship is like. Let me give you three things of true discipleship. Firstly, anyone is welcome to be a disciple of Jesus, even Gentiles. Secondly, no one finds discipleship easy, not even the apostles. And thirdly, although we struggle and fail like the disciples, keep following Jesus and he will help us.

Because Jesus isn't just offering bread and leftovers, he's offering himself to us. And the result will be righteousness and peace and joy, forgiveness, acceptance, life in his kingdom with him forever.

[34:58] Isn't that exciting? Isn't that hopeful? Isn't that something worth running to Jesus for and giving him thanks for? Jesus is so, so good and he cares for us so, so much.

Just stick with him and he will give us understanding. Let me pray. our Lord, we thank you for how you love us.

We thank you for your patience and grace towards us. We thank you for your transforming power in your word, that already where we are, that we can even come to you, that we can come together this morning in your name, that we can have forgiveness in your name.

It's only because you first helped us in our unbelief. It's only because you have given us understanding of who you are. It's only because you've opened our eyes to see just a glimpse of how much you care for us, that you hung upon a cross for us.

You care for us far more than we realize. And Lord, we thank you. Please help us in our lack of understanding. Please help us in our unbelief. Please help us in our faith.

[36:10] Help us to trust you, to follow you. Lord, help us to love you. And help us to know how much you love us.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.