

Can't You See the Signs?

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[0 : 00] I'll keep your Bibles open if you can to Mark chapter 8. The fact that I was searching online for a similar thing recently and landed on a sus-looking page.

And then, of course, the hooks themselves in the email, which on hindsight seemed too good to be true. Now, we're annoyed when things like that happen.

Maybe it doesn't happen to you, but just to me. But usually when we look back on it, the warning signs are usually there. That something's just not right.

And, you know, I'm not just talking about scams. And sometimes there are choices at work or choices with relationships. But often, until we've gone through it and experienced it, we have sort of fixed preconceptions, don't we, of what we are like ideally to happen, which is at odds with what reality truly is.

Well, in today's passage, we find the same thing with the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They were the religious experts of their day, the know-it-alls, you know.

[1 : 35] And by comparison, everyone else, they were unlearned, including Jesus. Now, we'll get to them in verse 11 a bit later. But first, let's begin back in verse 1 of chapter 8, where we witness a feeding of the multitudes by Jesus.

Again, yes, this is the second time that Jesus will be doing this miracle. So, as I read it, I do want you to follow along with attention paid to a few details, so that we can compare with the earlier miracle in Mark chapter 6.

So, on the slide, look out for the location, the number of loaves, the baskets left over, and the numbers who ate.

All right? Verse 1. 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.

[2 : 44] His disciples answered, But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to eat, to feed them? How many loaves of bread do you have? Jesus asked. Seven, they replied.

He told the crowd to sit down on the ground, and when he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to 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 were present. After he had sent them away, he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Del Manuza. So, I don't know whether you picked up all the details, but if not, here's a comparison table with some and more details on it.

The first thing we see, of course, is that this is yet another remote place, right? And like Mark 6, we see that Jesus had compassion on the people, on the crowd.

[3 : 52] You know, obviously, there was no Uber Eats or DoorDash at the time. So, they were far from food and they were fainting from hunger.

Now, in Mark 6, the disciples suggested to them that, you know, suggested that they could be sent away to the villagers to buy something to eat, even though that was unrealistic at that time. But in Mark 8, Jesus preempts even that thought of it, because he knows that they're not going to make it that far.

And he says it to them. And so, the disciples sort of throw their hands up in defeat and say, well, where in this remote place then can anyone get enough bread to feed them? Now, funny they should say that, because what happened in Mark 6?

Did they forget that Jesus had just fed 5,000 with about the same number of loaves? Well, obviously.

So, Jesus now has to do it again. But this time, it's seven loaves of bread that they have, not five loaves. And again, he asked them to sit down on the ground. I haven't put that detail in the table. [5 : 01] And there's some fish to distribute as well, although the exact numbers of the fish, that's not important. But what's important is what we see in verse 8, that the people ate and were satisfied.

Right? So, abundant was Jesus' provision that there were lots and heaps left over. Seven baskets. Now, not 12 this time, but if you care to notice, the Greek word for basket is actually different. So, it may be different sizes of baskets. So, it's not really comparable. But that's not the point. The point was ample provision. And of course, this time, Jesus fed 4,000 instead of 5. But still, a lot of people. Right? So, the question we need to ask is, why is Jesus performing this miracle again? And of course, the straightforward answer, which comes from the text, is because he was moved again by compassion for the people.

So, he's not just performing miracles to display his power, and then thinking, you know, I've really done this once to teach them. You know, I'm not going to waste my time repeating myself. Right? [6 : 07] Instead, he could see that the crowds were hungry and lost, like sheep without a shepherd, we found out in Mark 6. And so, he was compelled, therefore, to meet that need.

But of course, as he was feeding them physically, what he was able to do as well was to teach his disciples, yet again, what this lesson should be from this miracle. Now, what did we learn in Mark 6 about the miracle?

Well, that really, it was a sign, wasn't it, that this is akin to God providing for Israel in the desert, in the book of Exodus, where God fed them with manna from heaven.

And they ate as much as they needed, and were satisfied. And that is the same thing here again, that in both miracles, they ate and were satisfied.

So, Jesus is saying, I am doing what my father did. I am God providing for my people, just as my father did in Exodus.

[7 : 13] Now, of course, there's also the comparison that back in Exodus, the response to that was Israel's hearts were hard, because afterwards, they kept grumbling in the desert, and eventually, they rebelled against God.

And that's why, in that other psalm reading today, 95, we read, don't we, that Israelites hardened their hearts in Meribah. They tested the Lord in Massah, even though, on the next slide, they've seen what the Lord did, feeding them in the desert.

Now, this is again repeated here, in both Mark chapter 6 and chapter 8, because in Mark chapter 6, verse 52, what happened was that, you read that, Mark says that the disciples did not understand about the loaves, and then it says, this is the reason why, their hearts were hardened.

And now, here in Mark chapter 8, verse 11, well, we start, firstly, with the Pharisees, who died to do likewise. So, reading on, 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 sign?

[8 : 34] Truly, I tell you, no sign will be given to it. And then He left them, got back in the boat, and crossed to the other side. Now, what does it mean here, for Jesus to say that no sign will be given to this generation?

Because, if you look at the other Gospels, that's actually not absolutely true, right? John's Gospel, if you look at chapter 20, verse 30, on the next slide, it says, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples.

And, some are not even recorded in the Gospels. And, again, in Matthew chapter 12, Jesus, yes, He does say that for this wicked generation, no signs will be given.

But, then He says, none except the sign of Jonah. And, that, of course, is referring to His death and resurrection. Because, like Jonah, who spent three days in the belly of the fish, Jesus spent three days in the depths of Hades.

So, Jesus did do signs, right? And, His coming death and resurrection is actually the greatest sign of all. But, here, I think, what He's saying is that in response to their specific demand for a sign, Jesus will not do it.

[9 : 50] Because, He will not give in to, or pander to their hard hearts and pride. And, the reality is that there has already been many signs.

The one that just happened, the feeding of the 4,000, was one such sign. And, it's not that Jesus did it once, He actually did it twice. If only the Pharisees humbled themselves and were willing to look more closely, all the tell-tale signs are there.

Jesus has already shown that He is the Son of God, doing what His Father did, caring for His people, feeding them like a shepherd for His sheep.

Now, I think we can be tempted to do likewise as well, can't we? Because God has already, indeed, shown Himself clearly and shown who Jesus is in the Bible, His Word.

And, yet, sometimes, we still want more, don't we? We say, God, if You only give me a sign, you know, I know what's in the Bible, but if You give me a sign that's specific to my life, then I will know You want me to obey You and believe.

[11 : 03] Well, Jesus is not going to pander to the Pharisees in this way. Because, when hearts are hard, and there is spiritual blindness, no amount of signs will change that.

The demand for a sign, really, is just an excuse for not wanting to change. Well, the response of the Pharisees now become a warning for His disciples, which is what we see now when we get to verse 14.

But, before we do, let me just orientate ourselves here, because, back in verse 10, you will notice that Jesus had hopped on the boat after feeding the multitudes and crossed over the Sea of Galilee.

So, He's gone from the east to the west, which is where the region of Delmanutha is. Then He encounters the Pharisees, and then we read in verse 13 that He jumps back on the boat and crosses back over.

And this time, I think He's going further north, but still on the east side of the sea. So, all these verses here in 14 to 21 happen when Jesus is on the boat, having alone time, as it were, with the disciples.

[12 : 06] And so we read, 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. Now, if you've ever grown at those like dads who tell jokes with puns, just remember, Jesus used puns too.

Okay? Because yeast here is a pun, isn't it? It's a play on words. They've been preoccupied with thinking about bread all this time, you know, with the feeding of the 4,000 and now they don't have bread in the boat and all that kind of stuff.

And so Jesus uses this as an analogy to do with baking to make a serious point. But, of course, the disciples don't get it, do they? They take Jesus literally when really Jesus is speaking figuratively. So, what does it mean for Jesus to say, beware the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod? Well, if you've done a bit of baking, you know what yeast is used for, you add that to the flour and then that makes the dough rise and expand, right, when you put it in the oven.

[13 : 16] And so Jesus is using this image of the yeast to refer to something, something small in the lives of the Pharisees and Herod that when it's allowed to ferment and fester will keep growing until it's irreversible.

And, of course, I think what Jesus is speaking about here is sin. But sin of the kind that is initially just a little, sort of a little yeast, not full-blown.

I don't know whether you've watched, I'm sure you have watched shows like CSI and Criminal Minds. You know, they often hunt down the psychopath or whatever, but when they do, they often profile the criminal, don't they?

And they often tell you that, you know, if you look back in the history of the criminal, they actually have, there's a lot of telltale signs in the beginning, isn't it? You know, they'll say, oh, they first started searching on the internet and researching about serial killers, you know.

Next thing is that, you know, they go out to the woods, I mean, this is America, so not the bush, the woods, and they start shooting small animals for fun, you know, and cutting them up and hanging them up kind of thing.

[14 : 24] Then until they progress to the next thing, which is to kill real people, right? Start maybe with the homeless or whatever, the vulnerable, and then it ends, of course, with a mass killing spree

that escalates on and on before they catch him.

Well, that's what Jesus is warning the disciples about, that there is a danger of letting sin fester in their lives, that is, go unrepentant of, left to ferment in their hearts until it becomes entrenched in their character and then full blown into their lifestyle and their habits.

Now, you may ask, is there a difference here between the sin of the Pharisees and the sin of Herod? Perhaps. I think, for example, the sin of the Pharisees is the sin that we've just encountered in the last few verses, which I call the sin of self-righteousness.

And just like elsewhere in Mark, and I said this before, the Pharisees thought that with their years of learning and their fastidious obedience to God's rules or even their human tradition, they were better than others.

Confession time here. But, you know, for those of us who are theologically trained or have read lots of Christian books, we are tempted to do the same, aren't we? But, of course, Jesus said that their hearts were far from God.

[15:49] Remember chapter 7? They were blinded by their pride so that when Jesus came as the Messiah, they could not recognize Him. Why? Because Jesus came and said, repent and believe the good news.

Whereas what they were hoping and what they were expecting for the Messiah to say to them was, well done you, you've, you know, all this while you've obeyed the laws, come and join me as one of my favorite disciples.

But that's not what Jesus said. He heard them, they heard Him say, repent. And so they immediately hardened their hearts against that and could not see that Jesus was the Messiah.

But that initial attitude of pride when they heard that spreads like yeast, doesn't it? Because by the time we get to Mark chapter 3 verse 6, which is not a long time, the Pharisees were so consumed as we read that they were plotting with the Herodians to guilt Jesus.

So the initial sin of pride gives way to hate and jealousy and then ultimately we see on the day of Good Friday to the murder of Jesus.

[17:01] Now what about the yeast of Herod? Now some think it's a reference back to this verse 6 here that Jesus is talking about the Herodians and so if that's the case their sin would be the sin for the lust of power.

But I think Jesus here may also be referring to Herod himself and you recall that story that we had two or three chapters ago where Herod behated John the Baptist right?

And how did that all start? Well when John the Baptist called him out for his sin of adultery he didn't like it Herodias didn't like it and then although he was in prison and after a while remember that Herodias' daughter danced and then asked for half the kingdom asked for the head and what did Herod say?

He was so keen to please the courtiers in his party and to please Herodias that he went ahead with that sin even though he knew he was conflicted wasn't he?

In wanting to behead an innocent man in John the Baptist. So again the initial sin of adultery grows and grows and snowballs into this huge and public sin which was the public beheading of John the Baptist.

[18:17] So I think the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod are really two sides of the same coin. That for the Pharisees it was a sin of self-righteousness which is the unwillingness to repent because they can't see that they can be wrong whereas for Herod it was the sin of not wanting to repent even when he knew he was wrong.

But either way the failure or the refusal to repent sears their consciences and then invariably leads to greater and worse sins down the track.

Unless sin is nipped in the bud it grows doesn't it? It grows and then finally consumes us. And sadly you know I've seen that.

I've seen where someone is not wanting to forgive and then it just snowballs because from that the lack of forgiveness leads to conflict and the whole family becomes dysfunctional and the wider family and then at the end of it it's a mess.

All because at the very start there was an unwillingness to confront that sin when they were shown it. Now the question then is why is Jesus saying this to the disciples?

[19:32] Because shouldn't he be saying it to the Pharisees instead? Because the disciples, they're the chosen ones aren't they? They're saved. Shouldn't they, you know, why do they need to

hear this?

Well it's not as straightforward as that is it? Because let's read on in verse 17 and we'll see that that is not initially how the disciples were. So verse 17 aware of the discussion Jesus asked them why are you talking about having no bread?

Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Interesting. Do you have eyes but fail to see? Ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?

So five rapid fire questions in total but it's sort of Jesus asking them don't you get it? And then as if to help them to understand he reminds them again of the two feelings that has just occurred.

He said when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand how many basketfuls did you pick up?

Twelve they replied. Pretty good actually they remembered that.

[20 : 39] And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand how many basketfuls did you pick up? They answered seven. And then Jesus said do you still not understand?

Now sadly I think the point is no they don't understand. Not at this stage. And again like in Mark 6 Jesus suggests that it's because their hearts are hardened. And so even though the signs were repeated they fail to understand.

Now what is it precisely they don't understand? Some people have sort of gone out well is it because the twelve and the divide by seven or plus five? I think it's a bit more simple than that. Jesus is simply saying I've done this miracle twice now. Can you not see what I'm trying to show you in both cases? I'm trying to show you that I'm like my father.

I have the power to provide abundantly for my people so that they are fully satisfied. The leftovers in both instances is evidence that I give generously more than you need until you are satisfied.

[21 : 49] And so they have to see that no Jesus is God's Messiah. That the kingdom is here and therefore they should repent and believe in him. Now next week Jeff's going to look at the next passage for us and indeed Peter will recognize Jesus and confess him as Messiah next week.

But that only happens because God opens his eyes. Jesus opens his eyes. But for today we see that short of that intervention everyone is blind.

All hearts are hardened. Not just the Pharisees but even the disciples. they fail to understand because of their hearts. Now some of you will also be sort of thinking that with Jesus' questions there is a reminder isn't there of the parable of the sower in Mark chapter 4.

Because when Jesus was alone with them at the time and he explained that parable he quoted Isaiah referring to those outside the kingdom in the very same words that are used in these questions for they are on the next slide they may be ever seeing but never perceiving.

ever hearing but never understanding otherwise they might turn and be forgiven. And so it almost seems like Jesus is now implying that the disciples are outside the kingdom.

[23 : 08] Well I don't think that's the case but the fact that Jesus warns them about the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod shows that even for those who appear to be his disciples chosen by him no less these can be at risk of falling away because let me ask you who was on the boat there with Jesus?

Judas Iscariot right? He heard everything that Jesus said in the boat. He heard the parable of the sower even the explanation afterwards and yet he obviously ignored Jesus' warning didn't he?

And so even as believers and I know that we've got to hold attention God's chosen one he preserves but that doesn't mean then that as believers we presume on our righteousness and then say oh look I'm the chosen one I don't have to worry about sin or purity in our hearts because God has taken the care of that already of course God has taken care but we need to be careful not to fall into the sin of the Pharisees which was that of the sin of self-righteousness and then allow for pride to fester in our hearts so we shouldn't despise those whose faith is young compared to ours not look down on those who struggle to believe don't think that just because you understand the Bible that you're more spiritual than those who don't we need to stay humble and we also need to not be proud of our humility stay humble because all understanding comes from

God alone it's only because of that that Peter is able to confess that Jesus is Messiah and even then he didn't get it right did he he only gets it half right next week like everyone that Jesus has to heal and save we are spiritually blind deaf and mute until Jesus opens our eyes nothing we do not our intelligence or hard work or good works can save us even our hard hearts need to be overcome by the gift of faith which only God can supply but of course God Jesus he's full of compassion as he's already shown feeding not just the 4,000 but feeding us spiritually that despite our sin and our

hard hearts he comes in power to open our eyes graciously softening our hearts so that we can repent and believe and yet even though it's all

God and not us he still gives us that human agency that responsibility to choose to respond by faith to be watchful because otherwise he wouldn't be telling the disciples to take care and watch out it's because they have a responsibility even though he's chosen them for them to respond by faith in repentance now friends some of you here today may not yet believe in Jesus and I don't know how many times you've read the Bible or you've heard Jesus' appeal to you but my plea to you is if you're hearing God speaking to you from his word today don't pass up that opportunity because it's easy sometimes you hear it and then just say look I'll think about it later and brush it off but you know each time you do that each time it becomes a little easier to keep ignoring that call that's what hardening the heart looks like every time you hear

[27 : 01] God's voice every time you read the word and you know that he's telling you something and you don't respond whether you're Christian or not that is a little bit of hardening that goes on in your heart don't harden our hearts but as it says in that Psalm 95 and let me end with that come let us bow down and worship let us kneel before the Lord our maker for he is our God and we are the people of his flock the people of his pasture the flock under his care today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah as you did that day at Nassau in the wilderness where your ancestors tested me they tried me though they had seen what I did as the psalmist says we are the people of his pasture God has cared for us and given us the ultimate in sending his son to lay down his life as the good shepherd and so when he speaks when his son speaks through his word let us not harden our hearts but humbly!

turn to him by faith and so that we may be entering his kingdom and enjoying it forever let's pray father we are sorry for our hard hearts soften it so that we respond humbly!
and help us to be careful of the yeast the sin of the Pharisees and of Herod help us to understand your word and when we do to submit to your son by faith and in obedience in Jesus mighty name we pray amen