

# Mark 8:1-26

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Date: 19 January 2014

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] in our series in Mark tonight. For those of you who haven't met, my name's Nick. I'm one of the pastors here. This academic year, actually, we're looking at the Gospel of Mark. We're coming up in the second half of it.

This spring, we're gonna look at basically Mark 8 through 16. We're gonna finish Mark by Easter, which seems kind of like a daring feat, but we're gonna do it by God's grace.

So turn with me to Mark chapter 8. It's page 843 in the Black Pew Bible, if you wanna turn there. We'll put this passage on the screen, but it's good to have it open. If you can turn there, that way, if we jump around, you can follow me.

Mark chapter 8, we'll look at verses 1 through 26. Let me read this for us. So Mark 8, verse 1. In those days when a great crowd had gathered and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.

And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away. And his disciples answered him, how can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?

[ 1 : 1 2 ] And he asked them, how many loaves do you have? They said, seven. And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground and he took the seven loaves and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people.

And they set them before the crowd and they had a few small fish and having blessed them, he said that those also should be set before them. And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over seven baskets full.

And there were about 4,000 people. And he sent them away and immediately got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha. And then, the Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking 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, 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 leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.

[ 2 : 2 3 ] And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. And 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? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the 5,000, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?

They said to him, 12. And the seven for the 4,000, 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?

And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. And when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, do you see anything?

And he looked up and said, I see men, but they look like trees walking. Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again, and he opened his eyes.

[ 3 : 32 ] His sight was restored. And he saw everything clearly. And he sent him to his home, saying, do not even enter the village. Well, I wonder if you've ever been in a situation where someone is trying really hard to teach you something and you just can't seem to get it.

If you've ever tried learning a foreign language, maybe you've had that experience. I remember when I was in divinity school, I was learning Hebrew, and I had that experience a lot, actually, learning biblical Hebrew. The first time I encountered it was when I was learning, it was like chapter three of our grammar.

And you have to realize that in the Hebrew language, every single word just about comes from a three-consonant root. Every word, three consonants. It's completely baffling.

I remember our teacher trying so hard to get us to understand how these three-letter roots work. Because you see, the thing is, like any language, it doesn't always play by the rules, right?

Some consonants drop out, some combine with others, and some just mysteriously disappear. And here we were, sitting through our Hebrew class, utterly baffled, staring at the page of our grammar, just not getting it.

[ 4 : 43 ] And it was only week three of the course. We were in trouble. Now, maybe that hasn't happened to you learning another language, maybe learning a new skill, or learning some new idea.

To be honest with you, the New Haven public bus system, how that thing works is still a bit baffling to me. Those of you who are able to ride that thing and get around, I have a lot of respect for you because I would be utterly confused where that thing was taking me.

But it's like that with a lot of things, isn't it? Riding a bike, learning how to swim. You try and you try and you try, and it seems like you just can't get it. But then one day, something happens, right?

One day when I was studying Hebrew, despairing, it clicked. Suddenly it made sense. The lights came on and I finally started to understand how these crazy three-letter roots actually worked.

And the best way to describe it, I think, was that I could finally see it. I could see it. Have you had that experience from not understanding to understanding, from not seeing it to seeing it?

[ 5 : 54 ] Our text tonight is all about responding to Jesus Christ. Of understanding and seeing who He is. We've come to chapter 8 of Mark's Gospel, as I mentioned.

And you see, chapter 8 is really the turning point of the whole book. The whole book really pivots on this chapter. Everything leading up to this point, almost, has been to show us who Jesus is.

Mark has been taking pains to describe to us Jesus' person, His identity. And from this chapter onward, things are going to turn, things are going to shift, and Mark's going to begin showing us why Jesus came, what He came to do, His purpose, His mission.

But running underneath both of these questions and both of these halves is another question. And it's the question of how should we respond?

What does it mean to believe and to follow this Jesus? So as Mark brings this first half of his Gospel to a head, we're confronted with this pressing question from Jesus Himself in verse 21.

[ 7 : 08 ] Do you not yet understand? Do you see Him? Do you know Him? Do you understand who He is?

Now rewind to the beginning of our passage, the feeding of the 4,000. If you've been with us in our Mark series, this passage probably sounds kind of familiar. Do you remember back in chapter 6 where Jesus did something incredibly similar?

Back there with just five loaves and two fish, He fed a crowd of 5,000 men plus women and children and there were 12 baskets of bread left over. And now in our passage tonight with just seven loaves and a few small fish, He feeds over 4,000 people and there are seven baskets left over.

Jesus is at it again. And you have to ask, reading Mark's gospel, what are we supposed to learn from this miracle that we didn't learn from the first miracle?

After all, think about it. Presumably, Mark, the writer of this gospel, didn't include everything that he knew about Jesus into it. All of the gospel writers are being selective. They're all presenting to us what they feel to be the most important things, the things that we need to know to really understand Jesus rightly.

[ 8 : 26 ] So why does Mark include two miraculous feedings? Well, many commentators point out, and I think they're right, that one of the primary differences is this.

You see, the first feeding, if you go back there and read, took place in Jewish territory. Jesus was among His own people, among the people of Israel, the people of God.

But in chapter 8, He's actually now transitioned, not, no longer in Jewish territory, but He's in a Gentile region. If you have your Bible open, look back at chapter 7, verse 31.

We see there that Jesus is in the region of the Decapolis, which is a Gentile region on the far side of the Sea of Galilee. And that means Jesus is among outsiders.

He's among people that weren't necessarily born to the right family. He's among the pagans and the irreligious. Those who didn't have the spiritual privileges of being brought up as an Israelite.

[ 9 : 27 ] These are the people who probably don't know much about God's Word. They don't know much about God's covenant promises. And yet, here is Jesus going to the outsiders and satisfying their needs, too.

Teaching them and then feeding them. You see, Jesus is showing us and Mark wants us to hear it loud and clear that the kingdom Jesus has come to bring is for everyone.

For rich and for poor, for young and for old, for Jew and for Gentile, for male and for female, for insiders and outsiders, for religious people and irreligious people. He's come for them all.

And all can come to him and be satisfied. Did you notice that wonderful line in verse 8?

And they all ate and were satisfied. Mark tells us the same thing the first time around in chapter 6, verse 42. And they all ate and were satisfied. Jesus is the satisfier of souls.

[ 10 : 35 ] And that goes for you and that goes for me. There is one that satisfies and it is Jesus. He's showing them with bread a truth about who he is and what he's come to do.

A truth about his kingdom that in Jesus God has come to bring satisfaction to weary and hungry souls and he's come to do it for all people.

Now that's what we learn about Jesus in this passage. But I think Mark also wants to show us something about the disciples. And by implication he wants to show us something about us and what it means to respond to Jesus.

Now put yourself in the disciples' shoes for a second in this story. You're in a deserted place. Jesus is teaching large crowds. People are getting hungry.

There's not enough food. And this all sounds and feels very familiar to you. You're thinking we were in this situation not so long ago. And Jesus says to you I have compassion on these people because they've been with me.

[ 11 : 43 ] They're getting hungry and I can't send them away. Now, as readers of the Gospel of Mark what do you want the disciples to say? Jesus, you can feed them?

We've seen you do it just two chapters ago. Of course they wouldn't have said two chapters. Maybe it was a few months. Maybe even a year ago. We know you can feed them. We trust you. Just tell us what to do. We're ready.

We're expectant. Come on, Jesus. Do it again. But that's not how they respond. Instead they say who's going to feed all these people with bread in this desolate place?

And of course we as readers think oh, how obtuse can these disciples be? I mean, come on. how could they not put the pieces together?

But you know, when we stop and think about it, aren't you and I often the same? How many of us have seen the Lord work in our lives in very clear ways?

[ 12 : 48 ] But then a little further down the road a new situation arises and instead of our faith being stronger and responding in deeper trust to the Lord, it's like we've completely forgotten.

And we respond the same way we did the first time with questions and doubt and fear. Is God really there? Does He care for me? Is He in control? One writer reflecting on this passage put it this way.

He said, Mark is showing us how great is human spiritual blindness. The disciples continually fail to apply what they know of Jesus to new situations and that is the definition of unbelief.

Failing to apply what they know of Jesus in new situations. Friends, if you're here tonight and you're a Christian, you need to be aware that your heart will constantly be tempted to doubt Jesus again and again and again.

You know He's the satisfier of your soul. You know He's the good shepherd who cares for the sheep and yet there will be times when you and I are thrown into situations, maybe situations just like you've been in before and your heart will start to doubt His love and His power and His care for you and you won't expect Him to work and you'll wonder whether He's even there and in that moment here's what you need to do.

[ 14 : 10 ] Not trust your heart and not trust your doubts and fears. This is a sign of spiritual maturity when we see that our hearts are prone to doubt and prone to forget and instead of listening to those doubts and fears we instead work hard to remember what He's done and to view our current situation in light of what we know to be true about Him.

Now this theme of unbelief or of partial belief you probably picked it up it continues through the rest of the passage doesn't it? And each part is sort of instructing us how we ought to respond to Jesus.

First Jesus gets out of the boat and the first thing that happens is that the Pharisees come to Him and they confront Him and Mark says they argue with Him seeking from Him a sign from Heaven to test Him.

And Jesus' response is to sigh deeply and says in essence no sign is going to be given you. Of course there's a bit of an irony here isn't it?

Isn't there? Jesus has been doing incredible things His whole ministry. He's just fed 4,000 people with seven loaves of bread. So what exactly are the Pharisees looking for and why won't Jesus give it to them?

[ 15 : 43 ] Well in answer to the first question it seems that the Pharisees want Jesus to give them some sort of extreme supernatural proof a sign from Heaven that He is indeed the Messiah.

But you have to see a little deeper under what's going on here. You have to see that they're only asking Him this right as Mark says to test Him. You see they've already made up their minds about Jesus. They think He's a fraud or they think He's demon possessed or whatever and now they think they're going to ask Him to jump through a hoop so high that He's bound to fail or at least that's what they think.

But Jesus refuses to play their game. Why? Could He have done something amazingly supernatural? Of course.

He just calmed an entire storm a few chapters ago. Why doesn't Jesus do something amazingly supernatural? You see because Jesus knows that no amount of external evidence even miraculous evidence can break through some kinds of spiritual blindness.

Remember this section is all about seeing Jesus and responding to Him. I mean after all Jesus had been doing remarkable things.

[ 17 : 07 ] He had been doing signs of a certain kind, right? Healing the sick, feeding the hungry, causing the blind to see, comforting the outcasts, seeking out sinners and calling them to repentance and fellowship with God.

But you see that's not the kind of Messiah that the Pharisees wanted. That kind of Messiah didn't fit their grid. They wanted a Messiah that would keep all the traditions that they kept and they wanted a king that would be scrupulous about ceremonial purity just as they defined it.

But you see God's kingdom as Jesus defines it and as it is truly is for everyone. As we've said Jew and Gentile clean and unclean it's for everyone who stops trusting in their own moral performance and their own cleanliness and trusts in Jesus alone.

So Jesus refuses to give them a sign because he knows their hearts. Now does that mean that Jesus doesn't encourage us today as seekers to look at the evidence and to seek for the truth and even to ask questions along the way and to try this thing out to see whether it holds water?

Is Jesus saying no, don't do any of that? Of course not, right? Throughout the gospels he's encouraging people to come to him and look at him and test him out. You see, here's something that we often get confused about.

[ 18 : 39 ] We often think that faith is some kind of leap in the dark and in fact reading a lot of commentators on this chapter this week, that's basically what a lot of commentators said that Jesus was doing here. He's saying that no, faith is sort of you just have to take a leap.

Friends, that's not at all what Jesus is saying here. He's saying that faith involves something more than just evidence. Does it look at the evidence and investigate it and move on the basis of it?

Yes. But faith also involves your heart. And if our heart is filled with all sorts of biases and presuppositions and if we've already made up our mind, then friends, no amount of evidence is going to overcome it.

faith. Because you see, faith is more than acknowledging the truth of a fact. Faith is commitment to a person. And if there's no openness to that sort of commitment, if that door has already been shut, and if like the Pharisees were simply looking for ways to debunk Jesus' claims, then Jesus knows that signs are pointless.

You see, the problem with the Pharisees is that they were determining the definition of the Messiah themselves, and they were putting up their own criteria that this Messiah had to fit, and then, of course, they took their own standards and their own criteria, and Jesus fell short.

[ 20 : 11 ] And when Jesus gets into the boat with his disciples, what does he say? He says, watch out for that sort of thinking. He says, it's like leaven. It's like yeast that spreads everywhere and affects everything.

Because don't we often do the same thing? How often do we have similar thoughts run through our minds? God, if you loved me, then you would do this. You'd show me a sign.

You'd solve this problem in my life. You'd get me that job. You'd bring me a spouse. Jesus, if you were really God, then you'd fix this or that. You'd stop the pain I'm feeling.

Etc. Etc. You see how easy it is to fall into this trap? But it can be like yeast. It starts to spread.

And suddenly, we're calling the shots, and we're setting the standards that God has to meet. And if God doesn't jump through our hopes, then we start to turn away. God wants to come to Him and pour out our hearts to Him.

[ 21 : 23 ] But as soon as these desires of our hearts become the criteria, the test, that God has to meet, friends, then our hearts are in a dangerous place. Instead, let Him define the criteria.

And have your eyes open to what He's already done to demonstrate His love and His power toward you. Now, of course, all this talk about leaven and about yeast makes the disciples think that Jesus is talking about physical bread.

And they start to think that Jesus is correcting them because they forgot to pick up some lunch before they got into the boat. And Jesus says, don't you get it? Don't you get it?

It's not about bread. It's about who I am. And then He reminds them of what they have just experienced, 12 baskets left over from 5,000. Seven baskets left over from 4,000.

Imagine what that must have felt like in their minds. Twelve disciples, you feed a crowd of 5,000 people with tiny amounts of food, and at the end you're all standing there with a basket full of bread.

[ 22 : 36 ] In your arms the evidence that Christ is no mere man. And then weeks or months later you've got seven loaves for 4,000 people, and at the end of that experience you're holding seven baskets, each one of those loaves having turned into an abundance.

The Greek word there actually, one translator translates it a hamper, a hamper full of bread. Adela Collins actually from the Divinity School translates it as a hamper full of bread.

It's a lot of bread. Jesus says, don't you see who I am? I'm trying to show you. What is it that's going to turn the lights on?

If Jesus is the satisfier of our souls, if he's God come down to us to bring us back to himself, how do we come to believe it?

And that brings us to the last section of our passage tonight. This very unique, two-stage healing of this blind man at Bethsaida.

[ 23 : 46 ] Now, Jesus is giving, obviously, his disciples an object lesson here. Certainly, Jesus could have healed this man all at once. At this point in Jesus' ministry, in Mark's gospel, I mean, he's done incredible things, right?

He's calmed storms and cast out legions of demons and fed thousands of people and made blind people to see and mute people to speak and lame people to dance. With just a word, he could have opened this man's eyes, but instead, he's teaching us a lesson.

You see, the disciples had begun to see. They'd begun to have their eyes open to who Jesus is, and yet, they didn't see it all clearly.

They were kind of like this man. You know, at one stage of the healing, he could see people, sort of, but it was all a bit blurry, like trees walking around, he says, which is a great little detail.

And the disciples in Mark's gospel see Jesus, and they kind of begin to understand who he is, but it's not totally clear yet. And next week, we'll see that even when Peter makes his great declaration at the heart of Mark's gospel, people, that you, Jesus, are the Christ, you are the Messiah, immediately find out that his vision is still a bit blurry.

[ 25 : 06 ] But then, comes a second stage. Jesus lays his hands on his eyes again, and his vision is completely restored, and he finally sees.

You see, friends, the point is this, Jesus isn't just the satisfier of our souls. But he is the opener of our eyes. He's the one who grants us the sight to see him and know him.

And that means three things as we close tonight. First, if we're going to approach Jesus at all, if we're going to make any spiritual progress, if our searching after God is going to make any headway, then there has to be humility.

We have to admit that our vision is skewed, that we don't see things clearly, and that we need to have our eyes opened, that we bring with us all sorts of biases and presuppositions that may be right or may be wrong, and we have to be ready, unlike the Pharisees, to let those things be questioned and challenged in the light of who God has revealed himself to be in Christ.

Second, if Jesus is the opener of our eyes, it means that being a Christian, friends, is all of grace. You and I cannot take credit for believing in Jesus as if that somehow makes us better than other folk.

[ 26 : 31 ] It makes us incredibly humble people to know that it was Christ who opened our eyes, not me who pulled myself up by my smarty bootstraps and figured it out.

But doesn't that also make us very hopeful, people? that if Jesus is the eye opener, and if he can open my dull eyes, then surely he can do it for anyone else.

And that brings us to the third point. And the third point is that it's Jesus. Our passage begins with Jesus saying, I have compassion on the crowds.

And don't you see that his compassion for us is so great that he not only feeds our souls, but opens our eyes. He not just gives bread to the weary, but he gives a sight so we can see it and so we can take it.

In other words, friend, the picture of Jesus that we have here is that he is an utterly complete savior. That he accomplishes our salvation, and he applies it, and he brings it to us.

[ 27 : 42 ] That what he's done for us on the cross, he doesn't just leave there for anyone who's sort of strong enough to go get it, but he brings it to us and opens up our eyes so that we can take it and take him.

Friends, you want to see tonight? Then you have to come to the sight giver. You have to come to Jesus. Tonight, are you struggling to trust him and to believe him?

And brothers and sisters, instead of demanding a sign to test him, humbly ask him to open your eyes to see what's really going on. And that kind of prayer, he will always answer, and he will not turn you away.

Let's pray. Jesus, you know our hearts tonight. Lord, you know that some of us here are feeling weary and hungry.

God, we've been searching for satisfaction in things. Lord, in coming up empty. God, we've been looking for it in friends and in work.

[ 28 : 51 ] God, we've been looking for it in pleasures and in experiments. God, tonight, as we look into our hearts, we see that it's empty.

And Lord, we need the bread that only you can give. So God, for those here tonight who are in that position, I pray that they would come to you and find you. Lord, that you would grant them the sight to see, that you can satisfy their souls, that what you've done for them on the cross and in the resurrection is enough for them for all eternity.

God, grant them the vision to see you clearly. And God, for those who are here tonight who are wrestling with their circumstances, who are wrestling to trust you, God, would you too give them vision to see, to see your presence with them, to see that you have loved them with an everlasting love, that on the cross you have demonstrated your love in fullest degree for all who come and receive it.

God, help us to be a people who are deeply dependent on you. God, increase our faith for your name's sake. Amen.