



THE GOSPEL OF

MARK



Sermon Series Notes

“Spiritual Growth & Understanding” (Mark 8:1-25)

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Topic: Spiritual Growth

We now come to the second recorded miraculous feeding in the gospel accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. Before we read this text, I want to note an important statement in the context of the first miraculous feeding; See Mark 6:34b. God cares about our physical needs, but our greatest need is not physical but spiritual (see Deut.8:3); Just a simple reminder about Scripture; Read I Tim.3:16-17; Every time we read the Word, hear the Word, at least one of these four things should happen in our lives. While one person is receiving teaching, another is being rebuked. And while that one is being rebuked, a third is being corrected, and a fourth is receiving training. Certainly more than one of these benefits can be taking place at the same time. It is through the work of the Word of God in our lives that we grow and mature. May all of us receive what the Lord has for us through His Word today.

Read Mark 8:1-21.

vv.2-3 God cares about our physical needs. See Matt.6:25-34. A friend gave me a devotional book the other week, it's called “On Being A Servant of God,” by Warren Wiersbe. I just started using it, and the very first chapter talked about how in the Mark 6 miraculous feeding, the disciples suggested to send the people away. Warren Wiersbe asks an important question – “Where was their compassion?” He then adds, “...we are often tempted in ministry to get rid of the very people God wants to help.” (Matt.15:21-28; 19:13-15).

vv.11-13 For those who refuse to “get it” despite repeated and fully adequate evidence to the truth, Jesus does what he tells his disciples to do. Leave them, they are blind guides; Shake the dust of your sandals and head on to the next village (verses?); Luke 16:19-31, If they do not believe Moses and the prophets, they will not believe even if someone's rises from the dead.

John 6:37...whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

But these Pharisees were coming to “test him,” not to receive from him. He sighs deeply because of their willing ignorance and stubborn hearts. They are not only resistant to truth, they are intellectually arrogant. Alistair Begg said, “Christ is more than willing to cater to our intellectual integrity but not pander to our intellectual arrogance.”

v.16 Their discussion is over what Jesus meant by the statement in verse 15. For us, they are discussing the meaning of a verse in the Word of God. I wonder how often God looks down in bewilderment and even frustration at some of our ludicrous interpretations of Scripture?

This is the second recorded miraculous feeding in the ministry of Jesus. The first was in Mark 6, which we covered a few weeks ago. By the way, did you know that the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded in all four gospel accounts? (Matt.14, Luke 9, John 6). In that feeding, the crowd was Jewish. Here, the crowd is Gentile. If you have been with us in our study, you know that this is the region of the Decapolis. Decapolis simply means “ten cities.” Following Alexander the Great’s conquest in the fourth century, Greeks settled in this area. As Art pointed out last weekend in his teaching from Mark 7, Jesus, though called primarily to reach the Jews, shows by situations like this one that God loves all men, and that the Messiah came for all men.

In Mark 6, the word used for the baskets of leftovers is “kophinos,” a small basket, kind of like a lunch basket. But the word used in Mark 8 is “spuris,” which is more like a hamper. There is no doubt in my mind that the different words, denoting different size leftovers, has a prophetic implication. In Mark there were twelve basketfuls left over, one small basket for each of the apostles. This I believe is a very personal message to each apostle, but also for the Jewish people, Israel. The Messiah has come to the Jew first, and He cares for their physical as well as their spiritual needs. His ability to meet their physical needs is not simply adequate, but contains the capacity for abundance, overflow. David McIntyre at SRI conference recently in CO, speaking of the abundance of fish caught by Peter and the others, then Jesus asking, “Do you love me more than these?” David suggested that the Lord was showing Peter his ability to take care of his physical needs, and at the same time rebuking him for going back to the old business of fishing. He now had a higher calling, and his focus now was not to be fishing for fish, but fishing for men.

The number twelve is a number representing Israel (Twelve tribes, etc.). Here in Mark 8 the number leftover is seven, and once again, these are larger containers, hamper type baskets, if you will. The size of the containers in this second miraculous feeding could speak prophetically of the vast number of Gentiles that will be reached through the ministry of Jesus. Israel is a relatively small nation, and the people of Israel a minority among the nations of the world. The Gentiles include everybody in the world who is not Jewish, and that’s a lot of people! See Rev.7:9-14; This does not include all the Gentiles who have saved throughout time. Just the book of Acts alone records a vast number of Gentiles coming to faith in Christ and being spiritually grafted into Israel. So, it should not surprise us that the leftover baskets here in Mark 8 among a Gentile crowd are larger than those of Mark 6. The ministry to the Gentile world is one of abundant overflow and abundance. And the overflow and abundance is not simply because of the numerical difference. See Acts 28:17-28; Israel, despite overwhelming evidence to the truth about Jesus, rejected their Messiah, and now, except for a remnant of “Messianic Jews,” are in spiritual blindness.

The number seven is the biblical number for completion or fulfillment; After six days of creation, God rested on the seventh day; Israel marched around Jericho seven times, then seven priests blew seven trumpets; Rev.2-3, seven letters to seven churches; Rev.5:1, seven sealed scroll; Rev.8:1-2, seventh seal, seven angels who stand before God given seven trumpets; Read Rev.11:15; Rev.12:3, red dragon with seven heads and horns; Revelation 15:7, seven last plagues which are seven final bowls of God’s wrath; So, seven is clearly the number of completion or fulfillment. In all this there is a message.

The Bible prophecies that when “the full number of the Gentiles” has come to faith in Jesus, this will mark the end of time as we know it, and the second coming of Jesus Christ (see Rom.11:25). Israel, during the final seven years known as The Great Tribulation, will be purged, their eyes opened spiritually, and their Messiah and ours will return. Come quickly Lord Jesus!

While I believe that is a cool and very important prophetic message in comparing the two miraculous feedings, it is not the main message of this text in Mark 8.

They should have learned in the first feeding that they do not have to worry themselves about food, or any other necessity of life. Jesus is able to provide for them – even supernaturally when necessary. And his concern and compassion for people’s physical needs is not limited to the Jew, because God loves the whole world of people – red, yellow, black & white, rich, poor, Jew or Gentile.

Jesus’ rebuke to these disciples after this second feeding is because they were still focused on the physical rather than the spiritual. The main message in the passage is not learning to trust Jesus for physical needs. The main message is that they should have learned by this time to trust him for physical needs, and their focus now be on more crucial matters – the yeast of the Pharisees & Herod.

Jesus expected these disciples to be further along in their spiritual understanding and maturity, but they were not. So that is one of the key lessons and personal challenges from the text. Am I as far along in my spiritual understanding and maturity as I should be? See Phil.3:15-16; The Israelites, 40 years wandering in the wilderness, the Lord repeatedly trying to teach them to learn to live by faith, to stay away from the influences of the people who lived in the land God was giving them. Not only did they never learn to trust the Lord for daily necessities, they became like the people the Lord was driving out of the land!

If these disciples are not willing to listen, receive rebuke and instruction from the Lord, they will never grow and mature in their walk with Christ. See Mark 16:14; Luke 24:25-27, 31, 38, 44, 45. Even with humility & a willingness to learn and grow, one more thing is still required to be able to see and understand all the Lord has for us. And that is illustrated in Mark 8:22-25. Read.

Without the Lord’s touch, power, and supernatural revelation in our lives, we will never see the wonderful things He wants to show us, or understand the things of the Spirit. In short, we will never grow up and mature; See Eph.1:17-18; Col.1:9.

The spiritual focus Jesus wanted these disciples to have, maintain, and grow to maturity in, was to be astutely aware of their susceptibility, despite the revelation and truth they had received, and the privileges they had been afforded, to succumb to the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. And if they did not continue to grow and mature, they were prime targets for this yeast.

The yeast of the Pharisees was hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). And Jesus detailed aspects for their hypocrisy very clearly.

- Outer religious façade with no change of heart (Matt.23)
- Public displays of piety for personal gratification
 - Giving to the needy
 - Pompous public prayers

- Greed shrouded by selfish gifts to God (Luke 16; Matt.23)
- Despise those who speak genuine truth (Matt.23:29-37)

The yeast of Herod was flat out worldliness.

- Sexual sin
- Seeking power, especially political power
 - When any church becomes political it is in real trouble; men seeking ecclesiastical power and position, then using that position for their own ends and not the glory of God.
- Pursuing personal glory and fame (see Acts 12:19-24)

Matthew's record tells us that Jesus also warned them against the yeast of the Sadducees (See Matthew 16:11).

The Sadducees came from the leading families of the nation – the priests, merchants, aristocrats. The high priests and the most powerful members of the priesthood were mainly Sadducees (Acts 5:17). They enjoyed privileged positions in society and got along well under Roman rule. They didn't like any kind of movement that might upset order and authority (because it would threaten their privileged lifestyles). The Sadducees rejected Jewish the body of oral and written commentary that interpreted the Law of Moses. Sadducees only accepted the first five books of Moses, and depended on their own priests to interpret them. So they only believed "some" of the Bible. They were religious liberals, denying the complete authority of the Scriptures. The parts they did believe, they didn't really understand (or desire to), and even twisted them to fit their preconceived notions.

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead because they said it was not mentioned in the books of Moses. Jesus used a Scripture from the books of Moses to prove them wrong (Mark 12; Exodus 3:6); They also did not believe in the immortality of the soul, or rewards and punishments after death, so they did not believe in heaven or hell. Acts 23:8 tells us they didn't believe in angels or spirits either. They believed in free will, that people are responsible for their own prosperity or misfortune. They were not atheists. They believed in God, and even in the true God. But their lives were centered on earthly things. What else is there to live for with that kind of belief?

I Cor.15:32 If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

See notes on II Peter 1:3-11; Sadducees were near-sighted, Pharisees were blind.

Note: Jesus would not have warned His disciples of these yeasts if they were not susceptible to them.

How many people in the Bible failed in any of these areas of yeast?

- Peter (Gal.2:11-13); Demas (II Tim.4:10); King David (adultery, murder, hypocrisy); Gehazi, Ananias & Sapphira (greed), etc.

How many people do we know that failed to heed the warning about the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod?

- I know people that I went to Christian college with that are so far from God today. Some are living outright pagan lives, others are still very religious but have rejected certain parts of the Word of God, and therefore have no foundation for truth in their lives or what they proclaim to believe. And then others have lived the life of a hypocrite, and in time their hypocrisy has been unveiled, not only to their shame, but to the detriment of those they have failed by their hypocrisy – their wives & children, those they work with, their neighbors, and in some situations, the people in the congregations they served.

CONCLUSION

Hebrews 5:11-6:1a

If we are not growing, gaining in spiritual understanding, we are extremely susceptible to the yeast of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and that of Herod. Perhaps one or more of these yeasts has affected your life. The yeast of Herod is open, outright rebellion. A Pharisee puts on a nice religious front, attends church, talks the talk but doesn't walk the walk. A Sadducee simply picks and choose the parts of the Bible they like and rejects the rest. All three yeasts Jesus warned His disciples about keep one's focus on the things of this life and not the things of heaven.