

Jason Upchurch - Mark 8:1-21 - The Good News is Misunderstood

This morning we come to a passage of Scripture that reminds us that there are different reasons for people not following Jesus. The interesting thread that flows through these 3 separate events is the one reality that people are often confused about Jesus.

The Gentiles, though thankful for Jesus and amazed by what he can do, don't seem to understand who he is in the grand scheme of things. The Pharisees, of course, are continually rejecting him because they too miss the reality that he's the Messiah. And here again we see a theme common in Mark that even his own disciples are confused about what's going on.

And so this one theme of misunderstanding Jesus seems to be the thread that goes through the whole of this section.

Just by way of practical application I think it's important for us to remember that there are a variety of reasons a person might not follow Jesus. We need to be careful to not assume the reason that someone doesn't follow the Lord. There are many options.

They may simply not know the gospel. Especially if you were raised in a Christian home it's easy to forget that many people simply have no idea what the gospel is. The basic truths of the gospel that are so well known to us and the very basis for our faith are often unknown to many people even in our culture. A culture that celebrates Christmas and Easter and passes churches to and from everywhere they go might not actually know what we believe.

Others can be wrapped up in their own self-righteousness. Maybe they know the claims of Jesus - or some of the claims of Jesus - or have a vague religiosity and that's good enough for them. They don't want more. They think they're good enough on their own.

Still others have bad experiences at church and think we're all hypocrites. News flash: we are! Some think they know better than the word of God.

Part of our ability to witness to the world is to understand where people are in order to help them know Jesus.

But misunderstanding Jesus is as old as the gospel itself. **And** even when we take the time to actually explain to someone about Jesus, unless the Father opens their eyes to see, they'll never see.

That's really the big picture here: at this point in Jesus's ministry most people are still confused about who he is. This is often still the case.

Now, if you remember, Jesus has been ministering in Gentile areas, rather than Jewish ones in the last couple of stories. The Syrophonecian woman in Tyre along the sea coast, the mute and deaf man in the Decapolis. Those are all Gentile regions. And here, the feeding of the 4,000 is also in a Gentile region.

Jesus is doing the exact same miracles for Gentiles that he did for the Jews. Mark is showing us that the same exact blessing the Messiah poured out on the Jews is also being poured out on Gentiles.

I printed this **paper** off for you to get an idea of what I'm talking about.

Side: I know maybe this is a little geeky or in the weeds - you can toss this paper later if you want. But a lot of times when we're reading our Bibles we read slowly to absorb as much as we can. And that's good. But it's also good to read quickly as well to get a larger overview of things. To see big repeated patterns sometimes you have to read quickly.

And there are patterns all throughout the Bible. Matthew has patterns, John has patterns, Acts has a flow, Genesis. And sometimes the significance is in the playing out of the pattern.

So notice this: At the top is the big picture. Jesus does an exorcism, healing, feeds 5,000, crosses the lake, then confronts the Pharisees. That all happens in Jewish areas of Israel.

Then at the top right Mark walks us through almost the exact same events in the exact same sequence in Gentile territory. What's the point? The point seems to be that Jesus is bringing Messianic blessing to the Gentiles.

Now, we're going to look briefly at the feeding of 4,000. I want to highlight some things. But we'll only look briefly because it's almost a carbon copy of the feeding of the 5,000. And that's on purpose to show us the equivalence of the Jews and the Gentiles in the Kingdom of Jesus for those who believe in him.

I tried to break down the 2 passages for you and line them up so you can see this. **Read**

If you remember from when we looked at the feeding of the 5,000 there are some critical elements for us to understand.

First, Jesus is the new Moses who is feeding people with bread just like Moses fed Israel.

Second, and more accurate, Jesus is God because it was actually God feeding the Israelites in the desert.

Third, Messianic blessings were often given in food terms. Messiah would bring a bountiful harvest to Israel and all the nations.

What are some differences? Well, the situation here in chapter 8 seems a little more dire. They've been with Jesus 3 days, where the Jews had only been with Jesus that one day. These Gentiles love Jesus and have followed him for 3 days to a place where there's no food available.

There's also a difference in the amount of food. The first feeding had 5 loaves and 2 fish. The second has 7 loaves and some unknown small amount of fish. Mark doesn't actually tell us the exact amount.

But almost everything else is the same, written down in the same manner.

There is one big difference here that might be easy to miss. **Look back at 6:45-47.** Remember that after the first feeding there was this interesting misdirection that Jesus did. **Read 45-47, 53**

Remember this feeding is at about 3 o'clock on the lake and he tells them to go to 1 o'clock on the lake. Just head down the shore a couple miles while he dismissed the crowd. But he dismissed the crowd and went away by himself to pray until almost morning light.

Why did he do that? If you remember, I made the case that he did that to avoid the people taking him by force and making him king. He had just fed a stadium full of people and the people knew that's what Messiah would do. Let's make this guy king right now! That's exactly what John's gospel says in **John 6:15**. They wanted to take him by force to make him king.

So Jesus orchestrates a great plan to avoid the crowds while not offending them.

He sends the disciples up the way and he goes up on the mountain. But he sends a wind to blow the disciples to the opposite side of the lake and he walks across the water to meet them in the boat.

The crowd's zeal about Jesus being the Messiah is diffused. **Look back in Mark 8:9-10. Read**

Here, in Gentile land, there's none of that.

1) The first point to make here is that the Gentiles don't believe because they are ignorant of Jesus. They're happy about Jesus, but they're ignorant.

The people like the food. And they're amazed. But they don't seem to have the understanding that this is Messiah. There's no fervor to make Jesus king. There's no need for Jesus to run an elaborate interference play to hide himself from the crowd.

He heals, they get fed, and they hop into the boat and off they go. Nothing huge happens. In fact, **turn to Matt. 15:29-31** for a minute. This is actually right before the feeding. Jesus is doing a bunch of healing. Notice the reaction of the crowd. **Read 29-31**

They glorified the God of Israel. That's an interesting phrase. It shows just how separate they were from the Jews. "Oh, hey, your God's not half bad." They knew Jesus was Jewish and he did these miraculous things in the name of the God of Israel. And they worshipped the God of Israel.

Pagan people often switched their religious allegiance to whatever god they viewed as advantageous. Or they'd worship multiple gods. The Jews were very unique in that they only worshipped the one true and living God. When Jesus does these kinds of miracles in the Jewish areas, who do the crowds praise? They praise Jesus directly. They worship him. They bow down to him. They extol him. Many assume he's the Messiah.

But in Gentile land, they're happy about Jesus and even praise Jesus, but they miss the connection that he is God. They miss that he is the divine Messiah come to save. They don't have that understanding just yet.

Sometimes people need more information before they can understand who Jesus is and the significance of what he has done.

Let's go back to **Mark 8**. So Jesus feeds the Gentile 4,000 plus women and children. And heads back over to the other side of the lake. And he's met by the Pharisees.

2) The Pharisees don't understand Jesus because of rebellion. Read 11-13

So after the last feeding, if you remember, the Pharisees decided to argue with Jesus about washing hands. Jesus's disciples didn't wash their hands - they were unclean. At least to the Pharisees. There was nothing in the law that said anyone had to wash hands but the Pharisees had made this rule and expected everyone to follow.

Jesus rebuked them and proceeded to declare all foods clean and made it clear the real defilement comes from what's in our hearts not what's on our hands.

Well, here the Pharisees are again and they're back at it. They've come to argue with Jesus. Just like last time, the moment he gets off the boat they're ready to go toe to toe with him.

They want a debate. That's what the word means in **Vs. 11**. They want to debate with Jesus. They're trying to test him. This is not in good faith, mind you. This is for the purpose of undermining Jesus. They're out for blood.

And what they want is a sign. Wait a minute; didn't Jesus just do a sign? He's just fed 4,000 people. He's already fed 5,000. He's healed countless people. What kind of a sign do they really want?

Here's the interesting thing. The Pharisees don't deny that Jesus is performing miracles. Remember back in **Mark 3:22** they said he cast out demons. They didn't deny his power, they admitted he could do these works. But who did they say was giving Jesus that power? Satan; Beelzebul.

So they know he can do signs, they've likely heard about the feeding of the 5,000, although maybe not the feeding of the 4,000 just yet.

But what they are demanding is a sign from heaven. Or a sign **of** heaven. What they're asking for is a sign that makes it clear that Jesus's miracles are from God, not from Satan.

“Yes, Jesus, we grant that you do miracles. But how do we know for sure they are from God?” This is the same old argument they’ve always made: you’re a powerful teacher, and you do miracles. But we don’t think these miracles are from God.

Look at Deut 13:1-5. This is Moses, in the Law, talking about how false prophets will be able to do miracles. They’ll be able to do powerful signs and wonders. **Read**

So Israel is to be on guard against false teachers who might be able to do signs but will lead Israel away from the true and living God. But what’s the give away that it’s a false teacher? They lead the people after false gods and into sin.

Jesus hasn’t done that. He’s never called the people to worship any other God. Even as God in the flesh, he hasn’t specifically demanded anyone to worship him. People do worship him, and he never rebukes them for it, but it’s always in response to his miraculous working.

He’s also never called anyone to sin. He’s only ever called people to righteous living that begins in the heart.

And so what the Pharisees want is a sign from heaven. Or a “sign that authenticates he is from heaven” - something that is absolutely indisputable proof that what Jesus is doing is from God.

And, in all fairness, God had done some of those things in the past. You remember when Moses led Israel out of Egypt God gave Moses signs for the elders and for Pharaoh so that they would know Moses wasn’t speaking for himself he was speaking for God.

God also gave signs to Gideon and Hezekiah to authenticate miracles. The miracle works of the apostles were in large part an authentication type ministry so that people would know that God was with these people who were preaching about the resurrection of Jesus. God’s not necessarily against signs.

But here’s the deal: God’s not in the business of doing tricks for people who demand the signs. That’s the issue: **back in Mark 8** it says that the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign. Why did they ask? To test Jesus. They’re demanding signs from Jesus. They stood in judgment over him.

This isn’t humble asking. This isn’t genuine desire to know more. This is trying to trap Jesus. And what’s he say? Absolutely not. **Read 12**

So Jesus sighs here. The idea is a deep groaning because of the request. And he follows that with “truly I say to you.” What that means is that what he is saying is in bedrock granite. He will not waiver. They will get no sign whatsoever.

“This generation seeks a sign - 100% I will never give you a sign.”

Side: Matthew’s version adds, “except the sign of Jonah.” What’s the sign of Jonah? The sign of Jonah is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Just like Jonah was in the belly of the fish 3 days and 3 nights so too the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth 3 days and 3 nights.

The one big authentication sign for all people is the resurrection of Jesus. By the way: when people ask us why in the world we believe in Jesus our answer has to come back to the resurrection. He was alive, then he died, and then he was alive again. That’s the foundation for all Christianity.

But Mark doesn’t put that in here. Why? Well, we don’t know for sure. What seems to be the case is that Mark is emphasizing that in no uncertain terms Jesus will not be placating the Pharisees at all.

Even when Jesus does give them the sign of the resurrection, most of them reject it. Remember, they were in on the plot to pay the soldiers to lie and say Jesus’s body was stolen. The soldiers knew the truth, the Pharisees and religious leaders knew the truth, but they rejected anyway.

They've always disobeyed. These guys are so rebellious. God is standing there looking at them and they want proof that it's actually God.

See, the Bible says that you shall not put the Lord your God to the what? Test. **Deut 6:16**

And that's precisely what they're doing. Jesus has done a myriad of signs. He's performed more miracles than anyone in the history of the world. Only Moses and Elisha had performed any substantial amount of miracles prior to Jesus. Here comes Jesus, blows those guys out of the water by orders of magnitude. Jesus is literally a non-stop miracle worker the likes of which the world had never seen and has not seen since. It's not even close and what do the religious leaders want in order to make sure Jesus is for real? More signs.

And so Jesus condemns them. He says no. No signs for this generation. "This generation" is actually a slam against the Pharisees. Throughout the Bible the phrase this generation is used as a slam on rebellious people.

Gen 7:1 Noah and his family were the only ones righteous in "this generation."

Deut. 1:35: The Israelites who refused to go into the promised land would die in the wilderness because they were part of "this evil generation."

Psalms 95:10-11 talks about that same event: For forty years I loathed that generation. And said these are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways. Therefore I swore in my wrath 'They shall not enter my rest.'

This generation is a phrase that signifies 2 things. People who rebel against God, and who die as a result.

They are representative of the worst of the worst of rebels against Jesus.

And so we need to remember that some people disbelieve simply because they are rebellious. They want Jesus to conform to their demands. They want Jesus to approve of their lifestyle or their religion or their conception of who he should be. That's not how Jesus works.

You accept him on his terms and for who he is. He will not bow down to demands from anyone.

3. The disciples also don't understand because they are hard-hearted. **Read 14-21**

So the Gentiles are happily ignorant, the Pharisees are angrily rebellious. The disciples are confused and hard-hearted.

Vs. 17 alludes to the fact that the reason the disciples don't understand is that their hearts are hard. It's not just that they're confused but there's a spiritual condition going on with Jesus's own disciples that seems to be the problem for them.

Now, Mark really does paint the apostles as fools. I mean they just witnessed a massive miracle - the feeding of the 4,000 - and they get into the boat to leave and you know what they failed to bring? Bread. There were 7 baskets left over and no one thought to toss one of them in the boat for a snack later.

Now, the irony here is that they seem to be worried or upset that they have no bread. Why is that ironic? Because in the boat with the man who literally makes all the bread. Why would they be concerned?

Jesus uses the bread itself as something of a metaphor. He's going to toy with them a little. They're concerned about bread? Well, they should be. They should be concerned about leaven: the leaven of the Pharisees and the Herod.

And you can just imagine them sitting there thinking: "we don't have Herod's bread, Jesus. We don't have any bread, that's the problem." Really the problem is they're not picking up what Jesus is putting down.

Remember when the Syrophonecian woman played along with the who dogs eating the scraps left over? And Nicodemus played along with being brown again? Yeah, these guys have nothing. This is way over their heads.

Leaven in the Bible is often a euphemism for sin. So the leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy and the leaven of Herod is sexual immorality. Jesus is saying don't worry about your food, worry about your spiritual health.

But they're so dull they don't get it. And that's why Jesus asks about the hard hearts. Then he switches the analogy. This is scary. **Read 18**

He switches it to blindness and deafness. These guys are spiritually blind and spiritually deaf. Where have we heard that before? **Read Mark 4:10-14**

These guys are living out his parable. They are not understanding a thing. They can't even follow Jesus on the most basic logical journey. The Syrophonecian woman got it and Jesus cast out her daughter. These guys aren't picking up any of what he's laying down. **Read 8:18-21**

What's Jesus getting at here? What do they need to understand?

They need to understand 2 things: first they need to be one guard against sin and hypocrisy. That's the leaven.

But they also need to understand that Jesus provides all they need. They're in the boat with 1 loaf on a journey. That was a big oversight. But they're in the boat with Jesus who can provide whatever they need. And they just don't get it.

Let me ask you something. Why does Jesus keep putting up with these jokers? I mean, they're in the same spot as the Pharisees and the Gentiles. They don't understand. They've spent all this time with Jesus and they're missing it all.

Why does Jesus keep hanging out with them? Why does he keep doing this with them?

You know why? Because he chose them. They didn't choose Jesus. He chose them and appointed them to go the nations. That's why. He's not done with them.

And he's not done with us. Listen, there's a lot of times that we are hard hearted in our lives. Where we don't understand Jesus. Or we don't want to. Have you ever had those times in your life where you look back on your early Christian years and you think "what was I doing? What was I thinking?"

And you cringe at your former self for being so hard hearted. That's doesn't always mean you weren't saved. Sometimes it means we were hard hearted. We didn't know. But you know what? Jesus is patient with us. He's kind and gentle. He reveals to us what we need when we need it.

These guys are a little blind. And just like blind guy Jesus will heal in the next story, God will also open the eyes of these disciples. He opens all our eyes at just the right time.

Pray