

LESSON SIX

TITLE The Servant-Teacher

SCRIPTURE Mark 7:1-8:26

MEMORY VERSE

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

MAIN IDEA OF TEXT

Jesus teaches about the inside-out kingdom, where faith is greater than rule keeping.

BEGIN this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of his Word, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your study.

1 GRAB THEIR ATTENTION

TEACHER TIP

Start your lesson by telling a story that relates to the main idea of the lesson to grab the attention of your participants. In this section, we have provided you with two options, but feel free to develop your own.

OPTION 1: “TEACH ME, O LORD” BY EMERALD HYMNS

As followers of Jesus, we believe that his way and teaching help us understand what it looks like to be in relationship with God and live life the way it was meant to be lived. We were meant to live within God’s kingdom and serve Jesus as the king who reigns over God’s kingdom. Life in God’s kingdom is counter-cultural; in fact, you could say that it is an inside-out kind of kingdom, where faith is greater than rule keeping.

Let’s watch a lyric video for the song “Teach Me, O Lord” by Emerald Hymns and consider how we can become more responsive to Jesus and his teaching.

(Play lyric video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPDn1jKmq1c>)

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. What has God been teaching you recently?*
- 2. In what ways could you be more teachable as a disciple of Jesus? What would you need to change in order to be more teachable?*
- 3. How would you live differently if you lived with the belief that faith is greater than rule keeping?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text: Jesus reveals to us that life with God is more than simply keeping the rules. The Pharisees and teachers of the law in Jesus’s day did not fully understand this vital truth regarding what it means to live with God in relationship. They thought that what mattered most was obedience and following the rules, but a true relationship with God encompasses far more.

This week we are going to look at the reality that Jesus revealed to us a different way of living and that faith in him matters more than rule keeping.

OPTION 2: “THE LAW” BY THE BIBLE PROJECT

It is safe to say that there is no small amount of confusion surrounding God’s law found in the Old Testament. There are a lot of rules to follow—613 to be precise—and we modern believers may not be entirely sure what our relationship should be to God’s law. Was the law only for the Jews who lived during the Old Testament period? Or should we also continue to observe the law?

Let’s watch a video from the Bible Project that explains the purpose and design of the law and the fact that Jesus came, as the Messiah, to change our hearts and make it possible for us to fulfill God’s law and

commandments.

(Play video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BGO9Mmd_cU)

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *Having watched the video, how would you summarize the purpose and design of God's law?*
2. *What difference does it make to see our way of understanding God as primarily rule keeping or primarily a relationship?*
3. *In what ways have you recently experienced God changing your heart?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text: Jesus makes it possible for our hard hearts to be softened and changed. Only through him can we come to an understanding that we will never be able to fulfill God's law and his commands on our own. Through him we can have faith that he fulfills God's promise found in Jeremiah 24:7. "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart."

This week we are going to look at the fact that Jesus revealed to us a different way of living and that faith in him matters more than rule keeping.

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find the historical, cultural, and literary context you need to properly interpret and apply the text.

OUTLINE

1. Jesus Teaches About the Law (7:1-23)
 - A. The Pharisees and teachers of the law question Jesus about the tradition of ceremonial washing (vv. 1-5)
 - B. Jesus responds and rebukes the Pharisees and teachers of the law (vv. 6-8)
 - C. Jesus explains what the Pharisees and teachers of the law misunderstand about the law (vv. 9-13)
 - D. Jesus declares what truly defiles a person (vv. 14-15)
 - E. Jesus explains his teaching to his disciples (vv. 17-23)
2. Jesus Honors a Gentile Woman's Faith (7:24-30)
 - A. A syrophenician woman asks Jesus to drive out a demon possessing her daughter (vv. 24-26)
 - B. Jesus commends the woman for her faith and heals her daughter (vv. 27-30)
3. Jesus Heals a Deaf and Mute Man (7:31-37)
 - A. Townspeople ask Jesus to heal a deaf and mute man (vv. 31-32)
 - B. Jesus heals the deaf and mute man (vv. 33-35)
 - C. The townspeople are amazed by Jesus (vv. 36-37)
4. Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand (8:1-13)
 - A. Jesus feels compassion for a large and hungry crowd (vv. 1-3)
 - B. Jesus and his disciples discuss what to do (vv. 4-5)
 - C. Jesus feeds the crowd with only seven loaves of bread (vv. 6-10)
 - D. The Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign and he refuses (vv. 11-13)
5. Jesus Teaches His Disciples (8:14-21)
 - A. Jesus warns his disciples about the attitude of the Pharisees and Herod (vv. 14-15)
 - B. The disciples don't understand Jesus (v. 16)
 - C. Jesus rebukes his disciples and explains his teaching (vv. 17-21)
6. Jesus Heals a Blind Man (8:22-26)
 - A. Jesus attempts to restore a blind man's sight (vv. 22-24)
 - B. Jesus fully restores the blind man's sight (vv. 25-26)

CONTEXT

Jesus has demonstrated his sovereign power and authority by miraculously feeding five thousand people and walking on water. He has also commissioned and sent out twelve of his disciples for ministry.

FALLEN CONDITION FOCUS

We want simple, clear rules that we can follow so we can know that we are better than others.

GOSPEL RESPONSE

Jesus declares that rules are not enough to make someone righteous. Only faith in him will make a person welcome in his kingdom.

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find exercises you can use to lead your class through the process of Observation, Interpretation, and Application. As the teacher, work through all the exercises below to ensure you gain a good understanding of the text.

“Just tell me what to do.” This is often our response as men and women who are hardwired to follow the rules in order to get what we want or need in life. Really, we just want a new law that we can follow, and we believe that will make things nice and easy. But that is not the way that God’s kingdom operates, and that is not what Jesus taught his followers. Life in God’s kingdom is, at its core, a relationship. We get sidetracked from living within God’s kingdom whenever we believe that following the rules is *the* key to making God accept and love us.

Jesus came to reveal to us that there is nothing we can do on our own that will make God accept and love us. We are sinners and we naturally rebel against God. However, Jesus came to change our hearts. Through him we can see and understand that we fall short in every way of upholding God’s law, and we can see that he lived the life that we should have lived. He was perfectly obedient to God’s law and lived a sinless life so that our hearts might be transformed to live with God in a restored relationship in his inside-out kingdom, where faith is greater than rule keeping.

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The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus 2 and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. 3 (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. 4 When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?”

6 He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

“These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

7 They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules.’

8 You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”

9 And he continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! 10 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' 11 But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— 12 then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. 13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

14 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. 15 Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them." [16]

17 After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. 18 "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? 19 For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)

20 He went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. 21 For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come— sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. 25 In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. 26 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

27 "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

28 "Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

29 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."

30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

31 Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. 32 There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and

they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.

33 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. 34 He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!"). 35 At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

36 Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. 37 People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

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During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 2 "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. 3 If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance."

4 His disciples answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?"

5 "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked.

"Seven," they replied.

6 He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. 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. 7 They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. 8 The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 9 About four thousand were present. After he had sent them away, 10 he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

11 The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. 12 He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it." 13 Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

14 The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. 15 "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."

16 They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we

have no bread.”

17 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

“Twelve,” they replied.

20 “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

They answered, “Seven.”

21 He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

22 They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. 23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?”

24 He looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.”

25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 Jesus sent him home, saying, “Don’t even go into the village.”

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: FOLLOWING THE PLOT

Read the passage again and write down who are the main characters and what key actions move the plot of the story forward.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: IDENTIFYING KEY THEMES

Write down what you think are the key themes as single words or short phrases. Remember that identifying key themes will help you develop a good overall grasp of the passage.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 3: DISCOVERING THE MAIN POINT

Read the passage once more and reflect on what Jesus both says and does in the events that Mark’s gospel shares with the reader.

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 1: FROM PLOT TO EMPHASIS

Based on your reading of the passage, what do you think Jesus is trying to emphasize to both the religious leaders of his day and to his disciples?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 2: SYNTHESIZE THE KEY THEMES

Refer back to what you wrote down as key themes in the passage. What do these key themes reveal about Jesus as the Servant-Teacher?

How do these themes relate to one another and what do they reveal about the work of Jesus?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 3: SUMMARIZING THE MAIN POINT

How would you summarize the main point that this portion of Mark's gospel is trying to make regarding Jesus and life in his kingdom?

APPLICATION: HOW DO I RESPOND?

QUESTION 1: Jesus taught that the evil inside us is what defiles us, not the particular rules we do or do not follow. What makes it important for you to understand that your heart is naturally rebellious and evil toward God? In what ways does scripture support this truth?

QUESTION 2: How would you live differently if you believed that God's love and acceptance of you is not based on your performance but on Jesus and what he has done for you?

QUESTION 3: In what ways might you be changed by believing that God values you and his relationship with you more than he values your rule keeping?

QUESTION 4: What are some ways today that we might put new rules or laws on ourselves that God did not give?

QUESTION 5: What is one thing you could do this week to live for God's kingdom and as Jesus did?

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find questions to choose from that will help your group consider how God is calling them to respond to the text. Help your group set measurable action steps.

4

CHALLENGE

TEACHER TIP

End your time of study with one final challenge and prayer. Your final challenge should pull together everything you covered in this lesson and call your participants to action.

Jesus shows us that the real problem is not the rules we may or may not be obeying. The real problem is our hearts which are naturally sinful and rebellious toward God. Only until the problem of our sinful hearts is addressed will we have any hope that we can both desire God and obey his commands.

We do have hope because of Jesus. He came to show us that in his inside-out kingdom, faith is greater than rule keeping. He made it possible for our hard hearts to be softened and changed from the inside out. Through Jesus we can experience the abundance that God has for us in a renewed and restored relationship with him.

Life with God is not about measuring up and following the rules. It is about acknowledging our inability to measure up to God's standards and believing that Jesus has made a way for us to get back to God and have a relationship with him. It is a life of faith and trust that Jesus has done for us what we could not do ourselves. He lived a sinless life in perfect obedience to God. Because of him we can know God personally and be welcomed into his kingdom as a son or daughter. This is what Jesus has accomplished for us.

LET'S PRAY

COMMENTARY

MARK 7:1-13

Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss explain in their commentary in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* what was the difference between the commands of God and the traditions of men.

Another delegation of fact-finding religious leaders (Pharisees and teachers of the law) comes down from Jerusalem to investigate the Galilean activities of Jesus. The first such visit provoked the Beelzebul controversy (3:22-30), which, as we have seen, was a key crisis point in Mark's narrative used to distinguish the "insiders" who were responding to the kingdom message from the "outsiders" who were rejecting it (see comments at 3:20-34; 4:10-12). The reference to Jerusalem again reminds the reader where the center of hostility toward Jesus lies and foreshadows his Jerusalem passion.

What the Pharisees and scribes discovered was that Jesus' disciples did not wash their hands before eating. Their complaint was not, of course, that the disciples were being unhygienic. The question was one of ceremonial purity. The term translated "unclean" in the NIV (*koinos*, GK 3123, "common") is used here in the sense of "defiled" (TNIV), in contrast to what is "holy" or set apart to God. Mark explains for his Gentile readers that *koinos* means "unwashed" (i.e., in the prescribed manner).

As in the question about fasting in 2:18, the issue here does not concern an OT command but a Pharisaic tradition. The OT did not command hand washing before meals but did require ritualistic washings for the priests before offering sacrifices (Ex 30:19-21; 40:12, 30-32). The Pharisees took these priestly commands and applied them to themselves, not only with reference to sacrifices but also to all food. Perhaps their intention in doing so was in recognition that Israel was intended to be a "kingdom of priests" (Ex 19:6). It is uncertain whether the Pharisees expected all Israelites to live by these standards or whether they are here applying them to the disciples because of Jesus' reputation as a religious leader.

Verses 3-4 are parenthetical (so NIV and TNIV). Mark felt it necessary to explain to his Gentile readers the Jewish custom of ceremonial hand washing. Mark's application of the custom not only to the Pharisees but also "all the Jews" (v. 3) may be a generalization for his Gentile audience to identifying this custom as specifically Jewish. Gundry, 358-60, however, sees evidence for the widespread practice of hand washing among the Jews of Jesus' day.

The "tradition of the elders" (vv. 3, 5) consisted in a great mass of oral tradition that had arisen about the OT law. About AD 200 it was written down in the Mishnah, but in Jesus' day it was still in oral form. The purpose of this oral tradition was to provide guidelines for all areas of life. If the OT law was silent or too general about a particular subject, the tradition would seek to provide specific applications for diverse situations. The goal was to "build a fence" around the law to protect against its violation. An entire division of the Mishnah is devoted to the question of ceremonial purity (*eharot*, "cleannesses"). The rabbis came to view these oral traditions as fully authoritative and even claimed they had been given to Moses by God on Mount Sinai and passed down from one generation to the next (m. Abot 1:1-2).

In v. 4, Mark gives an example of the custom. The Greek phrase *ap' agoras* ("from the marketplace")

is cryptic and may mean “things bought from the marketplace” or “when they come from the marketplace.” If the former meaning is adopted, the verse would be translated, “They do not eat things bought from the marketplace unless they wash them.” But the NIV and most versions are probably correct, for the verb *baptisantai* is in the middle voice and so could mean “wash themselves.” After being in the marketplace and coming into contact with Gentiles or even nonobservant Jews, the Pharisees would wash themselves to ensure their ritual cleanness. By way of further explanation, Mark adds that the Pharisees “observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and [copper] kettles.”

To the question as to why Jesus’ disciples acted as they did, Jesus answered by quoting a passage from Isaiah, preceded by his own comment: “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites” (v. 6). The word “hypocrite” (*hypokritēs*, GK 5695) originally meant “play actor” and refers here to people whose worship is merely outward and not from the heart. Though the term is common in Matthew (thirteen occurrences), Mark uses it only here. In saying that Isaiah had prophesied about them, Jesus did not mean that Isaiah had in mind the Pharisees and the teachers of the law when he originally wrote these words but that his denunciation of the religious leaders of his day fit those of Jesus’ day. The quotation (Isa 29:13) is from the LXX, which differs slightly from the MT in the last sentence. The MT says “their fear [or reverence] of me consists of commandments taught by men.” The LXX says “vainly they worship me, teaching human commandments and teachings.” Both make essentially the same point—that their traditions and regulations pay mere lip service but show no true heart for God. Their outward appearance of piety is a lie, because it is not accompanied by a “total life commitment to the one who is the true object of religious devotion” (Anderson, 185).

In v. 8, Jesus contrasts the “commands of God” with the “traditions of men.” It is clear that this great body of Jewish tradition had failed to get to the heart of God’s commands. It was supposed to fence in the law so that the people would not infringe on it. In practice, however, the Pharisees were abandoning God’s law while holding fast to human traditions.

In v. 9, Jesus repeats and expands the claim of v. 8 by emphasizing that the Pharisaic traditions were even being used to overrule or invalidate God’s commands. The statement is sarcastic and ironic: “You are very good at setting aside God’s command to hold fast to your tradition!” The Pharisees, Jesus says, had turned doing so into an art form.

Jesus cites here a specific example. The first quotation is from the LXX of Exodus 20:12 (cf. Dt 5:16) and is a statement of the fifth commandment. The second quotation is from the LXX of Exodus 21:16[17]. In the latter the seriousness of the failure to keep the fifth commandment is underscored—death is the penalty for anyone who curses his father or mother (v. 10). But by means of the tradition, the responsibility of children to their parents could be easily circumvented (v. 11). A son need only declare that what he had intended to give to his father and mother be considered “Corban,” i.e., a gift devoted to God; then it could no longer be designated for his parents. By devoting the gift to God, a son did not necessarily promise it to the temple, nor did he prevent its use for himself. What he did do was legally to exclude his parents from benefiting from it (v. 12). So the very purpose for which the fifth commandment was given was set aside by the tradition. This loopholing is what is meant by “nullifying” (*akyrountes*, GK 218) the word of God (v. 13).

The phrase “and you do many things like that” parallels Mark’s “and they observe many other traditions” (v. 4) and carries the same derogatory tone. It emphasizes that this example is merely one of the many ways in which the true spirit of God’s law is being ignored or arbitrarily dismissed by the

Pharisees.

MARK 7:24-31

In the Focus on the Bible Commentary, Geoffrey Grogan gives insight into the significance of Jesus's interactions with the Gentile woman in 7:24-31 of Mark's gospel.

The journey to Tyre took Jesus beyond the bounds of the Holy Land proper. This was one of the two great cities of Phoenicia, the other being Sidon. Mark tells us earlier that people from that area had heard about Jesus and had come to swell the crowds who were drawn to him (3:8). Now he was to pay a personal visit to their own land.

The reason is not given to us. His concern to keep his visit secret here is unlikely to have any connection with the 'Messianic Secret' (see comment on pages 109-10), which was related not to the fact that he was in a particular place and wanted this fact to be kept secret but rather with the possible misinterpretation of his mission in political and military terms. Perhaps he went there for rest and prayer.

How apt for this event to be placed after 7:1-23! Paul, with whom Mark had worked for a time, taught that God accepts Gentiles simply by grace and not by works of the law, as we see confirmed in Luke's record of the Jerusalem Council recorded by him in Acts 15. Mark here emphasizes that this woman was a Gentile. She is described by him as 'a Greek born in Syrian Phoenicia'. By this he seems to be saying that her language was Greek and that she was not an emigrée Phoenician, such as were the North African descendants of the ancient Carthaginians, but rather was born in the Phoenician homeland. Matthew 15:22 uses an old and very broad term, 'Canaanite', indicating that she was a descendant of Israel's ancient enemies. So both have indicated that she was a Gentile, although in somewhat different ways.

Here then is somebody whose every designation shouts aloud that she is not a Jew—yet she was blessed by Jesus! This is a foreshadowing of Pentecost and beyond that the great ingathering of the Gentiles through the mission of the church of Christ.

Our Lord's apparent rebuff to her stimulated her faith. This was surely his intention, for divine love has many ways of securing its aims. Sometimes he allows us to reach desperation point to give our prayers new urgency and depth, and this certainly happened on this occasion.

The Jews often referred to Gentiles contemptuously as 'dogs', for the dog was not then the much-loved domestic animal that it is among us today, but a scavenger of the streets. Children did, however, often play with the puppies, which were brought into people's houses. Jesus used the diminutive, which would be appropriately translated 'puppy dogs', when he spoke to the woman. In this cultural context, this expression had connotations of the home rather than of the street. This unexpectedly softer language would take her by surprise, but it did more than that—it gave her hope, and her faith blossomed.

After giving his account of this event, Mark plots the course of a journey by Jesus which took him first northwards and then to the southeast, terminating eventually in the Decapolis area where we have seen him already in 5:1-20. Again we can see how selective Mark's account is, for he tells us nothing about the ministry of Jesus in Sidon.

MARK 8:1-13

Rodney L. Cooper, in the Holman New Testament Commentary, explains the importance of Jesus's miracle of feeding the four thousand at this stage of his ministry.

This feeding of the crowds is generally considered to be a separate event rather than a repeat of the first feeding. Jesus mentions the two in verses 19–20, and there are enough differences between the two to believe that they are separate accounts.

This time, the crowd was gathered not by Lake Galilee but in the region of the Decapolis. He had been in Tyre and Sidon in chapter 7. As we have seen previously in chapter 5, this region was populated by Jews and Gentiles. Barclay makes an interesting point about the crowds gathered here. In chapter 5, after the healing of the demoniac, the crowds urged Jesus to leave, but the restored man stayed behind. It is possible that the people now gathered were a result of his witnessing to Christ's intervention in his life (Barclay, Mark, p. 184).

This miracle probably included numerous Gentiles. While Jews had been the recipients of the first miraculous meal, the Gentiles were fed this time. This symbolizes a time when all people, regardless of race or national origin (Gal. 3:28), will share in the Lord's Supper. The two feeding miracles emphasize that the kingdom will be made up of Jews and Gentiles. In between the two feeding miracles are miracles to Gentiles and Jesus' miracle for the Syrophenician woman. Jesus' discussions in chapter 7 had been about "clean" and "unclean." The miracle of the feeding of the four thousand validates his teaching that only God can decide who is clean and who is unclean.

Jesus' teaching had filled a spiritual hungering on the part of these people. So intent were they on his words that they had not eaten for three days. This is reminiscent of Ezekiel's experience of eating the scroll of the word of the Lord. It tasted as sweet as honey in his mouth (Ezek. 3:3; cf. Ps. 119:103). "This audience had proved their right sense of spiritual values by three days of eager listening to the Lord's preaching. It is not just that they were hungry, but that they were hungry in God's service: and so theirs was to be an experience of 'seek ye first the kingdom of God ... and all these things shall be added unto you' (Matt. 6:33)" (Cole, Mark, p. 127).

Jesus had probably gone without food for this time as well. But it was for his flock that he was concerned and felt compassion. He was also concerned about sending them home. Many of them had traveled great distances and might not make it home without fainting or becoming ill.

This location was more remote than the location of the previous feeding miracle. In that place, there had been nearby towns where the people could buy food if necessary. This place was too desolate. Some interpreters take the disciples' question as evidence of a lack of faith and a failure to remember the previous miracle. Other interpreters feel that the disciples were acknowledging there was no way for them to feed the crowds and that they were looking to Jesus in faith for another miracle.

As in the previous miracle, Jesus asked the disciples to determine the amount of food they had. Again, it was inadequate. But Jesus took what they had—seven loaves and a few small fish—blessed them, and gave them to the disciples to distribute. As before, Jesus took a little and made much of it. In Jesus' hands, there is no such thing as too little.

Again, all the people were satisfied and the fragments were gathered. As Cole points out, it is not necessary to affix a spiritual meaning to the number of baskets of fragments picked up. There were

probably twelve baskets because there were twelve disciples and each had a small basket. On this feeding occasion, four thousand men were present. After feeding the crowd, Jesus dismissed them and then left, returning to Galilee.

Stock notes that in returning to Galilee, Jesus was returning to a discussion with the Pharisees. "In contrast to the faith encountered in Gentile territory, Jesus encounters disbelief in Galilee" (Stock, Mark, p. 220). The Pharisees demanded a sign from Jesus. One wonders just how many signs they needed! These people, with their superior intellect and knowledge, should have recognized Christ at once. And yet, they refused to have their eyes opened. Through their stubbornness and rebellion, they remained blind and deaf while others were healed.

The phrase sign from heaven may mean that they expected a miracle from heaven, not the earthly miracles Jesus had been performing. If they had just heard about the miraculous multiplication of the bread and fish, perhaps they wanted Jesus to bring down manna from heaven. As Luke records in 16:31, however, those who are set against the Lord will not be convinced even if a person is raised from the dead.

Jesus would not perform signs or miracles on demand. He would not bless unbelief. He could do nothing to convince these people, so he left them to their unbelief and blindness. Barbieri notes that Jesus' rapid departure is a signal of his great indignation for these leaders. There are times when talk is useless (Barbieri, Mark, p. 179).

MARK 8:10-26

Warren W. Wiersbe, in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, brings clarity to a potentially confusing portion of scripture:

Jesus and the disciples crossed to the western side of the Sea of Galilee where they were met by the Pharisees who were still angry at Him because of His earlier indictment of their hypocrisy (Mark 7:1-23). This time they tempted Him to prove His divine authority by giving them a sign from heaven. They did not want an earthly miracle, such as the healing of a sick person. They wanted Him to do something spectacular, like bring fire from heaven or bread from heaven (John 6:30-31). This would prove He was indeed sent from God.

Our Lord's response was one of deep grief and disappointment (see Mark 7:34). How tragic that the religious leaders of God's chosen people should be so hardhearted and spiritually blind! Their desire for a sign from heaven was but another evidence of their unbelief, for faith does not ask for signs. True faith takes God at His Word and is satisfied with the inward witness of the Spirit.

Since Mark was writing primarily for Gentile readers, he did not include our Lord's words concerning the sign of the Prophet Jonah (Matt. 16:4; and see Matt. 12:38-41). What is "the sign of Jonah"? Death, burial, and resurrection. The proof that Jesus is what He claimed to be is the fact of His own death, burial, and resurrection (Acts 2:22-36; 3:12-26).

Jesus left them and crossed to the east side of the Sea of Galilee, and en route taught His disciples an important spiritual lesson. It appears that they were almost as blind as the Pharisees! The men were having a private discussion about their food supply, because somebody had forgotten to pack bread. Who was to blame?

It must have grieved Jesus that His handpicked helpers were so spiritually obtuse. The fact that He had multiplied bread on two occasions and fed over 10,000 people had apparently made little impression on them! Why worry and argue over one loaf of bread when you have Jesus in the boat with you? Their minds were dull, their hearts were hard (see Mark 6:52), their eyes were blind, and their ears were deaf (see Mark 4:11-12).

God's people often have a tendency to forget His blessings (Ps. 103:1-2). He meets our needs, but then when the next problem arises, we complain or become frightened. As long as we are with Him, we can be sure He will care for us. It would do us all good to pause occasionally and remind ourselves of His goodness and faithfulness.

But the main lesson had to do with leaven (yeast) and not with bread. In the Bible, leaven is consistently a symbol of evil. Each Passover season, the Jews had to remove all leaven from their dwellings (Ex. 12:18-20), and leaven was not allowed with the offerings (Ex. 23:18; 34:25; Lev. 2:11; 6:17). Evil, like leaven, is small and hidden, but it spreads and soon infects the whole (Gal. 5:9).

The Bible uses leaven as a picture of false doctrine (Gal. 5:1-9), unjudged sin in the church (1 Cor. 5), and hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). In this context, Jesus warned them about the teaching (false doctrine) of the Pharisees and the followers of Herod. The Pharisees "said but they did not"; in other words, they practiced and encouraged hypocrisy (note Mark 7:6). The Herodians were a worldly group who catered to Herod, accepted the Roman way of life, and saw in Herod and his rule the promised kingdom for the Jewish nation. If this false teaching got into the hearts and minds of the disciples, it would infect them and pollute the truth Jesus had given them to proclaim about Himself and His kingdom.

We can never be too careful about detecting and avoiding false doctrine. Only a small deviation from the Word may get into an individual or a church, but before long it will grow and infect everything. Our Lord did not often say "Beware!" but when He did it was important!

In this section, Mark recorded two miracles that are not found in the other Gospels: the healing of the deaf man who had a speech impediment (Mark 7:31-37), and the healing of the blind man outside Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26). Perhaps we can see in these two men illustrations of the disciples' spiritual condition described in Mark 8:18! Jewish readers would connect these two miracles with the messianic promises in Isaiah 35.

In both these situations, friends brought the men to Jesus; and in both situations, Jesus led the men away from the crowds. In fact, in the latter case, He took the man outside the city. Why? Probably because the city of Bethsaida had already been judged because of its unbelief (Matt. 11:21-24). No more evidence would be given to them.

The unique thing about this miracle of healing is that it occurred gradually and not instantly. The Gospels record the healing of at least seven blind men, and they show that our Lord used a variety of approaches. Perhaps it was the atmosphere of unbelief in Bethsaida that hindered Him (see Mark 6:5-6), or it may have been the spiritual condition of the man himself. For some reason not given, the man was not ready for instant sight, so Jesus restored him gradually. The fact that the man recognized men and trees suggests that he had not been born blind but had been blinded by accident or disease.

The man was not from Bethsaida, for Jesus sent him home and cautioned him not to enter that town. Now that he had been healed, why go to unbelieving Bethsaida where Jesus had been rejected? His job was to go home and spread the Good News of the kingdom, and to demonstrate its power by showing others what Jesus had done for him (see Mark 2:11; 5:34; 10:52). Should he not give another opportunity to the people in Bethsaida? Perhaps they would believe if they heard how Jesus had restored his sight. No, Bethsaida had been given adequate evidence, but still had refused to believe. It is a dangerous thing for anybody to reject the message of God and harden his or her heart in unbelief.

The disciples learned some valuable lessons on this trip, lessons that they would need to remember and apply in later years of ministry. We today need to learn these same lessons: (1) don't seek after signs, but live by faith in His Word; (2) trust Jesus to meet needs; (3) avoid the leaven of false doctrine; (4) let Jesus work as He wills, and expect variety in His working.

Mark recorded the events of some busy days in the ministry of God's Servant! Next he will take us "behind the scenes" as the Servant instructs His disciples and prepares them for His death on the cross.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Hans F. Bayer, *Mark*, The ESV Study Bible.

James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary.

D.A. Carson, *Mark*, The NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible.

Rodney L. Cooper, *Mark*, Holman New Testament Commentary.

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Leland Ryken, Introduction to *Mark*: Literary Features, The ESV Study Bible.

R.C. Sproul, *Mark*, The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version.

Charles Swindoll, *Mark*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary.

Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Mark*, The Bible Exposition Commentary.