

Sermon Title: Miracle Hearing, Speaking, and Eating Speaker: Jim Harris
Scripture Text: Mark 7:31 – 8:9 Date: 1-6-19

After a couple of weeks away for the special holiday events, let's return to our friend Mark, and continue in the Gospel According to Mark.

It would be my systematic temptation, when we've been away from a series for a while and we come back to it, to probably get stuck on the first verse and do 45 minutes of background and reviewing and all of that; and I'm going to do exactly the opposite today. We are at a transition time in the ministry of Jesus, as we make our way through Mark. You're probably sick of me telling you over and over, as we've gone through all of these incidents: "This happened during the Great Galilean Ministry." Why, you would think that, most of what Jesus did happened in the Great Galilean Ministry. Well, it isn't that it's most of what He did, but a lot of what is *recorded* was during that extended period—about a year and a half that Jesus spent in the region of Galilee. He went from synagogue to synagogue, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and all along the way, He dealt with crowds wherever they were. He healed countless people, He cast out thousands of demons, He calmed storms, He walked on water, He fed about 15,000 people from one boy's lunch, and He constantly irritated the Pharisees by confronting and exposing their twisted and legalistic teaching.

And during that year and a half, He *did* make a few trips to Jerusalem at special feast times, but Mark doesn't mention them; that's more for Matthew to deal with because he was dealing with the Jewish audience, and more for John to deal with because he was focusing on the more theological aspects of things. Mark wrote for a Gentile audience and his gospel is the shortest one, so it doesn't have as much in it; that's not a problem for us;

On our last visit to Mark, we saw Jesus do something rather radical. He went beyond the border of Israel to the city of Tyre; it's about 50 miles north and west of His longtime headquarters at Capernaum, in the land formerly known as Phoenicia—that's where Tyre and sister-city of Sidon were. By then, in the time of Jesus, it was known as the region of "Syrophenicia" because it had come under the control of Syria. You could go today and find a city called Tyre, you could find a city called Sidon, and if you were there, your GPS app would say, "You're in Lebanon." But it wasn't Lebanon in those days.

Jesus, when He got there, dealt with a Gentile Syrophenician woman, and He marvelously delivered her demon-possessed daughter. As we studied that, we saw that, imbedded in the record of that incident is the vital information about the concept that is developed later in the New Testament, that the gospel goes to the Jews first, and also to the Gentiles. (see Rom. 1:16; cf. Acts 13:46). And we also learned, from looking at that woman in Matthew's description of her, what it means to have great faith. If you weren't with us then, I suggest by all means, go online or get a CD and listen to that; it will help you connect with what we're doing today.

Now, the transition that is taking place, that I referred to, is from being where the Jewish crowds were, to Jesus doing just the opposite and pulling away from the crowds. Now, that's easier said than done, if you're Jesus and you're in Galilee. He wanted to spend concerted time with the Twelve. Now, I won't take all the time to show you the details, but it isn't a very difficult study to do. If you harmonize Matthew and Mark and Luke and John, we can tell that,

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Jesus took the Twelve disciples on what amounts to a long walking tour, during which time He taught *them*; it wasn't focused on the crowds, it was focused on them, and preparing them for their apostolic ministry. We don't have nearly as much detail about events during this time, as we have details from the Great Galilean Ministry. As a matter of fact, what we studied last time and what we'll study today, is almost everything we have from this little tour; there'll be a little bit more.

These travels took many weeks—actually months. Once they got into the region of Judea, after they had circled to the north and to the west, and then back to the south and to the east, and over into the area called Decapolis, that I'll describe in a minute—once He finished *that* portion of His life, and got into the last 6 to 10 months, when He was heading to Jerusalem for the Cross—when we get there, we'll have, again, a lot more details of things that happened.

So if you look at a map of Galilee and the surrounding areas, you can get an idea of where they went. Unfortunately, it doesn't show you how many *hills* there are in the way; this was a rather difficult trek, if you will, but they took their time with it. From Capernaum, they went north and west to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, to the city of Tyre. Then they went north along the Mediterranean coast to the sister-city called Sidon. From there, they headed southeast and they stayed north of the Sea of Galilee. They went past the area called Caesarea Philippi; they're going to come back there later, and something very significant will happen there. And you have a picture online of Marsha and me at that site in Caesarea Philippi—which, of course, you probably want to print and have us autograph, but we'll do that later.

As they came past there, they looped even farther to the east, and then south again, so that they could turn west and come into the area known as the Decapolis. "Decapolis" means "ten cities": "Deca"—ten; "Polis"—city. It was a region to the east of the Sea of Galilee and the north part of the Jordan River; and there were ten identifiable cities in that region. They were Hellenized cities; they were Gentile territory, Greek speaking territory. Obviously there were Jews there as well, and they were scattered throughout that region.

So today, rather than review a lot I, want to bite off a relatively larger section—that overlaps Mark Chapter 7 and Chapter 8—to look at two events that happened in the Decapolis region. They are connected geographically, and they are connected chronologically—these two events are—and they underscore that great lesson that Jesus was teaching His men, that the message of the gospel is for *everyone*, not only for Jews (see Is. 49:6). Yes, He came to the Jews. Yes, He was a Jew. Yes, "salvation is from the Jews" (Jn. 4:22, NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted)—but it's to the Jew first, and also to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16). You're going to see a very personal miracle, and a very public miracle among Gentiles, to make the point. So, two events, two points of an outline; we can pluck the outline points from the text: Number 1—Be opened; and we'll show what that means. And Number 2—Sit and eat.

First: Be opened. The first of these events is the very personal one. It happened within sight of others—Jesus didn't *hide* and do this—but it was very special to one man. Now, I want you to connect something. I mentioned to you, back in Chapter 5, to remember something; and I

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don't suspect that you did, but that's okay—you will in a moment. Wouldn't you wonder how Jesus could go over into Gentile territory and immediately attract huge crowds—someplace He'd never been? Well, it's because, behind the scenes of this passage is the connection to what we saw back in Chapter 5. That was when Jesus went from Capernaum, just across the northeast tip of the Sea of Galilee, and He visited the area of the Gerasenes—or the Gadarenes, depending on which gospel you're looking at. That's where He dealt with those two spectacularly demon-possessed men. They were gloriously delivered. That legion of demons that He cast out of them entered and famously killed the herd of pigs, drowning them in the Sea of Galilee. Sadly, when that happened, remember the reaction of the people? You would think that, these two guys that had been terrorizing everybody that came by—now they're completely sane, they're clothed, and they're in their right minds—wouldn't you think that they would want to welcome whoever did that? But it tells us, in Mark Chapter 5, that the people were so terrified, they demanded that Jesus leave immediately: "Get out of here! We don't want You.

Well, the one of the two that apparently did all the speaking, wanted to go back to Capernaum with Jesus and the disciples. But Jesus didn't let him. The passage is Mark 5:19 and 20; and here's the connection to our text. It says: "And He did not let him, but He said to him, 'Go home to your people'—which would scare the daylights out of his people, having been as he was—"Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.' And he went away and began to proclaim"—here it is—"in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed." That man, we said at that time, is the first missionary sent by Jesus; it was even before He sent the Twelve out to their little preaching circuit that He sent them on. He was a Gentile, and he went to the region of the cities of Decapolis. Obviously, he was faithful at doing what he did, and he was effective, so when word came that Jesus was in the area, the response was spectacular!

So let's connect from where we were, when we last left Mark, to where we're going today: Mark 7, starting at Verse 31—"Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee"—that's on the north side of the Sea of Galilee, and farther away than Capernaum—"within the region of Decapolis. They brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they implored Him to lay His hand on him." Now, Mark zeroes in on the one guy, and that's appropriate; that's what he's going to feature here. But if you compare this with Matthew's gospel, we realize this happened in the midst of, really, quite a scene. Matthew 15:30 says of this time: "And large crowds came to Him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them." The words "laid down" imply, they just sort of dropped them off. You know, we'll come by..."Oh, there's Jesus!" Drop this one off; "Jesus, you pick him up." We'll drop another one off; "Jesus, heal him." Drop another one off; "Jesus, heal him." It seemed almost like an implied assembly line of this going on.

But, this one man receives very special attention. He was deaf, perhaps congenitally deaf; and as an obvious corollary to his deafness, he "spoke with difficulty." It's very hard to pronounce words if you can't hear what they sound like. I mean, I'm not deaf, and it's hard for *me* to pronounce words. Try to listen to words in another language, if you not accustomed to

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hearing it; even when you speak, you speak with a horrible accent. Why? Because hearing and speaking go together. And, of course, the earlier in life that deafness occurs, the more profound it is, the more difficult it is to speak; and this guy's deafness seems to have been complete.

Now, in *that* world, that would make you an outcast. Some deaf and mute were even treated as if they are insane. You know, that's how you think when the person can't understand you: "Well, you're stupid. And then I say something to you, and it's perfectly clear, and you understand it, and you respond in a way that doesn't match what I said to you—well, you must be crazy!" That's how they were treated. There was no speech therapy available. Formal sign-language wasn't invented until the 17th century. And so, a man was with total deafness was at a huge disadvantage.

Well, what Jesus did with this guy is unique. His compassion, and His very personal attention here, is nothing short of spectacular. So look at the miracle with me. Now, I go to hospitals rather frequently. If I hear somebody in our flock is in the hospital, I try to go and pray with them and find out if there's more that we can do when they get out of the hospital. And I always try to listen carefully and not stay too long and, you know, get that sweet spot of, just enough to show you care, not enough to make them wish you'd go home. And sometimes when I pray with a person, I'll put a hand on their shoulder, or maybe even hold their hand, if I don't think I happen to have cooties from the anywhere, at the moment. I never thought of doing something like this. Here's how Jesus handled this guy: "Jesus took him aside from the crowd, by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, 'Ephphatha!' that is, 'Be opened!'"

Now, look back over that; let's be careful to see everything here. He took this guy "aside from the crowd, by himself." How spectacularly compassionate! Jesus could've just said, as one person hit the ground, dumped in front of Him: "Healed. Next! Healed. Next! Healed. Next!" I don't think it was quite like that, but, He takes this guy aside. Now, the guy couldn't hear, so Jesus must have had to lead him by the hand to pull him off to the side. And they didn't go into a tent or something; people could see this. But, the point was, to get *full* attention, face-to-face between the two of them. Very personal. And He "put His fingers into his ears." Now, sign language wasn't invented yet, but I would say, that's a pretty good way to symbolically say, "I know where your problem is. It's there in your ears." No way He could have better communicate that He understood deafness.

Then He makes up another nothing-short-of-spectacularly-vivid sign to show that He understood, by spitting, and then, I suppose, spitting on His own hand, and then touching the man's tongue with the saliva. Now, that might not be the way the you expect your doctor to treat you, but you've got to admit—it makes a point, makes a connection that is very vivid, very personal. On your own, I'll let you do your own study. It occurred to me that, one could make a Bible study out of Jesus's use of spittle. This isn't the only *time*; think about it, see which you can find. I'll tell you, it's less than a baseball player but far more than most preachers spit, and less than your mom would approve of you doing it. Cultural difference, I'm sure.

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Then Jesus gave two more sign-language gestures, if you will. He looked "up to heaven"—now, trust me, when He's had His fingers in his ears and His fingers in his mouth, and He's face to face with him, and He looks up to heaven, the guy's looking at Him; it's as if He wants to make sure that the man knows where this miracle is coming from. Remember, Jesus said He only came to do what the Father told him to do (Jn. 5:19; 6:38).

Then, one more sign: He gives "a deep sigh." Even if you can't hear, you can see that visible gesturing; you know what it means. He was acknowledging, He was empathizing with this guy; He was showing He understands his agony and his frustration and his loneliness. Now, Jesus preached with astounding authority and power, but never was His nonverbal communication more profound than at that moment—all for this *one man* plucked out of this huge crowd, so you know He intends to make something very significant of this.

And then, "He said to him, 'Ephphatha!' "—that's apparently an Aramaic word; we don't really know its origin *exactly*. But it doesn't matter to us where it comes from, because Mark immediately includes the translation: It means, "Be opened!" Jesus was commanding his ears to be opened to hear, and his mouth to be opened to speak. And like all miracles, it was instantaneous and it was complete. Who knows? I think maybe the guy even heard the last two syllables of "Ephphatha!"—just *instantly* opened his ears, and he understood. Look at Verse 35—"And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly." What an *astounding* thing that is! I mean, we've already seen somebody who was lame get up, take up their bed, and walk. It's astounding! It's amazing! The paralyzed given mobility, all these things that He'd done. But, in an instant, this guy could hear *and understand*—there was no learning curve! He "began speaking plainly"—there was no speech therapy; there was no baby-talk, at first. This was an instant physiological change, and it included installing into his brain a complete vocabulary and understanding of syntax! Most people *today* don't have that! So we know, from that description, that he immediately spoke King James English—but being around Jesus, he quickly learned Aramaic and Greek. That was supposed to amuse you.

There is actually a story told of a man who came up to the pastor after a service one day, and he said, "Pastor! Would you please pray for my hearing?" Well, the preacher thought of this passage and said, "Sure!" So he put his finger in the man's ears, he prayed a fervent prayer, then he pulled his fingers out, and he said, "Amen." And then he said, [whispering] "How's your hearing?" He said it in a real quiet tone to test and see if his prayer was effective. The man answered, "Thank you for praying, Pastor, but I don't know yet—my hearing is Tuesday afternoon!" So, sometimes you can apply the text and *not quite* hit a homerun.

Then comes a verse here that might baffle you at first: Mark 7:36—"And He gave them orders not to tell anyone"—notice, He gave "*them*" orders; so that tells you: Yes, this was very personal with this man, but everybody around saw it and heard it—"He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it." Now, you've got to wonder: Why would Jesus say that? He has done something quite dramatic and bold, by taking His ministry across the borders of Israel. He's crossed ethnic and social boundaries. Why would He try to slow the spread of the news? Well, I think the best

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answer is that, it's a matter of timing. We saw Him do that early in His Great Galilean Ministry. Now, He's saying the same thing among the Gentiles. You see, He wanted to make sure that, it wasn't just the message about these spectacular miracles; He wants them to have the *whole* message, and they didn't *have* the complete story yet. It's *more* than miracles, *more* than deliverance from demons. We're going to see, as He's training His men, He's going to tell them, "Guys, listen! I have to go to Jerusalem. I have to be betrayed, delivered over, crucified, and rise again, and then I'll send you the Holy Spirit. *Then*, you're going to "the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NKJV). So, just as Jesus didn't seek crowds for the wrong reasons when He was among the Jews in Galilee, He's also doing the same thing in Decapolis.

Now, I have to say: If ever there was a command from Jesus that was disobeyed, and we can understand *why* it was disobeyed—this has to be it. This guy had wanted to speak for years, and he was unable. Now, he's *able* to speak, and Jesus tells him and his friends, "Don't talk about it!" So, what's a guy to do? I think we've got to cut him a little slack, here. We understand what Jesus meant, but this guy had gone from "unable to speak" to "unable *not* to speak"—what a glorious thing.

Now, there's one more gem I want you to see, before we move on to the second event for today. Mark 7:37—"They were utterly astonished, saying, 'He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.' " Now, one interesting little tidbit is, what's translated "utterly astonished" is a combination of two Greek words that together mean, "They were super-abundantly struck with amazement." It was a mind-blowing miracle! Now, I think *any* miracle like that would be mind-blowing, but this one was over the top. Now, that's exciting, but that's not the gem. The gem is in a word that Mark used, and you can't tell it in your Bible, but I want to explain it to you. Back in Verse 32, Mark used a Greek word to describe this man's speaking difficulty. There's a similar word—but a little bit different—that's used all the other times in the New Testament to describe a speaking difficulty, or being mute. But this one occurs only once, and it's in Mark 7:32.

I think Mark intentionally used that word in order to make this very subtle connection. The word, which happens to be *mogilalos*, occurs only once in the New Testament—Mark 7:32—and it occurs only once in the Septuagint. The Septuagint is that Greek translation of the Old Testament. Mark, remember, is writing primarily for a Roman Gentile audience. If they were to look up something in the Scriptures, they would use the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament. And they would find—if they looked diligently—the one place that that word is used; it's a passage about the glories of the Millennial kingdom: Isaiah Chapter 35, in Verses 5 and 6, says this—and you can trust me; go study Bruce Smith's notes on the book of Isaiah from our class there, you'll realize, this is about the kingdom—it says, "Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the"—*mogilalos*—"the mute will shout for joy." That same rare word that the New American Standard Bible translates "mute" in Isaiah 35:6—is the word that Mark used for this guy in Mark 7:32. So here's this gem: What a spectacular connection! That was no accident! I believe Mark was guided by the Holy Spirit to use that very same word so it would be *yet another* way to reinforce that Jesus is "the King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 17:14; 19:16; cf. 1 Tim. 6:15).

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Now, there's another aspect of this gem, and it tells you maybe *why* some of these people *might* have grabbed their Septuagint and looked at something; because look how it describes the response of this crowd. It's not in Mark, it's in Matthew. Matthew's version of this, [Chapter 15] Verse 31, he wraps it up with this: "So the crowd marveled"—they were astoundingly-super-hyper-impressed with joy and rejoicing over this—"the crowd marveled as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing"—look at this—"and they glorified the God of Israel." They were *all* from a culture full of false gods. Now, this miracle is similar to many others, but it's significant—for its *personal* nature; it stands from the rest of them—but also, that it was in Gentile territory, healing a Gentile man. How cool of Mark to make the connection to the prophecy of the King who is going to bring the kingdom to Earth, and to point out: "They glorified the God of Israel." That is wonderful.

Now, let's forge ahead. Let's see another case of a miracle, Version 2.0, like we've seen one before. Miracle Number 1—"Be opened!" Miracle Number 2—"Sit and eat." And we're going to roll right over into Mark Chapter 8. I think the chapter break between Mark 7 and Mark 8 is one of those that is *probably* established just to keep chapters from being inconveniently long. And it *is* the end of one incident, the beginning of another one. But it's the same general time, it's the same general place, it's the same general Gentile group of people, in the same region of Decapolis. And so, it's not a *logical* break; there's actually much more connection than there is break from the end of Chapter 7 to the beginning of Chapter 8.

Look at the description of it in the first three verses: "In those days"—so it wasn't on the *same* day that He healed that guy—"In those days, when there was again a large crowd"—so He probably moved from one place to another, still within the region of Decapolis—"and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, 'I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance.' "

Now, there's one of those tasty little morsels here in what Jesus said. This is the only record of Jesus using the word "compassion" to describe His own reaction to *physical* needs. Now, before He fed the 5,000 plus women and children, He mentioned He had compassion for the people's *spiritual* condition—He said "they're like sheep without a shepherd"—but here, He's showing that He *also* cares about *physical* needs. Now, these people had obviously been around for three days, and without food; so we *know* what didn't happen during the Christmas and New Year holidays—*nobody* goes without food then. That was long enough for Jesus to know that, some of them would likely collapse if they tried to make the trip back home. He had once fasted 40 days, so He understood being hungry.

Mark Chapter 8, Verse 4—"And His disciples answered Him, 'Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?' " Now, you might think, "How stupid *are* these guys?" I want to show you—they're *not*. It wasn't that long ago, Jesus had fed 5,000 men, plus women and children. And on that same day, He gave this great discourse—which you can find a John 6:22-40—about Him being "the Bread of Life." Trust me, there is not a chance in the world that the disciples didn't remember the feeding of the

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5,000. So, why this Q & A about where to get food? Well, I believe the disciples, right away, caught on. And I think they were saying this out loud, just to acknowledge their own lack of resources. They weren't playing dumb; they *knew* what happened at the previous mass-feeding miracle, so it's reasonable to think they *probably* vocalized this question for the sake of those in the crowd, who could hear the interchange between them and Jesus, and then they could relate it to the others after the miracle was done.

That makes a lot of sense as you read on: Verse 5 through Verse 8—"And He was asking them, 'How many loaves do you have?' "—you know, little loaves like bread cakes—"And they said, 'Seven.' And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people. They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well. And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces."

Alright, this is mass feeding, Version 2.0. Same scenario as the previous miracle that was so much like it; with each passing of the food, it multiplied. I don't know how that was, but it's got to be something that would just make you grin from ear to ear, to see it. Each person got to see his meal come into being right before his eyes, before he ate it. Fish that never swam, bread that was never baked—Wow! Just...fish, bread; fish, bread; fish, bread.

More than they started with is taken up in the leftovers, just like last time. And would you notice—a little detail here: Mark says, "They ate and were satisfied." The word translated "satisfied" describes "eating until completely full"—that's the point at which Americans go on to the next course—but, it means, this wasn't like the plane flight where you've got three hours, and they give you a little bag of pretzels that's supposed to take care of you until you get there. Everybody got all they wanted, and there were *big* baskets of leftovers when they were all sated. And Mark explains—Mark 8:9—"About four thousand were there; and He sent them away." But Matthew says, in Matthew 15:38—"And those who ate were four thousand men"—and then Matthew adds again—"besides women and children." So this time, probably a total crowd of between 10,000 and 15,000 ate miracle-food.

Now, I've got a minute here to give you a little sidebar; not specifically about this text, but about a way that you can, from this text, respond to a criticism of the Scripture. You know that skeptics like to attack the Bible. The most common attack is to say, "I can't believe the Bible because of the contradictions that are there." It's *really easy* to deal with that. Somebody says that—"Oh, let me get my Bible. Show me the contradictions that you've been studying." Because it's almost always a smokescreen; they heard somebody say that somewhere, and they don't really know what they're talking about. And there *are no* contradictions—there may be some *apparent* contradictions, when you don't yet know what the passages mean, but there's *always* a way to respond to it. And if they *do* give you one that you don't know the answer to—*golden opportunity* to witness to them again, when you get together *next* week, and bring the answer to their question! Because there *are* good answers, and we'll help you find them, if you need them.

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That's the most common attack, but there are others that skeptics use. And this is one passage that's sometimes used in an attack on the gospels. This attack says that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are not really first-century accounts based on eyewitnesses. The attack says that they were compiled later from fragments of oral tradition, and one of those things—and I *did* read this many years ago, and it's still around—says that the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000 are clear evidence that we don't really know what happened, because obviously, the story went this way and said 4,000, the story went that way and said 5,000; it all came from one event that was probably made-up, or, it was greatly inflated in the retelling. That's why you hear that nonsense about being in pursuit of the "historical Jesus." I mean, we *assume* that whenever Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John say, He *didn't* say, and He *didn't* do; and we're going to try to find the *real* historical Jesus. That's the idea—just blow away what the text says, and then make up your own theory about where it came from.

So the allegation is that, this can't be true because there are two *very* similar accounts that disagree. So, how do you answer that? Well, actually, the distinctions between the two accounts *underscore* the veracity of both of them! The details that are provided help to distinguish them because, they *are* the kind of details that *only eyewitnesses* would provide! Now, in Mark's case, he wrote it; Peter was apparently the eyewitness. But it was a very close connection between those two.

But if you look at this, they clearly *are* two different events. They happened in different locations: Jesus fed the "5,000 plus women and children" near Bethsaida, northeast of the Sea of Galilee; He fed the "4,000 plus women and children" far down to the south and the east, somewhere in the region of Decapolis. There were completely different people involved: One was a Jewish audience; the other was Gentiles. There were different numbers of people there: 5,000 men; 4000 men—plus women and children, in both cases.

There were different times leading up to the need for the meal: In the feeding of the 5,000, it was *one* day—they'd been there all day long, and toward evening, "Well, we don't have time to get them home, and there's not enough food here, and even if they went to the villages, they couldn't get back in time to be in on the teaching." The second one was *three* whole days. So, one day versus three days. There was a different number of loaves: Five in one case, seven in the other.

Next time we come back to Mark, we get into the next paragraph, we're going to see that Jesus, in speaking to the disciples, will refer to the two events *separately* (Mk. 8:18-20), so *He* knew they were two different events; I think He could remember them pretty well. We have Matthew and Mark both recording them separately. We have different kinds of baskets used for the leftovers, and there's specific words. When they picked up the leftovers after the feeding of the 5,000 plus women and children, it says that they got "little baskets"—the word describes, like a picnic basket; and there were 12 of them—apparently, one for each disciple to take, and then they all had to share with Jesus...I'm not sure how that quite worked. But, in Mark, it's a *different* word that means "bigger baskets"—*much* bigger baskets—and they got seven of them. So, even distinctions in the words.

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And, we know that they happened at *different times of the year*—from one little detail that only an eyewitness account would have. When He fed the group the first time, He said to His disciples, "Divide them up into groups"—remember, fifties and hundreds—"and tell them to sit on the grass." I don't know if you caught it when we were in Mark 8 just a minute ago; He told them to sit on the *ground*. Now, *we* live in an arid climate, right?—except for where we have our irrigation and we grow grass like Americans do. You get out of town or you look at the foothills, and they're usually brown. As soon as the snow's gone, all you'll see is brown, right? And then spring will come; snow will melt, we'll have a little bit of rain, and *everything gets green!* And there's grass for two days, a week—maybe a month, if it's a nice wet spring. And then, we're back to *brown*. There's only a little window of the year, in a climate like that, that you could be in an out-in-the-country kind of place, and tell people to sit on the grass! The rest of the year, it's going to be: "Sit on the ground," because there won't be any grass for you to sit on. It's very obviously two distinct things. And so, again, just a way to answer an attack.

Back to our theme for today, and we'll be done. But let's ask an important question: What's so special about this? We've now had three events: the Syrophenician woman's daughter in Tyre, the deaf and mute man in Decapolis, and feeding the huge crowd in Decapolis. Well, why is this so special? Well, where was Jesus? He was in the region of Decapolis—that's Gentile territory. Who were these people that He was talking to? They were Gentiles. And the *spectacular* result is: "They glorified the God of Israel" (Matt. 15:31). These events are a preview of coming attractions; the gospel is going to go to all the people (see Acts 13:45-48).

Now, just think about it: After all that the disciples had heard from the Pharisees in their rejection of Jesus's teachings, and all the parables that Jesus had given them about how the kingdom was going to be, in the era between Christ and His second coming, and all about Gentile salvation—their minds must have been *convulsing* with the implications of what Jesus was doing. Why would He do essentially the same miracle, twice? Well—big secret: I have preached the same sermon more than once. All you have to do is change audiences, and you even do it better the second time!

So, it's not that there's anything *wrong* with doing the same thing, but what have we learned from Him feeding 4,000-plus, that we didn't learn from Him feeding 5,000-plus? Well, *technically*, nothing from the feeding, but, this one was for Gentiles. By putting the two side-by-side, we realize: God is not a "respector of persons" (Acts 10:34, KJV; cf. Dt. 1:17; 2 Chr. 19:7; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9). He shows no favoritism; anyone and everyone can come to Him and receive mercy through the once-for-all-sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:10, 12, 14). You are sitting in a room full of people who are trusting in Christ for eternal life, not one of whom I know to be from a Jewish background. We are walking evidence that the gospel has gone to the Gentiles primarily, in this time between the resurrection of Jesus and the Rapture of the Church. Now, that doesn't mean that God has given up on Israel (Rom. 11:1-5). "To the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16), or, also to the Gentiles. God has a lot of unfinished business to do with Israel, and He will finish it, as we've been studying in the book of Revelation (see also Rom. 11:25). But, understand: This is here to show you—the gospel is for everyone.

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So the only remaining question is about you, individually—if you *personally* have settled your trust in what Christ did for you, to secure your redemption, the forgiveness of your sins (Col. 1:13-14), your eternal life (Rom. 6:23), your part in the fellowship of the Spirit in the bond of peace (2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:3), your role in the Body of Christ (Eph. 5:30), and your inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away because it is reserved for you in heaven while you are protected here by the power of God (1 Pet. 1:4-5). So the question is: Are you in? Have you passed through what's described in Romans Chapter 10, Verses 9 and 10? "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord"—in other words, anybody listens to what you say in the course of your life, and they're going to say, "That person really knows this guy Jesus, and wants to follow Him!"—"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." Are you in? You've got great evidence here: Miracle healing, miracle speaking, miracle eating.

Let's pray:

Father, how we thank You for what You have intended to follow beyond those miracles, and that is, the miracle of salvation. How I thank You for washing away my sins, working within me to make me over into what You created me to be. And, oh, how we yearn for the day that we will see that kingdom here on Earth. In the meantime, Father, we know You've left us here to spread this glorious Word—to Jew and Gentile, man and woman, bond and free, any culture, any standing in the world—one message, one Savior. So please, sweep away anything in our lives that would hinder us from clearly spreading that message. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.