

*Why a Sign?*

Mark 8:1-13

Reading: **Exodus 15:1-18** (note esp. vv. **11 & 18** in prayer)

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**Pray → Read vv. 1-10).**

- A. *Déjà vu!* There is a “*feeding the multitudes*” account in **Mark 6**.
- B. *You know:* hungry crowds, fish, bread, multiplying, leftovers...!
- C. This seems like some kind of *repeat*?
- The details seem all so *similar*!
- D. And did you catch the *response of the disciples*?
- If this is a *new* miracle (less than a year from the events of **ch.6**) then how could they have forgotten the *I<sup>st</sup>* big feeding?
- E. *Did Mark get mixed up?*
- F. **No way!** ...Mark is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and *he didn't get mixed up*.
- i. This is a **second** *miraculous feeding* with a **big lesson** for Jesus' followers about His *grace* for the *Gentiles*.
  - ii. And it's followed by a *second story* about *miracles*, with a **big warning** about refusing Christ.
- G. When you place these **two** incidents *side by side*, you see something about Jesus use of *miracles* (Mark's been *full* of them!):
- You see how two consecutive signs point to grace & then judgment.*
1. The first sign was *given* to signal Christ's **grace** (1-10).
  2. The second was *refused* to signal His **judgment** (11-13).

- 1.) **Chap. 8 begins with a miracle that shows Jesus' purpose was a mission of *world-wide grace*.**
- A. Let's think together about this *second* miraculous meal.
- i. Jesus & His disciples are still on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, in the region of *Decapolis* (Ten Cities).
  - ii. This is the same setting and the same *excited & unruly* crowd that had ***gone wild*** when Jesus had restored the *hearing & speech* of the deaf man in 7:31-37 (look w/ me at **7:33 & 7:36-37**).
  - iii. This multitude by the seaside is *Gentile*; the Jewish Messiah has been ministering for weeks (*months*) among the Gentiles of Tyre & Sidon & Decapolis.
  - iv. They've been with Jesus now for three days along that desolate & hilly shore.
    - a. It seems likely that the *excitement* we read about at the end of Chapter 7: fueled by miracles & teaching; truth & power, *has held them there in the wilderness*.
    - b. But whatever *supplies* they brought have *run out*...
  - v. Jesus sees their *need*, & responds in *deep-seated concern*.
    - a. **σπλαγνιζομαι** - *have pity*; but it originates in the idea of *human viscera (guts!)...*
    - b. ***Our Lord felt gut-wrenching pity for the hunger of this restless crowd.***
  - vi. Then the disciples make a ***puzzling response*** (v. 4): *Where will anyone be able to find enough to satisfy these men w/ bread here in a desolate place?*
    - ***Isn't that strange – do all these guys have amnesia?***

- vii. But Jesus doesn't *rebuke* them – He gets them involved; He wants His disciples to *feel that same compassion* He feels, & to *understand the full scope* of His mission.

...*pause*...

- viii. The disciples *report* their meager supplies, & then Jesus begins: *seven loaves* (barley or wheat biscuits); a few small, salted *fish*; *4000* men; + *wives & kids* (Matt 15).
- ix. He *seats* the crowd on the ground (*perhaps* in small groups of 50 & 100); *blesses* the bread, *breaks* the bread, and *hands* it to the disciples, who *distribute* it among the people.
  - a. He *blesses* the few small fish, *hands* them to the disciples, who *distribute* them among the crowd.
  - b. Perhaps He used the familiar Jewish meal blessing:
 

*“Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, **King of the world**, who brings forth bread from the earth.”*
  - c. Giving two separate blessings would be unusual for a Jewish meal; but this *wasn't a Jewish crowd*.
  - d. What happened to that **paltry** serving of *fish & chips*? **It grew!** Sometime between the blessing & the eating, probably as *Jesus breaks & passes*, the *seven barley biscuits & the few little salted fish*, become an abundance for **over 4000!**
- x. *In fact*, when it was all over, and everyone had eaten all they could possibly want: there were **seven** large baskets of left-overs (Greek text: a *different type* than in Mk 6).
- xi. *Follower of Jesus – God cares for you, He gives more than you need: And my God shall supply all you needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus **Ph 4:19.***

B. ***Bible-bashers*** love to take shots at this text (& Matt 15).  
*They're convinced that Mark & Matthew put in one miraculous feeding two times!* You might read thru **Mk 6:32-34** in your QT.

i. Let's identify the critics' ***two concerns***:

a. **First**, the feedings *seem so similar* at first read, that the skeptics can't believe they are really *two different miracles*.

And, there are *similarities*: hungry crowd, remote location, Jesus' compassion, meager supplies (loaves & fish), baffled *disciples*, miraculous distribution process, baskets of leftovers...

b. **But**, there's something that troubles the critics *even more* than the similarities: it's the seemingly *inexplicable response* of the Twelve (**read 8:4**). If there were **two** miracles, how could the disciples *fail to apply the lesson of the first?* (Good question!)

ii. Let's think about those two concerns...

a. **First**, the feedings of Mark 6 & Mark 8 are actually full of ***differences***:

1. **Mark 6** – the crowd was there one day.  
Mark 8 – three days.
2. **Mark 6** – the crowd sat on green grass.  
Mark 8 – the ground (*it's months later...*)
3. **Mark 6** – one blessing.  
Mark 8 – two blessings.
4. **Mark 6** – Five loaves & two fish.  
Mark 8 – Seven loaves & a few small fish.
5. **Mark 6** – Twelve small baskets of leftovers.  
Mark 8 – Seven large hampers of leftovers.
6. **Mark 8:19 & 20** – Look at these verses as Jesus refers back to these two *separate* miracles. Kind of ***slam-dunk***, *isn't it!*

*There's **one more** important difference that helps us understand why miracle must be reported to Mark's Roman readers (and **you & me**)!*

7. **Mark 6** – A crowd of Galilean Jews.  
Mark 8 – Pagan Gentiles. Like you & me...

b. But *what's with* the **Twelve**? (Read v. 4)

1. The feeding in Chapter 6 was an incredible event; John 6 tells the same story, and indicates that the Jewish crowd became so excited about Jesus' power that they almost started a *Messianic riot*!
2. It just doesn't make much sense that even *sometimes slow* disciples could miss that lesson!
3. I struggled with most of the week. *How could they forget?*
  - a. Finally it broke on me: I don't believe they *did* forget. Here's why:
    - i. It isn't *logical* to believe they all forgot. The Mark 6 miracle was *huge*. It was *unsettling* (John 6). It was *recent* (less than a year). It couldn't have been forgotten by *all Twelve*!
    - ii. The disciples aren't *rebuked*. Mark is not reluctant to *report* the disciples' deficiencies. But, there are *no words of reproach* anywhere in our passage.

- b. But that still begs the question, *why didn't they ask Jesus to miraculously feed **this** crowd?* Let me offer some possible reasons:
  - i. Maybe they were too *imperceptive* to apply the first miracle to this situation (although they should have).
  - ii. Maybe they don't understand Jesus can do it *again*, anytime He wants (i.e., they don't fully appreciate His sovereign control over His authority).
  - iii. Maybe they felt it would be *presumptuous* to suggest.
  - iv. Maybe they didn't want to precipitate another *Messianic frenzy* (as in **John 6:14-15**).
  - v. Was it because this crowd is *largely pagan*, not Jewish (maybe they still don't fully see Jesus' willingness to minister to anyone.)
4. The point is: critics question this text because it seems so *illogical* for the Twelve to forget the first miracle. The answer: they *did* remember, they just didn't know what to do with it.

- C. It's vital that you & I understand that Mark reports *two different miracles to two different crowds* hungry men & women:
- i. Jesus came to offer the Messianic Kingdom to the Jews, but He also came out of love for the Gentiles – for men & woman of every race & tongue.
    - a. In v. 2, Jesus Himself says His love for these unruly pagans is deep-seated, **gut-wrenching** love.
    - b. Jesus was keen to pass this **all-encompassing** love on to the Twelve.
      - i. Jesus could have fed these thousands *all by Himself* (could have kept the Twelve on the side-lines).
      - ii. But He allowed John & Andrew & Peter & James and all the rest to *join Him...*
      - ii. *Don't miss this:*
        - a. They had helped feed a *Jewish* crowd.
        - b. **Now** they were helping feed *Gentiles*.
- D. **Do you ever wonder why the Gospels record so many miracles (some *alike*, some very *unique*)...**

Listen to what the apostle **John** writes about that:

*Many other signs there fore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. 20:30-31*



*So Mark 8 begins with a report of **a sign** – **a miracle** that makes it clear that our Lord came to pour His grace on **anyone who turns & believes**.*

2. ***With all the focus on a sign to the Gentiles in vv. 1-10, the very next thing we see is Jesus refusing work a miracle for the Jews! (Read vv. 11-13.)***

- A. The boat-ride in v. 10 takes us back to Galilee, back to the territory of the Jews.
- i. The trip west across the Sea of Galilee to *Dalmanutha* (perhaps south of Capernaum) was quiet – you have to wonder what the disciples talked about after months in Gentile territory...
  - ii. But it didn't stay quiet for long! Someone seemed to be *waiting* for Him; and not long after Jesus returned to Galilee, an *unholy alliance* came out to meet Him.
    - a. Matthew 15 indicates that not just the *Pharisees*, but with them, the *Sadducees*, approached Jesus.
    - b. The **Pharisees** were strict *rule makers & rule-keepers*. And...they were *separatists*, keeping aloof from anything they didn't agree with.
    - c. They almost never agreed w/ the **Sadducees**. The Sadducees controlled the Temple and were often quite *liberal* in their *practice & perspective*.
    - d. It was a bad sign when these enemies all linked arms and *came to argue with you!*
  - iii. They demanded that Jesus perform a sign from heaven.
    - a. When the Pharisees wanted a sign from heaven, they weren't thinking about *heaven* in the spiritual sense we think of the *Kingdom of Heaven*. They simply meant they want Jesus to cause a sign in the *skies*.
    - b. Something very *visible*, very *showy*, very *spectacular*.

- c. But what they *really* wanted was to ***test & trap*** Him.
    1. They want Jesus to try & to fail in an unavoidably ***public*** way.
    2. Or refuse, and turn, and disappoint the crowds.
  - iii. Jesus reacted with *strong feelings & strong words* – no sign for *this generation*.
    - Then He got back in the boat, and left.
- B. Mark' Gospel has already been threaded through with these attacks from the ***religious elite***.
- i. Mark 2 – the scribes & Pharisees were offended by His offer to forgive the sins of the paralytic, by the banquet Levi threw in Jesus' honor, by Jesus' disciples' neglect of fasting, by their careless observance of Sabbath
  - ii. Mark 3 – the Pharisees attacked Jesus' willingness to heal on Sabbath (and form an alliance w/ the Herodians), the scribes accused Him of collusion w/ Satan.
  - iii. Mark 7 - the Pharisees & scribes accused Jesus & His followers of disregard for the traditions of the elders.
  - iv. And now they're back *again*...

- C. Christ doesn't comply, He **judges**. Jesus' judgment is seen in *three ways*:
- i. *First*, in His deeply **emotional** response to the Pharisees' trap.
    - a. Christ drew a deep sigh. The word here the verb for *sighing*, compounded with a prefix to make it unusually strong – extra emotional.
    - b. Was He angry? Discouraged? *Doesn't say*.
    - c. Whatever Jesus' emotion: **there was no sin wrapped around it!**
    - d. Do you ever get discouraged or angry? *Jesus understands*. Just don't give up on doing the right thing. Christ *felt* this attack deeply. He didn't blow up, and He didn't *knuckle under*. He did what was right. ***Jesus has been tempted in all things as we are, yet w/o sin*** – Christian, He understands you.
  - ii. *Second*, Jesus judged them in His refusal to give a sign.
    - a. Look in your NT as I read Jesus' response in v. 12.
    - b. The Greek is really tricky here. Most translations ***drain the emotion*** right out of Jesus' indictment of the Pharisees.
    - c. *Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I declare to you: If a sign shall be given to this generation....*
      - i. Then He stops...*His refusal hanging in the air*.
      - ii. Very emotional...very forceful.
    - iii. He might as well say: *You thing you're getting a sign? Over My dead body!*

- iv. *Then Jesus just leaves.* That's the *third* aspect of judgment.
  - a. Back across the Sea of Galilee (to Bethsaida on the NW shore).
  - b. Out of the Galilee, back to Gentile territory.

D. Who's in control here? We don't have to ask, do we...

- i. The malignant Pharisees came with another plan to trap Him, but Jesus was in control.
- ii. Let me read you one more scathing response seen in Matthew 16:

*“And evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign: and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.”*

- ii. Christ wasn't simply refusing: He was judging!

### 3 Conclusion.

- A. Two stories, two groups – a crowd of unruly & unfed *pagans* & a committee of orthodox *enemies*.
- B. Two stories, two emotional responses: gut-wrenching *pity* & deep *discouragement* (anger?).
- C. Two stories, two takes on miracles: a sign *given* – ***grace***  
a sign *withheld* - ***judgment***.
- D. These stories are drawn side by side in Mark & Matthew.
  - 1. Christ is a willing & gracious Savior.  
  
*He sees the needs of all men.  
He calls them to follow & to serve.*
  - 2. But Christ is a fiery & holy Judge.  
  
*Don't test Him.*

***Pray***