

“Spiritual Dullness – Part 2”
Mark 8:1-21
(Preached at Trinity, June 15, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. A we began **Chapter 8** Mark once again leaves us short on the details. We have to assume Jesus is still in the region of Decapolis described in **Verse 31** of **Chapter 7** and once again we find Him surrounded by a large crowd of people. In **Verse 9** Mark records that the number as about 4000.
2. The scene has much in common with the feeding of the 5000 in **Chapter 6** with some minor differences:
 - A. In **Chapter 6** there are 5000. In **Chapter 8** there are 4000
 - B. In **Chapter 6** they begin with five loaves and two fish and end with 12 baskets
In **Chapter 8** they begin with 7 loaves and a few fish and end with 7 baskets
3. The amazing thing about this passage is the complete lack of comprehension by the apostles. Their behavior seems incomprehensible.
 - A. First, it seems they had completely forgotten that Jesus fed 5000 people with only five loaves and two fish.
Mark 8:4 – “Where will anyone be able *to find enough* bread here in *this* desolate place to satisfy these people?”
 - B. Second, they seem greatly concerned over the fact they had forgotten to bring bread in preparation for their trip. They only had a single loaf between them.
Look at **Verses 14-16**
Do you see the foolishness of their conclusion. If Jesus had fed 5000 with five loaves and 4000 with seven loaves, could Jesus not feed 12 with one loaf of bread?
 - C. They demonstrated a complete spiritual dullness.
Mark 8:17 – “Do you not yet see or understand?”
4. These men who would change the world through their powerful preaching and steadfast faith are at this time spiritually dull.
By spiritual dullness I’m talking about a lack of discernment regarding spiritual matters, a lack of hunger for spiritual things, an unhealthy regard for the things of this world, a sluggishness towards our Christian duty, even apathy towards Christ.
5. Last time I began to examine the issue of spiritual dullness. Tonight I want to continue to address the issue. As I stated last time I want to cover the subject under three main points.
 - I. The Danger of Spiritual Dullness
 - II. The Causes of Spiritual Dullness
 - III. The Cure for Spiritual Dullness
6. Last time I set before you the great danger:
 - A. It is dangerous because it is inconsistent with Christianity
The lost man is given over to matters of the flesh – he is spiritually dead
The lost man is dull of hearing

- B. Christians are of a completely different sort
 - 1. They are filled with the Holy Spirit, led by the Spirit, The Holy Spirit continually enlightens their minds
 - 2. Unfortunately, many professing Christians today are plagued by this spiritual dullness
They have little hunger for the things of God – no spiritual appetite
They have little understanding of the things of God
- 7. Then, we began looking at the various causes of spiritual dullness.
 - A. Immaturity
 - 1. The Apostles were still being taught
 - a. They had only been walking with Christ for two years.
 - b. They didn't yet have the fulness of revelation. They still didn't completely understand Christ and the nature of His Kingdom. Later they would have great understanding. The Church is founded upon the foundation of the Apostles doctrine.
 - c. Most important, they were not on this side of the crucifixion and the resurrection and Pentecost. They were not yet indwelt with the Holy Spirit.
 - 2. Christians today, however, are expected to grow. Where there is life there is growth. It is not permissible for us to remain perpetually immature.
 - B. Apathy
 - 1. The Apostles had taken it for granted that they were with Christ
 - a. They had heard Him teach every day. While the crowds were amazed at his teaching the Apostles had grown accustomed to Him
 - b. The disciples had witnessed the miracles of Christ numerous times. They had God in their presence and were not in awe.
 - 2. We have to guard against falling into apathy. We have God in our presence, yet we can grow cold of the wonder
 - a. We can come to worship without a sense of the presence of the God of glory.
 - b. We can pray without the sense of awe of entering into His presence.
 - c. We can take His Word for granted
- 8. Tonight I want to continue with the causes of spiritual dullness and then we'll look at the cure.
 - I. Other Causes of Spiritual Dullness
 - A. Hardness of heart – **Verses 17-18**
Mark 8:17 – “Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?”
 - 1. We also saw this in **Chapter 6**
Mark 6:51-52 – “Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, ⁵² for they had not gained any insight from the *incident of the loaves*, but their heart was hardened.”
 - 2. This hardheartedness takes many forms

3. It can refer to an unregenerate man. This is a most fearful thought. The words of Jesus could be taken as a solemn rebuke – “Are you without understanding?” Were they still unregenerate?
Ezekiel 36:26 - "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."
 4. It can refer to a decrease in our love for Christ – a lack of passion for Him
 - a. Did they doubt the love of Christ for the multitude?
Mark 8:2 – “I feel compassion for the multitude because they have remained with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat;”
 - b. Did they doubt His love for them?
Mark 8:17 – “Why do you discuss *the fact* that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?”
 - c. Listen to our Lord describe the great decrease in love among professors of Christ prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. Is this also true today?
Matthew 24:9-13 - “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. ¹⁰ "And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. ¹¹ "And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. ¹² "And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. ¹³ "But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved.”
 5. Jesus refers to their hardness of heart as a dullness of understanding.
Mark 8:17 – “Why do you discuss *the fact* that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand?”
 - a. As we increase in spiritual dullness we will become more and more spiritually ignorant
 - b. We will lack in discernment
 - c. The Word of God will become more and more difficult for us
 - d. It will affect every area of our lives
- B. Forgetfulness - A failure to remember – **Verses 18-20**
Mark 8:18 – “And do you not remember”
1. One of the chief reasons for their spiritual dullness was their forgetfulness
 - a. They had forgotten the many miraculous healings
 - b. They had forgotten Jesus calming the storm
 - c. They had forgotten Jesus feeding the multitudes
Mark 8:18-21 – “And do you not remember, ¹⁹ when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?” They said to Him, “Twelve.” ²⁰ "And when *I broke* the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?” And they said to Him, “Seven.” ²¹ And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?"
 - d. Do you not yet understand who I am?

2. How guilty we are of sinful forgetfulness
 - a. Do we not remember our deliverance from sin?
 - b. Do we not remember the countless ways He has proven His love for us?

II. The Cure for Spiritual Dullness

- A. We must recognize the problem

See Revelation 2:1-5 – Remember, Repent, Return
- B. We must give ourselves to those things that feed spiritual life
 1. It is possible to starve ourselves spiritually
 2. Usually the more dull we become the more satisfied and comfortable we become
 3. The opposite of spiritual dullness is spiritual vitality marked by great zeal and passion for Christ and the things of Christ.
 4. How do we increase in spiritual vitality? By filling our lives with those things God has ordained for building us up spiritually
- C. What are the things that build us up spiritually?
 1. Seeking those things that are spiritual

Colossians 3:1-2 – “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”

 - a. Our flesh tells us that minding earthly things is most beneficial

Philippians 3:17-20 – “Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. ¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. ²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;”

Colossians 3:1-2 – “If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”
 - b. We must deny the flesh that we might grow spiritually

1 Peter 2:11 – “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.”

Colossians 3:5 – “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:”

2. As the people of God we must discipline ourselves to the pursuit of holiness. It must become our chief business. We must train ourselves to that end.
1 Timothy 4:7 – “But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; ⁸ for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come.”
3. We must give ourselves to those things which will build us up. This demands being very careful in the things we allow into our lives. It demands giving particular attention to the things God has ordained for our spiritual good.
 - a. The Word of God – God’s chief means of building us up
2 Timothy 3:16 – “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:”
Acts 20:32 – “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”
 - b. Preaching and teaching
 - c. Prayer
J.C. Ryle - "What is the reason that some believers are so much brighter and holier than others? I believe that those who are not eminently holy pray little, and those who are eminently holy pray much."
4. We need to understand how essential the Holy Spirit is in our lives. If we are suffering spiritual dullness it is also true that we are in great need of the Holy Spirit’s influence.
 Without His gracious influence we are doomed to languish in spiritual dullness.
Owen – “The Scripture abounds in examples, instances, and directions for prayer, unto this end—that we may have the assistance of the Holy Spirit in learning of the truth of the mysteries of the gospel, without which we cannot do so in a do manner.”

Conclusion:

1. We need to give ourselves to those things that build and edify. We need to give ourselves to those things that point us to Christ.
2. May we flee from those things that tend to drag us down into spiritual dullness.