

“Spiritual Dullness – Part 1”  
Mark 8:1-21  
(Preached at Trinity, June 1, 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. As we’ve seen, Mark’s Gospel moves quickly. Beginning with **Verse 24 of Chapter 7** Mark records that Jesus got up and traveled to the region of Tyre where He entered into a house.
  - A. This marks a transition in our Lord’s ministry. His Galilean ministry is ending and He retires to the district of Tyre and Sidon. This portion of our Lord’s ministry is called The Retirement Ministry. This will continue through **Chapter 10:52**. From there the text will cover the portion known as The Climax.
  - B. In this section called The Retirement Ministry Jesus is primarily in Gentile territory.
2. In **Verse 31** we read:  
**Mark 7:31** – “And again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis.”  
We are not told of the exact place Jesus entered. Only that he journeyed through the region of Sidon to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee to the region of ten cities known as the Decapolis.
3. Now as we begin **Chapter 8** Mark again leaves us short on the details. We have to assume Jesus is still in the region of Decapolis and once again He is surrounded by a large crowd of people. In **Verse 9** Mark records that the number was about 4000.
4. 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
5. 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. Then they were concerned over the fact they had forgotten to bring bread in preparation for their trip. They only had a single loaf.  
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?”

6. 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.
7. Tonight I want to begin to examine the issue of spiritual dullness. 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
- I. The Danger of Spiritual Dullness
- A. It is dangerous because it is inconsistent with Christianity
    1. The lost man is given over to matters of the flesh – he is spiritually dead  
**Romans 8:13** – “for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”
    2. The lost man is dull of hearing  
**Acts 28:27** – “For the heart of this people has become dull, And with their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes; Lest they should see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I should heal them.”
  - 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. The NT speaks harshly against those who profess Christ yet are divided in their affections.
      - a. James accuses them of spiritual adultery  
**James 4:4** – “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”
      - b. He calls them “double-minded”  
**James 4:8** – “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”
    3. Unfortunately, this describes many professing Christians today.  
They have little hunger for the things of God – no spiritual appetite  
They have little understanding of the things of God
  - C. One of the greatest warnings is in Hebrews 5-6  
**Hebrews 5:11** – “Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.*”

## II. The Causes of Spiritual Dullness

- A. The most fearful cause is an unregenerate heart
1. They are spiritually dull because they are spiritually dead
  2. But I want to focus on the cause of spiritual dullness in the Christian
- B. 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.  
**John 14:16-17** – "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; <sup>17</sup> *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you."  
 (Literally, another Intercessor)
  2. This was part of the problem with the Hebrew Christians  
**Hebrews 5:11-14** – ". . . for he is a babe. <sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."
  3. Christians, however, are expected to grow. Where there is life there is growth. It is not permissible for us to remain perpetually immature.
- C. 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
      - Pastors face the challenge of keeping their message fresh before their congregation
      - Congregations need to guard themselves from ceasing to hear and heed the voices of their pastors
    - b. The disciples had witnessed the miracles of Christ numerous times. They had God in their presence and were not in awe.
    - c. This was the problem with the church of Laodicea  
 They had lost the awe – they were satisfied  
**Revelation 3:17** – "Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,"

2. We have God in our presence, yet we can grow cold of the wonder  
This is always a danger.
  - a. We can come to worship without a sense of the presence of the  
God of glory. We can come in spiritual dullness—in the  
lukewarmness that is nauseating to Christ.  
The problem with spiritual dullness is we become dull to the  
absence of Holy Spirit. We don't weep at our emptiness.
  - b. We can pray without the sense of awe of entering into His  
presence.
  - c. We can take His Word for granted – how many thousands of  
people do not have the Word of God in their language?
  - d. The dullness of apathy will affect our service. We won't feel the  
passion for evangelism.