

## Gospel of Mark: The Beginning of Victory

*“These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.” – I Corinthians 10:11*

Two central themes emerge in the eighth chapter of Mark’s Gospel. The first is a continuing revelation of the power of Jesus now with the added theme of Jesus’ necessary death and resurrection. The second is the unpredictability of Jesus. Jesus is confusing to the Pharisees and to Peter. The disciples don’t understand him. He himself does not follow a set model but commands us to take up our cross and follow him.

### I. The Importance of Bread and Yeast – 8:1-21

- a. The feeding of the four thousand. Jesus performs another feeding miracle in vs. 1-10, this time with four thousand people. This account seems to have many similarities to the feeding of the five thousand in chapter 6, verses 30-44. Some commentators believe they are simply two versions of the same story. On the other hand there seem to be some crucial differences. What do you think? Consider the following –
  - i. Parallels to the feeding of the five thousand – Is it the same story?
    1. Jesus has compassion on the hungry crowd – 8:2; 6:34
    2. both times the crowds are in a “deserted place” or a “desert”- 6:31; 8:4
    3. the disciples have no idea how to feed the crowd – 8:4; 6:37
    4. all they have are a few loaves and some fish – 8:5, 7; 6:38
    5. Jesus blesses the food and everyone is fed – 8:7-8; 6:41-42
    6. There is a great deal left over – 8:8; 6:42
  - ii. Differences in the account
    1. This is a second time – “again” – 8:1
    2. The second crowd has been three days without food, the first only a day.
    3. The first crowd was Jewish, the second were Gentiles (“the region of the Decapolis,” 7:31; the presence of a large number of swine, 5:13)
    4. Possible symbolism of the left over bread –
      - a. Five thousand – “twelve baskets” – twelve tribes of Israel?
      - b. Four thousand – “seven baskets” – seven, the number of perfection – the inclusion of the Gentiles in the perfect plan of salvation?
- b. The “yeast” of the Pharisees – The Pharisees once again come to test Jesus. Their testing takes the following form:

- i. They ask Jesus for a “sign from heaven.” Consider that in the previous chapters Jesus has fed two multitudes with practically nothing, he has healed the sick, cast out demons and even brought a dead girl back to life. Yet they still want “a sign from heaven.”
- ii. Jesus sighs deeply in his spirit. He says no sign will be given “this generation” and he leaves them.
- iii. Jesus is back with the disciples who have forgotten to bring any more than one loaf of bread (8:14). Jesus warns them of the “yeast” of the Pharisees and of Herod (8:15). “Yeast” here signifies a spreading corruption.
- iv. The disciples completely misunderstand Jesus’ symbolism and think he is only speaking of their forgotten bread (8:16). Jesus reminds them of **both** the feeding of the four thousand and the five thousand. He in effect is saying, “How can you possibly be worrying about bread when you know I can feed thousands with only a small loaf?”

## II. The Unpredictable Jesus

- a. The incomplete healing – 8:22-26 - People bring a blind man to Jesus.
  - i. Jesus takes the man by the hand out of the village, puts saliva on his eyes and places his hands on him (as he did with deaf man in the previous chapter, 7:31-35).
  - ii. Unlike that case and indeed all others this blind man is not “immediately” healed. His sight is only partially restored (8:24).
  - iii. Jesus lays his hands on the man a second time and then his sight is completely restored. This is the only time in the Gospels that Jesus has to touch a person twice for them to be healed. No explanation for this is given in the text.
- b. The confession at Caesarea Philippi – 8:27-38
  - i. Jesus asks the disciples who do people say he is. The answers include
    1. John the Baptist risen from the dead. This is Herod’s view (6:16).
    2. Elijah, the prophetic forerunner of the Messiah (Malachi 4:5 which Martin Luther placed at the end of his Old Testament translation to prepare for the Gospels)
    3. “one of the prophets” – read, “other”
  - ii. Peter’s true confession and Satanic rebuke – 8:29-33. When Jesus asks the disciples who they think he is Peter responds with the great confession, “You are the Messiah.” Jesus orders them not to tell anyone about him.
  - iii. Jesus then explains the meaning of his mission. He is to be rejected, killed and then rise again after three days (Note that Jews to this day define the beginning of a day as sunset not sunrise. Hence Jesus was in the tomb Friday (before sunset), Saturday (beginning sunset on Friday) and Sunday (beginning sunset on Saturday).
  - iv. Peter takes Jesus aside to rebuke him. This is a tactic one might take with a friend who has said or done something improper. It is completely inappropriate with the Son of God (1:11). It is perhaps not

surprising that Jesus maintains his Messianic Secret (8:30). If someone like Peter had this much trouble understanding, the crowds in general would be hopelessly confused.

- v. Jesus turns the tables on Peter, rebuking him, calling him Satan and saying that his mind is set on human things not divine things (is this what Satan does to us?).
- vi. Jesus calls both the crowds and the disciples to his mission. This mission is nothing less than standing with Jesus in a hostile society and taking up our cross and following him.
- vii. Jesus ends by reminding everyone including us that he will come again “in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (8:38). This is the final outcome in which we gain or lose our lives (8:36-37).

### III. Questions for Us –

- a. Jesus in both his feedings of large crowds operates out of compassion for the people, Jews and Gentiles. The disciples’ reaction is to talk about how hard it is to carry out that compassion. How are we like the disciples when confronted with human need? How can we show the compassion of Jesus more?
- b. How often do we look at our loaves and fish, seeing inadequate resources for the challenges we face? It is easy to become concerned just like the disciples. How do we apply the truth to ourselves that Jesus can take the very little we have and turn it into overflowing abundance?
- c. What are examples of “yeast” in our lives and in our world? Does our generation still want signs in spite of all the testimony that Jesus has given through his word and through the Holy Spirit? What would you say to people who insist that they need to be actually shown that Jesus is the Son of God?
- d. Do we find it disturbing that the blind man in this passage is not immediately healed? What might that say to our experience with healing in this life? How important is it that Jesus finally heals the man completely?
- e. How do we, like Peter, both affirm Jesus and deny him? How do we both serve him and Satan? What lessons can we learn from Peter’s example?
- f. What does it mean for us to take up our cross and follow Jesus? What are some examples of this in our lives?