

Mark 8
Three Layers of Blindness

We're looking at a long passage because each paragraph is a reprise. "Reprise" is originally a musical term. It refers to the repetition of or return to the already introduced theme of a piece of music. We have such a reprise here there are some differences between the earlier and the later renditions. It is in the repetition itself that we find an important lesson and I want to draw your attention to that lesson as we look at the passage.

1 In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and *said to them, 2 "I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. 3 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." 4 And His disciples answered Him, "Where will anyone be able to *find enough* bread here in *this* desolate place to satisfy these people?" 5 And He was asking them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven." 6 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. 7 They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well. 8 And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces. 9 About four thousand were *there*; and He sent them away. 10 And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha.

11 The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. 12 Sighing deeply in His spirit, He *said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." 13 Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side.

14 And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. 15 And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." 16 They *began* to discuss with one another *the fact* that they had no bread. 17 And Jesus, aware of this, *said to them, "Why do you discuss *the fact* that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? 18 Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? 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 "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?"

22 And they *came to Bethsaida. And they *brought a blind man to Jesus and *implored Him to touch him. 23 Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?" 24 And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I see *them* like trees, walking around." 25 Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and *began* to see everything clearly. 26 And He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."

The same story??

Some differences, especially the context – this one is Gentile, the other was Jewish.

Reprise of the miracle of feeding the multitude.

Jesus is moved by compassion – He won't send the people away hungry.

This was a test for the disciples and they've already seen the test and know the answer.

Will THEY GET IT RIGHT?

NOTE the Patience of Jesus with his disciples. That is good news for us as well.

It's easy for us to think, "Those guys didn't learn anything from chapter 6 where Jesus fed 5000."

AREN'T WE LIKE THEM?

“As a matter of fact, even mature Christians (which the disciples at this time certainly were not) do often doubt the power of God after they have had signal experience of it.” [Cranfield, 205]

EX: At times I read my old journals from 40 years ago as a young believer and I think, “I thought I learned that lesson then, but I still struggle with some of the same things.”

Daniel Rowland, one of the greatest preachers of the Great Awakening and a contemporary of George Whitefield figured that he would have reached full maturity in the Christian life when he was able to **do four things consistently**:

1. Repent without despairing;
2. Believe without presuming;
3. Rejoice without levity;
4. And be angry without sinning.

ARE YOU THERE YET? I'm not.

*** Jesus takes care of US in our desolate places. He provides a place to feed us and care for us – His Word, The Table, His body of believers, the throne of Grace, etc

From v. 10 – 26 we see three layers of ‘blindness’ – Religious leaders, disciples, and a blind man.

v. 11 – Why this episode stands out - The Blind religious leaders

The Pharisees came to “ARGUE” /harass him. They come to test = TEMPT him.

“tempt/ test” is used four times in Mark. Once it refers to the temptation by the devil in the wilderness. The other three are references to the Pharisees.

Matthew adds the Sadducees in the mix as well (Matt 15). The hostility against Jesus deepens as the two groups join together. The Pharisees were the strict law keepers – the religious and social conservatives. The Sadducees were the more progressive skeptics who liked a more elite way of living. They had hereditary connections to the High Priest and some ties to Herod through a political marriage between Herod and a daughter of a high priest.

. The one thing that united the Pharisees and the Sadducees/Herodians was their mutual opposition to Jesus.

These men come forward with an evil intent and they make themselves the tools of the devil

They ask for a SIGN. They assume that they can evaluate and judge Jesus' authenticity.

Did they not have any signs up to this point? They had plenty. Jesus HAD done many things that ONLY God could do, but they viewed them as the works of the Devil.

John 2 – Wedding at Cana is the first **sign** that he did to show his glory, and his disciples believed in Him. But not the Pharisees.

They are looking for a sign from “heaven” that would distinguish Jesus as being not merely from earth. His miracles are NOT conclusive for them.

When the man born blind in John 9 acknowledge that Jesus was from God the Pharisees couldn't figure it out. They finally resorted to insulting him and putting him out.

(the man born blind) Jn 9:32 Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.”

34 The Pharisees answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?” So, they put him out.

(** a great tactic of the authoritarian impulse – if others disagree then insult them, silence them and put them out i.e. they practiced cancel culture)

Their demand for a sign reminds me of the devil in the temptation of Jesus. “If you really are the son of God then do this_____.”

They demand a sign, but they don't say what sign would be sufficient. NO sign from Jesus would suffice. They keep moving the goalposts to justify their unbelief.

EX: It's like Voltaire, the French atheist philosopher..."Even if a miracle should be wrought in the open market place before a thousand sober witnesses, I would rather mistrust my senses than admit a miracle."

i.e. mistrust what you and others can clearly see rather than admit that your preconceived notions are wrong.

A prior commitment to unbelief or a certain agenda will find a way to deny the truth.

Jesus does miracles for the benefit of people, not just for show like a circus act. Jesus is not performing signs just for the sake of performing signs.

Haven't they seen enough? What would they have him do that he's not already done?

"Here, heal this guy? How about her? Him? Him? Her? Etc, etc. Do this, now this, and this..."

EX: Opie and Bully -So, you want to fight.. step across this line., knock this chip off my shoulder, step inside this circle. Lucky for you I have my good pants on.

Now they are looking for a conclusive sign to settle the issue once and for all.

v. 12 Jesus sighs again. A glimpse into the emotional life of Jesus

This is a sigh of exasperation for the hard heartedness of the Pharisees. Jesus has been more than patient. God is patient and longsuffering. Don't let that lull you into thinking that God is patient forever. Clearly in scripture, that is not the case. Look at His dealings with Israel. He is patient and longsuffering with their stubborn unbelief, but at some point His fatherly discipline kicks in or his righteous judgment takes center stage.

** Don't become at ease or complacent with the patience and grace of God. Don't ignore areas of sin in your life as you presume upon the patience of God.

*** APPLY: That could happen to people who are sitting in this room right now, who have depended on God's mercy, who are thinking, "Tomorrow I'm going to get right with God," or, "Give me another week." Next week may be too late to deal with God. We don't know what the future holds. We don't know the number of our days. Heed the words of Jesus, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

"This generation" WOULD be addressed to this generation of Jewish leaders. They will get no sign that they demand, but He will give a sign. Elsewhere he speaks of the sign of Jonah i.e. an empty tomb after 3 days.

v. 14 Only one loaf - The Blindness of the disciples (not opposition but a form of spiritual blindness)

Watch out for the Leaven of Pharisees and Herod - wanting signs just for the sake of it.

EX: What is leaven?? A small amount can change the whole batch. It seeps in and is a catalyst for the process of making the bread rise.

Sproul...

What is the leaven of the Pharisees? Elsewhere in the New Testament, - Matt 15 - the Pharisees' leaven is described as "the leaven of their teaching" and "the leaven of their hypocrisy." Jesus is saying: "Watch out for false doctrine. Watch out for hypocrisy and teaching that can poison you."

The danger was the teaching of the Pharisees and the moral principles, or lack thereof, of Herod. The two go together or they collapse separately. The false teaching of the Pharisees led to self-righteous legalism. The lack of moral teaching of the Sadducee/Herod group led to license.

This metaphor of leaven is borrowed from the process by which bread was made, where yeast was added to the dough to make it rise, a fermenting agent of the ancient world and still in our own day. The whole metaphor means that just a little bit of this substance can radically alter and change anything it's mixed with. Almost every time in the New Testament, when "leaven" is used in a metaphorical way, it's used in a negative way. It's an influence that corrupts and destroys.

The disciples didn't understand what Jesus was saying... not unusual for them....or us.

Don't we have the same tendency?

"How will we have something to eat? How will God take care of us now? "

V 16 Clarifying Questions to the Disciples

The topic of discussion after seeing this great miracle was to debate among themselves about the one loaf they had. There were 7 baskets of bread collected, and they only brought ONE loaf. AND THEY ignored who was sitting with them in the boat.

The leaven of unbelief had impacted their own souls. BEWARE, it could happen to you or me. They got so fixated on the material need – bread- that the spiritual reality of the Son of God was obscured.

How do you think Jesus would have reacted if they had said, "Jesus, we're really hungry now and we foolishly left the bread behind. Could you help us now and multiply this loaf?"

Jesus – "Sorry guys. You should have brought more with you. I've reached my miracle limit for the day. Let this be a lesson for you – BE PREPARED."

NOooooooo! Jesus is not concerned with their discussion in terms of the arguments they are making...Whose fault was it? Who had the basket last? Etc.

HE IS CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR HEARTS.

V. 17 Do you have hardened HEARTS??? These two similar events were KEY events yet they gained NO understanding.

Jesus asks a series of questions for them to think through, but he is aiming at their hearts.

** friends, we do foolish things in our lives, but we should never hesitate to go to Jesus with humility and bold faith. He is not ashamed to be our provider. He gives grace to the humble.

v. 22 – A blind man sees better than the disciples.

This is an event told in the narrative that shows the theme of Blindness and Sight i.e. living by faith even when we can't see with our eyes.

Again, spittle is used to heal, but this miracle takes place in stages.

An initial reading might lead one to ask, "Did Jesus do something wrong the first time? Was he losing his power?" MOST CERTAINLY NOT. Scripture does not explain why Jesus did it this way, but it would be sheer folly to think that in this instance Jesus was stumped by that particular vision impairment.

Dr. Rayburn – This has been discussed for a long time. It is certainly possible, following upon and contrasting the spiritual blindness of the disciples, that the stages of the miracle of granting sight to this blind man may very well suggest the *process* of revelation that occurs in the believer's heart. People don't grasp the truth all at once; they don't see Jesus all at once. It is a process by which they come to understand, to grasp the full truth about him only in steps and stages.

EX: in reality, we don't spiritually see all at once. The healing in stages is an example of how the disciples begin to see in stages.

These two miracles of the deaf man and the blind man are only found in Mark. They are spiritual parables for the disciples and US. We are spiritually deaf and blind apart from the healing touch of Jesus. No one perceives the glory of God in the face of Christ without divine intervention.

For BELIEVERS...how should we live? As we grasp the lessons of the loaves and the blind man, we should be eternally grateful for God's grace. It should change the way we interact with those who do not yet see. Why has God opened our ears and eyes and not the ears and eyes of others we know? That question should push us to be deeply grateful and not self-righteous towards those who do not hear and see.

To quote John Newton, author of Amazing Grace... **Whoever .has tasted of the love Christ, and has known, by his own experience, the need and the worth of redemption, is enabled, Yea, he is constrained, to love his fellow creatures. He loves them at first sight;**

NEWTON... again...After receiving the gift of hearing and sight, he should not be angry at those still in that condition. He did not heal himself. He should show them pity.... A man, truly illuminated, will no more despise others, than Bartimaeus, after his own eyes were opened, would take a stick, and beat every blind man he met

(Richard Cecil, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton*, p. 105).

For not YET believers....Today, if you do not yet hear and see the glory of God in the face of Christ, then ask God to open your ears and eyes to see your need and to run to Christ.

In closing, we see that the man is Sent home, not into the village.
Jesus was not looking to create a crowd. So Jesus told him to "Keep quiet"

It's hard to do because our joy is fully expressed when we share it.

Let's not act as if Jesus has told to tell no one.

Just the opposite, He has told us to go into all the world with the message of the Good News.

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Discussion questions:

- What point was Jesus trying to make referring to the “leaven” of the Pharisees?
- How were the Pharisees and Sadducees/Herodians alike?
- What did Jesus want the disciples to understand that they weren’t understanding?
- Why are spiritual things so hard to understand?
- What does hardness of heart mean? How does it happen?
- What did God use to open your spiritual eyes?
- If God has opened our ears and eyes, how should we then live?