

Mark 8:1-21 ~ Scripture Verses

Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand

¹ During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ² “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. ³ If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”

⁴ His disciples answered, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?”

⁵ “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.

“Seven,” they replied.

⁶ He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so. ⁷ They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. ⁸ The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ⁹ About four thousand men were present. And having sent them away, ¹⁰ he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

¹¹ The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. ¹² He sighed deeply and said, “Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it.” ¹³ Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

The Yeast of the Pharisees and Herod

¹⁴ The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. ¹⁵ “Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”

¹⁶ They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.”

¹⁷ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?”

¹⁸ Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

“Twelve,” they replied.

²⁰ “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

They answered, “Seven.”

²¹ He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

Mark 8:1-21 ~ Discussion Questions

1. How did Jesus feel toward the crowd of people that followed him? (8:2-3) How do you think his disciples might have felt? How would you feel?
2. If you were in the crowd, how would you feel? A) Hungry, B) Plan to leave to get some food, C) Hanging on Jesus' every word, D) Go along with the crowd, E) Hoping for a miracle, F) Angry, G) Worried about your wife and kids, H) ??
3. How do you feel when listening to an especially long sermon? Is it the same as reading a book or watching a sports event for a long time? Why or why not? How can you get the most out of a sermon (of any length)?
4. How did Jesus involve his disciples with the food problem? (8:5-8) How are we like (or not like) the disciples?
5. The Bible often reports dialogs between Jesus and the Pharisees. Weren't there other types of Jews? Is this different or similar to Christianity today?
6. How did the Pharisees try to test Jesus? How did Jesus respond? (8:11-12) Have you ever tried to test the Lord? What happened?
7. Why do people demand signs from God? Why does God refuse to give us signs or proof of his existence and presence?
8. What had the disciples forgotten to bring on their lake voyage? What warning did Jesus give his disciples? How did they misinterpret his warning? (8:14-16)
9. What would have enabled the disciples to understand Jesus better? (8:17-18) What prevents us from understanding Jesus' teaching?
10. In verses 8:17-21, Jesus rebukes the disciples soundly, almost harshly. Would Jesus ever have occasion to rebuke you? What passages or ideas from the Bible have you struggled to understand? How can we guard against misinterpreting or ignoring the real message from the Scriptures?
11. If Jesus had been speaking to you personally, what negative example might he have warned you to watch out for or to learn from?

Mark 8:1-21 ~ Leader's Guide

1. How did Jesus feel toward the crowd of people that followed him? (8:2-3) How do you think his disciples might have felt? How would you feel?

Jesus obviously had compassion on the people. The scripture doesn't tell us how the disciples felt but only what they said in response to Jesus saying that he had compassion for them. The disciples may well have felt frustration and annoyance. After all, these people were following Jesus on their own (Jesus didn't tell them to follow him) and anyone with any common sense would realize there wasn't any food where they were. If I were a disciple I'd have felt that it was the people's own fault that they didn't have any food. It's not my job to keep these idiots fed and nourished. I'd also be annoyed because it was these times in the wilderness when Jesus could spend "quality time" with his disciples teaching them and a time when they all could get some much-needed rest. (Mark 6:31, 7:31)

2. If you were in the crowd, how would you feel? A) Hungry, B) Plan to leave to get some food, C) Hanging on Jesus' every word, D) Go along with the crowd, E) hope for a miracle, F) Angry, G) Worried about your wife and kids, H) ??

I would think the range of emotions covered a wide spectrum. After three days, probably everyone was hungry to some degree. Some men would be worried about their wife and kids not having anything to eat and trying to figure out when and how they could leave and get something. A few may have heard about Jesus feeding 5,000 a few months earlier and hope that he would do the same again. Some might be angry that Jesus just kept talking (a very long sermon) and didn't take into account their hunger at all. (I've occasionally had that feeling in church when listening to a particularly long-winded sermon.) Others may have had the "whatever" attitude so prevalent among teens today and have been content to just follow the crowd. And a few may have been concentrating so intently on Jesus' teaching that they didn't even notice the passing of time or their bodily needs.

3. How do you feel when listening to an especially long sermon? Is it the same as reading a book or watching a sports event for a long time? Why or why not? How can you get the most out of a sermon (of any length)?

For the most part, a sermon involves only one sense (hearing). So does reading, but vision seems to be a stronger and more focused sense so your mind is less likely to wander. Watching a sports event usually involves both vision and hearing, and sometimes speaking (yelling, shouting) and getting more involved. You're probably not going to fall asleep in a stadium as you might in church or reading a book.

To get the most out of a sermon, take notes. If you do nothing but listen, only

4% of the population can remember the topic and main points of a sermon one week later. Taking notes increases the percentage to 40%, a huge 10X increase. Talk about the sermon with a friend afterward, not just to say, “Pastor did a good job today,” but talk about the actual content and what it means in your life. Another tip: underline or highlight meaningful verses from the sermon in your Bible. (Warning: this can get out of hand; I’ve seen Bibles with more than half of the text highlighted.)

4. How did Jesus involve his disciples with the food problem? (8:5-8) How are we like (or not like) the disciples?

Jesus involved the disciple in several ways. First he made a compassionate statement about the people that, although not a question, invited their response. Their response was similar (incredulous, how can we possibly do it?) as when they faced the problem of feeding the 5,000 a few months earlier. You might think they’d learn. Clearly, the disciples’ question in 8:4 reflects their inadequacy and spiritual dullness.

Second, Jesus focused on the problem and asked how many loaves they had. Third, he gave thanks, presumably to the Father, and had the disciples distribute the food. And fourth, he had them pick up the leftovers. So they were involved with every phase of the process: 1) the compassion and emotion that led to a decision to do something, 2) their doubt that it could be done, 3) Jesus taking action with extremely limited resources and being successful, and 4) cleaning up and seeing the results of Jesus’ action.

5. The Bible often reports dialogs between Jesus and the Pharisees. Weren’t there other types of Jews? Is this different or similar to Christianity today?

Judaism at the time of Jesus was both unified and divided, much like Christianity is today. All Jews believed and practiced some core aspects of their religion (Monotheism, the Law of Moses, Circumcision, etc.), but different Jewish groups debated and disagreed with each other about many details (expectations of the Messiah, ritual and purity laws, how to live under foreign domination, etc.). Similarly most Christians today agree on certain core items (Jesus is the Son of God, the NT has 27 books, etc.) but disagree on many details (the number of sacraments, forms of worship, role of faith and good works, etc.).

During Jesus’ time, there were three major Jewish groups: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, as well as some smaller splinter groups. The New Testament mentions Pharisees and Sadducees (but not Essenes) plus a few others.

- Pharisees - a group of influential Jews; they advocated and adhered to strict observance of the Sabbath rest, purity rituals, tithing, and food restrictions based on the Hebrew Scriptures and on later traditions. They were long-time political and religious rivals of the Sadducees, vying for influence among the rulers and the

people. Mostly laymen, but possibly also some priests (from the tribe of Levi) or even members of the Sanhedrin. NT Gospels portray them mainly as opponents of Jesus (Mark 8:11; 10:2), who conspire with the Herodians to kill Jesus (Mark 3:6). Some of Jesus' harshest debates are directed against the "hypocrisy" and "blindness" of the Pharisees (Matt 23; John 9). In contrast to Sadducees, Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:1-8). Paul himself was a Pharisee (Phil 3:5; Acts 23:6; 26:5), as were some other early Christians (Acts 15:5).

- Sadducees - another prominent group of Jews; they were probably smaller "elite" group, but even more influential than the Pharisees; they followed the laws of the Hebrew Bible (the Torah), but rejected newer traditions. Long-time political and religious rivals of the Pharisees, although their influence was more with the wealthy ruling elites. Closely associated with the Jerusalem Temple and with the ruling council ("Sanhedrin") of the Jews (Acts 4:1; 5:17; 23:6). Did not believe in life after death (Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27) or in angels or spirits (Acts 23:8).

- Essenes - a smaller group or "sect" that lived a communal "monastic" lifestyle at Qumram (near the Dead Sea); the "Dead Sea Scrolls" found in this location in 1947 are usually associated with them. They regarded the Jerusalem priests as illegitimate, since those were not Zadokites (from the family of the high priest Zadok). They rejected the validity of the Temple worship, and thus refused to attend the festivals or support the Jerusalem Temple. They expected God to send a great prophet and two different "Messiahs" (anointed leaders), one kingly and one priestly.

- Herodians - probably a faction that supported the policies and government of the Herodian family, especially during the time of Herod Antipas, ruler over Galilee and Perea during the lifetimes of John the Baptist and of Jesus. In Mark 3:6 they conspire with the Pharisees to kill Jesus, still fairly early during Jesus' ministry in Galilee. In Mark 12:13-17 and Matt 22:16 they join some Pharisees in trying to trap Jesus with a question about paying taxes to Caesar.

- Zealots - one of several different "revolutionary" groups in the 1st century CE who opposed the Roman occupation of Israel."Zealots" were probably not an organized group at first, but any Jews "zealous" for God's law (Num 25:13; 1 Kings 19:10; Acts 22:3; Gal 1:14). One of Jesus' apostles is called "Simon the Zealot" in Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13; he may have belonged to a revolutionary group before joining Jesus, but more likely was "zealous" in the older sense.

- High Priest, Chief Priests, Priests, and Levites - members of the tribe of Levi who were responsible for the temple and its sacrifices, and thus were the religious and social leaders of the Jewish people.

[Information above from http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Jewish_Groups.htm]

6. How did the Pharisees try to test Jesus? How did Jesus respond? (8:11-12) Have you ever tried to test the Lord? What happened?

The Pharisees wanted a sign from heaven, basically more compelling proof of

Jesus' divine authority than his miracles. He refused to give them such a sign, partially because their request came from unbelief.

A key here is that this account comes right after the miraculous feeding of the 4,000—in other words, Jesus has already produced a huge sign, and the Pharisees don't accept it. They doubted not Jesus' ability to do signs, but their origin in God.

7. Why do people demand signs from God? Why does God refuse to give us signs or proof of his existence and presence?

8. What had the disciples forgotten to bring on their lake voyage? What warning did Jesus give his disciples? How did they misinterpret his warning? (8:14-16)

The disciples had forgotten to bring bread. Having just gone through an episode with a lack of food, one would think... but that's another story.

We may look at this and say, "My gosh, this is silly. How can the disciples be so dense?" But is it any different than when we leave church every Sunday? I'll be thinking about the sermon, mulling it over, and maybe discussing it with Keith as we drive home. Meanwhile Ed and Nancy are thinking about the party they had last night where they ran out of chips and snacks and what could they do before the game on TV this afternoon because they invited people over and all the stores were closed for the holiday. When Keith joins them later, he's still thinking about the sermon and says something about it but Ed and Nancy are on a completely different wavelength and can't relate.

So it is in this story. By verse 15, Jesus is in the boat again with his disciples trying to warn them about the yeast, i.e. influence of the Pharisees. Would they use this time wisely to learn at the Jesus' feet? No way. Instead, Jesus' talk of yeast seems to remind them that they had forgotten to bring bread with them. While Jesus is talking to them in v. 15, in v. 16 they are discussing among themselves the fact that they had no bread! Why didn't they remember? If Jesus could feed 5,000, couldn't he feed 12? Of course they knew this, but human nature is like this. We tend to get distracted by worldly and carnal things so that God's words fall on deaf ears. Talk about foolish!

9. What would have enabled the disciples to understand Jesus better? (8:17-21) What prevents us from understanding Jesus' teaching?

In verses 17-21, Jesus rebukes the disciples soundly. Didn't they remember the feeding of the 4,000 and the 5,000 he asks. Twice he asks them if they understood, or not? Did they have a hard heart? Blind eyes? Deaf ears?

Carl McMurray from Expository Files writes: We can literally worry ourselves to death and divide Christ's church into fractions over a thousand different pieces of bread. Satan loves it. He likes us distracted. I believe that's why he has so many churches today involved in politics, day schools, parties, dinners, sports, teen trips,

karate demonstrations, “living” Christmas trees, fireworks demonstrations, hog roasts, cafeterias, and a host of worldly and carnal pursuits. There are churches that have country music stars visit, some that have Big Bird visit, some that have a come-as-you-are drive-in communion, and some that take Master Card or Visa. If you want something, you can find it in today’s religious arena. Worldly and carnal (fleshly) bread is burying many.

But don’t forget Jesus is still speaking. After 18 centuries, he is still asking, “Do you not yet understand?” Romans 14:17 teaches, “...the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Stop worrying about bread and begin listening to Jesus. He will make it worth your while.

[Above from <http://www.bible.ca/ef/expository-mark-8-11-21.htm>]

10. In verses 8:17-21, Jesus rebukes the disciples soundly, almost harshly. Would Jesus ever have occasion to rebuke you? What passages or ideas from the Bible have you struggled to understand? How can we guard against misinterpreting or ignoring the real message from the Scriptures?

11. If Jesus had been speaking to you personally, what negative example might he have warned you to watch out for or to learn from?