

A Study of Mark's Gospel

Week Eleven

Mark 7:31-8:21

Day One

31 Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. 32 There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. 33 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. 34 He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "*Ephphatha!*" (which means, "Be opened!"). 35 At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

v. 31 – Jesus was on a tour of the lands north of Israel, probably for three reasons. One was that He was trying to get His disciples accustomed to working in Gentile areas, which was a big hurdle for them to overcome. The second was that He was a wanted man in Israel; the leaders wanted to kill Him! So Jesus had to do what He did in exile because Israel rejected Him and His message.

The third reason was that Jesus went off to a place where He was less known so He could train His disciples without interruption. We have already seen how much of a celebrity Jesus was, and His agenda kept getting interrupted. If Jesus had to get away to maintain His priorities, then you may need to do the same. **How often do you get away to focus on the most important things according to your own values system?**

v. 32 – Yet Jesus was also known throughout that region, which meant that the surrounding areas had a lot of Jews living in them. Jesus had come for the lost sheep of the house of Israel and there were some lost sheep in Tyre, Sidon and the region of the Decapolis. The people brought Jesus a deaf and dumb man and asked Jesus to place His hand on the man. They wanted Jesus to touch him. That's interesting. **How many people want me to touch them because of what I can do for them? How many want you to touch them? If there aren't many, then what does that say about our spirituality? Anything at all?**

v. 33 – This is a strange way for Jesus to heal the man. First, He put His fingers in the man's ears. Then He spit and touched the man's tongue! What was Jesus trying to do? I'm not totally sure, but one thing I do know—Jesus used many different techniques when He healed people. I think this was so people would not put their faith in the technique, but in God. In this case, however, Jesus took the man away from the crowd so they would not see this bizarre incident.

Jesus put His fingers in the man's ears and then applied some of His saliva to the man's tongue. Jesus had to repair this man's communication system, for He could neither hear

nor talk. Nothing is too difficult for God, for He created us and can fix us when we malfunction or break.

vs. 34&35 – **Why would Mark have to translate what Jesus said? Was it in Aramaic, while the rest of the gospel was in Greek? Or could Jesus have been using a heavenly language that He then interpreted for His disciples?** Whatever the reason, the results were extraordinary. The man was healed and could both hear and speak plainly. God is good! There is no condition beyond His touch.

Day Two

36 Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. 37 People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." 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."

v. 36 – Jesus was trying to maintain some semblance of anonymity as He moved about in these northern areas, but the people would have none of it! While I want to identify with the people since they had such good news to tell, they were disobedient to the command of God by talking about what Jesus did when Jesus said not to do so. Truly Isaiah wrote:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).

Even when God does something good for us, our tendency is still toward sin. I hope I am not being too hard on the people, for I know that I have the same sin principle in my own life. This is evident in the fact that I am ungrateful when God blesses, not stopping to say thank You or to acknowledge His help. So in many ways, I am just like the people in this story.

v. 37 – Here we have **wow 10**. (In case you've forgotten, we are tracking how many times Jesus astonished or shocked the people. This the tenth instance in the first seven chapters.) The people were amazed that Jesus had done all things well. People are still surprised when they encounter excellence from the spiritual or Church world, for that has not often been our trademark. The Queen of Sheba was surprised just like the people in this verse when she encountered excellence when she visited Solomon:

When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, **she was overwhelmed** (1 Kings 10:4-5 emphasis added).

What can you do so that people are impressed by God's excellence when they encounter you?

8:1 – A large crowd had gathered and they were hungry. **Have we seen this scenario before?** Yes we did in Mark 6. God was bringing another situation to the disciples to see if they had learned their lesson. The Lord does the same for you and me. **Are you growing in faith? Are you handling situations with faith that five years ago would have overwhelmed you with worry or doubt?** I hope so, but the report wasn't so good for the disciples, who failed this faith test, even though they had seen Jesus feed the multitude earlier.

v. 2 – Jesus was setting the stage to see how the disciples would respond. Jesus had compassion on the people and their human condition – they were hungry. So He thought out loud as to how He could meet their need before sending them away. He was leading the disciples, trying to help them give the correct response. “I want to feed these people before they leave. If I don't, they will collapse on the way home. Let's see, what can we do? Any ideas from any of you?” You would think that one of them would jump up and say, “Hey, let's feed them like we did the last time!”

I don't want to be too hard on the disciples, for I have done the same thing. I have seen God move on my behalf on numerous occasions, but I still panic when the next crisis comes along. **How much are you like the disciples in this situation?**

Day Three

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.

v. 4 – The disciples did not draw on their inventory of faith memories. If they had, they would have remembered what happened the last time they faced that situation. Their hearts were still hard, even after all they had seen and heard. As I mentioned yesterday, I am the same. I think I am better than I was, but it has taken me years to learn to trust God. Last Friday, my bank account was near zero and some money came in. I rejoiced that I had not panicked or worried all day or week. I kept saying, “I trust You, Lord.” **Are you panicking, when you have no reason to do so?**

v. 5 – Jesus asked them the same question, “What do you have?” I seldom think that what I have is enough. Most of the time, I think I need more money, education or time if I am to be effective for the Lord. Seldom is that really the case. I am being either lazy or fearful, and the need for more simply excuses me from taking action. Is this the case with you?

v. 6 – The disciples must have been thinking, “This is déjà vu!” They had seen this before. Once again, I am no different from the disciples, for I have seen the Lord “come through” miraculously again and again, only to doubt His ability the next time I have a need. As I write, my checking account is low, which has happened many times. The Lord has always replenished it, yet I found myself worrying this morning whether I

would have enough for the next few months. Can you imagine? After all the times the Lord has provided, I would dare worry? That is how powerful unbelief is, and it won't go away quietly. We must root unbelief out and confront it whenever and wherever it shows its ugly face. **Do you need to confront any unbelief like I did this morning?**

v. 7 – I can understand bread being multiplied, because it is something that is manmade. The ingredients are mixed together and baked, and you have bread. I don't know why I find the bread being multiplied easier to fathom than the fish being multiplied. Fish is a creature and Jesus showed His divinity by increasing a living thing (I know, the fish was dead when He multiplied it.) Does this make any sense? Multiplying fish indicates to me that God can do anything and provide for me without any problems whatsoever, using anything that is part of His creation to do so.

Day Four

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.

v. 8 – It is interesting that the disciples picked up more leftovers when Jesus used five loaves in Mark 6 than they did when He used seven loaves in this instance. God can do more with less or He can even use nothing and provide for everyone's needs. It is a good reminder that God doesn't need a lot to do a lot. He can save by many or few and can take a little and do a lot. **So where is your focus? On what you have or on what God can do?** You are better to put your focus on the latter and trust Him, regardless of what you think you have for Him to use.

It wasn't that the people only had a snack. They were satisfied! When God provides, there are no halfway measures. I am writing this on a plane heading to England. I had to bring an extra suitcase with me and I knew that would incur additional charges. When I got to the ticket counter, they said I owed \$135. Then they reduced it to \$110, then to \$80. Finally, the man could not get the computer to take my credit card number so he said, "Never mind. Go ahead, I'm not going to charge you anything."

Some people act like if God is going to help one person, it will somehow limit His ability to impact others. Some think if God helps them once, He won't want to do it again. Both those beliefs just aren't true. God is willing and able to provide again and again, and doesn't mind doing it. When He does, His resources aren't diminished in the slightest, so He can keep on providing.

v. 9 – I don't know if this means that only men were present, or if only men were in the official crowd count. At any rate, this means that Jesus fed a total of 9,000 men with 12 loaves and about four fish. That's pretty impressive! Our God is an awesome God.

Jesus was constantly on the move, wasn't He? He used the Sea of Galilee like a modern highway, going back and forth to here and there. Paul was also a man on the move as was Philip the evangelist.

I have been constantly on the move (2 Corinthians 10:26).

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea (Acts 8:39-40).

How about you? Are you on the move as the Lord would intend? Are you reaching all those He would want you to reach? I am not implying that you need to travel like I do, or be like Paul or Philip to please the Lord? Yet you can't be laid back and just wait for some things to happen either.

Is there anything you need to do that you have been putting off? Perhaps today the Lord wants you to kick into gear and move it!

Day Five

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.

v. 11 – This is the second instance where the Pharisees came to interrogate Jesus. These men never knew where Jesus would be at any given time, so they must have been in motion themselves just looking for Him. **Do you see the difference between their movement and that of Jesus?** Jesus was going about for ministry to help people; the Pharisees were going around as God's policemen, trying to maintain order by their definition. Religious people are in motion to maintain their system of rules; spiritual people are in motion to do the will of God and minister to people.

The Pharisees wanted to test Jesus, not to find the truth but to prove what they assumed to be true: That Jesus was a fraud! They asked Jesus to produce a sign from heaven, which is not a sign of belief but unbelief. They wanted proof, after all that Jesus had already done. He had healed the sick, fed the multitudes and walked on water! That wasn't good enough. Be careful when you ask for a sign that will confirm God's will for your life. He is not obligated to give one and you can remain in disobedience, blaming God for your own problem because He won't give you what you require.

v. 12 – I think of Nehemiah here, who also had people seek him out, not to help him but to make his job more difficult. Jesus refused to provide the sign they requested and Nehemiah refused to stop working to answer his critics:

Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages [a] on the plain of Ono." But they were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:2-3).

Are you surprised by your critics? Are you spending undue time trying to answer their charges or placate their anger? If you are, stop! It's not worth your effort and is a distraction from your main task.

When they asked Jesus for a sign, He said no. It's alright to say no from time to time. Jesus did it. You can do it, too. **Is there anything you need to say "no" to at this time in your life? Any bothersome person or situation that requires a stern "no"?**

v. 13 – There He goes again! Jesus came over to one side of the lake and then He departed for another side. Back and forth, back and forth. There is another reason why Jesus did this. The Father directed Him to do so, and He did not question, He just obeyed! That would be a good strategy to follow; God speaks, we obey without asking questions.

For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it (John 12:49).

Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does (John 5:19).

This is a good picture to hold in your mind. When you are on the go, you are actually going with Jesus who is on the go. Jesus is always working because the Father is always working. **So what implications does that have for you?**

I have found that I can do more than I think I can do. My schedule or capabilities aren't the problem; my mind and thinking are the problem. **Are you limiting what you can do? In what area? What can you do about it? What are you prepared to do about it?**

Day Six

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?"

v. 14 – The disciples were on the go and they had forgotten to bring some bread. I suppose they were hungry. Their minds were focused on food and that made it impossible for them to understand what Jesus was about to say. It's not like they were going to be traveling for the whole day; their journey across the lake would probably have taken an hour or two.

vs. 15&16 – Jesus tried to talk to the disciples about the Pharisees and used a break analogy, leaven, to make his point. Because their minds were set on bread, they misinterpreted His comments. **Has your mind ever been set on something, causing you to misunderstand what someone else is trying to say? Do you think it's possible to do the same thing with God? It is! Do you think you can have a blind**

spot because of a preconceived idea or notion? It is, even where spiritual things are concerned.

So the question is: **where are you doing that and how you can tell when you are doing it?** First, I think that's why we need to be listening the Lord more than we talk to the Lord. Second, we need to be around others and hear what they are saying, allowing them to challenge what we are saying. Third, I think we need to specifically ask God to show us our blind spots. Fourth, we need to keep a good journal of what we think we are hearing and seeing. **Why don't you try taking some of those steps today and apply them regularly for the rest of the week?**

v. 17 – The disciples misinterpreted what Jesus did after the first occasion when He fed the crowd. They thought He was a ghost when He walked on the water. They did it again when they thought He was referring to having no bread. Did they think that not having bread was a problem for Jesus? Did He not prove on two occasions that He could feed a large multitude? How much easier would it be to feed the few in that boat? Yet, they did not understand His lesson because they were concerned about having enough food to eat.

I suppose this is why William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, had the motto, "Soup, soap and salvation." He knew that people who are preoccupied with their basic needs can't focus on spiritual things. The disciples proved that in this scenario.

Day Seven

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?"

v. 18 – Jesus asked good questions and His questions are still relevant today. I won't pose my own questions here; I will simply use His. **Do you fail to hear, see and remember?** The answers there were of course yes, yes, and yes. **What about you?**

The question about remembering is why you should record what the Lord says and does for you. It's so easy to forget! We have short-term spiritual memories where God's goodness is concerned, and long-term memories where the offenses with others are concerned.

v. 19 – Jesus was always teaching, never allowing His personal frustrations to keep Him from instructing and training His disciples. *Lord, I need the focus that Jesus had. I need the commitment to Your will that He exhibited. I want to be like Jesus!*

vs. 20&21 – Jesus walked them through the lesson He wanted them to learn, even though they had covered this topic before. Jesus was teaching them how to think and reason where spiritual things were concerned. I like that. Spiritual people need to think and come to rational conclusions that are consistent with faith.

I used to say that many people checked their brains in as they enter the church and forget to pick them up on the way out. God wants you to think. See what Luke wrote in Acts:

During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them (Acts 16:9-10).

God sent them a vision but they still had to think it through. God did not directly tell them to go to Macedonia. After careful consideration, however, they concluded that God wanted them to go. They thought about and used the brain that God gave them to determine God's will.

Have you been afraid to think about something, fearing it would make you less spiritual? Don't be afraid to think.