

**Mark 8:1-21**  
**November 19, 2023**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: Have you ever doubted Jesus could provide even after He has already proven to you that he was able to? How do you fight the issue of doubt in your life? [Let people engage]

**Transition:** Throughout the Scriptures there is a sad and persistent theme: over and over we see the people of God forgetting Him or not believing that He can be trusted. It's the story of the people of Israel, a stubborn and forgetful people. And it's a theme that continues with the closest followers of Jesus, His twelve disciples. Throughout the Gospel of Mark, we continue to see the disciples' dullness of faith and their slowness to truly believe.

In today's text, we see the disciples' pattern of unbelief continue. Jesus confronts them with a barrage of questions in v.17-21 about their slowness to understand persists. It's a stern rebuke from Jesus. Jesus warns them of the danger of their unbelief, but we should also consider the mercy and longsuffering that is shown as Jesus allows them to continue with Him. We are so slow to trust Him, and yet He is kind and merciful to us in our weakness – continuing to call us to faith, and ready to accept all who turn to Him. Let's read the text and process it.

**BOOK:**

**Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand**

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

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

<sup>5</sup> “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.

“Seven,” they replied.

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. <sup>8</sup> The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. <sup>9</sup> About four thousand men were present. And having sent them away, <sup>10</sup> he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

<sup>11</sup> The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. <sup>12</sup> 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.” <sup>13</sup> Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

**The Yeast of the Pharisees and Herod**

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

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

<sup>17</sup> 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? <sup>18</sup> Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? <sup>19</sup> When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

“Twelve,” they replied.

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

They answered, “Seven.”

<sup>21</sup> He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

Those of us who have trusted in Jesus for salvation can still be guilty of failing to trust Him in our day-to-day lives. We may know that Jesus saves and forgives and yet we struggle with anxiety and fear as we doubt God’s care and sovereignty in our lives.

### **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 136-138). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.***

**Feeding the 4,000 (vv. 1–9).** Those who try to find contradictions in the Bible often confuse this miracle with the feeding of the 5,000 which is recorded in all four Gospels. Only Matthew and Mark record this event, and it is not difficult to distinguish it from the other miracle of the multiplying of bread and fish. The first miracle took place in Galilee, near Bethsaida, and involved predominantly Jews. This miracle took place near Decapolis and involved mostly Gentiles. In the first miracle, Jesus started with five loaves and two fish, while here He had seven loaves “and a few fish.” The 5,000 had been with Him one day, but the 4,000 had been with him three days. Twelve baskets of fragments were left over after the 5,000 were fed, but only seven baskets after the 4,000 were fed. There were even two different kinds of baskets used: for the 5,000, small wicker lunch baskets (*kophinos*); for the 4,000, large hampers, big enough to hold a man (*spuris*, see Acts 9:25).

Once again, we are encouraged by our Lord's compassion and His complete control over the situation. However, we are discouraged by the blindness and unbelief of the disciples. Had they completely forgotten the previous miracle? Let's not be too hard on them. How many times have *we* forgotten the mercies of the Lord? We need to remind ourselves that Jesus Christ is still the same and has the solution to every problem. All we need do is trust Him, give Him our all, and obey.

### **Warning the Disciples (Mark 8:10–26)**

Jesus and the disciples crossed to the western side of the Sea of Galilee where they were met by the Pharisees who were still angry at Him because of His earlier indictment of their hypocrisy (Mark 7:1–23). This time they tempted Him to prove His divine authority by giving them a sign from heaven. They did not want an earthly miracle, such as the healing of a sick person. They wanted Him to do something spectacular, like bring fire from heaven or bread from heaven (John 6:30–31). This would prove He was indeed sent from God.

Our Lord's response was one of deep grief and disappointment (see Mark 7:34). How tragic that the religious leaders of God's chosen people should be so hardhearted and spiritually blind! Their desire for a sign from heaven was but another evidence of their unbelief, for faith does not ask for signs. True faith takes God at His Word and is satisfied with the inward witness of the Spirit.

Since Mark was writing primarily for Gentile readers, he did not include our Lord's words concerning the sign of the Prophet Jonah (Matt. 16:4; and see Matt. 12:38–41). What is “the sign of Jonah”? Death, burial, and resurrection. The proof that Jesus is what He claimed to be is the fact of His own death, burial, and resurrection (Acts 2:22–36; 3:12–26).

Jesus left them and crossed to the east side of the Sea of Galilee, and en route taught His disciples an important spiritual lesson. It appears that they were almost as blind as the Pharisees! The men were having a private discussion about their food supply, because somebody had forgotten to pack bread. Who was to blame?

It must have grieved Jesus that His handpicked helpers were so spiritually obtuse. The fact that He had multiplied bread on two occasions and fed over 10,000 people had apparently made little impression on them! Why worry and argue over one loaf of bread when you have Jesus in

the boat with you? Their minds were dull, their hearts were hard (see Mark 6:52), their eyes were blind, and their ears were deaf (see Mark 4:11–12).

God’s people often have a tendency to forget His blessings (Ps. 103:1–2). He meets our needs, but then when the next problem arises, we complain or become frightened. As long as we are with Him, we can be sure He will care for us. It would do us all good to pause occasionally and remind ourselves of His goodness and faithfulness.

But the main lesson had to do with *leaven* (yeast) and not with bread. In the Bible, leaven is consistently a symbol of evil. Each Passover season, the Jews had to remove all leaven from their dwellings (Ex. 12:18–20), and leaven was not allowed with the offerings (Ex. 23:18; 34:25; Lev. 2:11; 6:17). Evil, like leaven, is small and hidden, but it spreads and soon infects the whole (Gal. 5:9).

The Bible uses leaven as a picture of false doctrine (Gal. 5:1–9), unjudged sin in the church (1 Cor. 5), and hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). In this context, Jesus warned them about the teaching (false doctrine) of the Pharisees and the followers of Herod. The Pharisees “said but they did not”; in other words, they practiced and encouraged hypocrisy (note Mark 7:6). The Herodians were a worldly group who catered to Herod, accepted the Roman way of life, and saw in Herod and his rule the promised kingdom for the Jewish nation. If this false teaching got into the hearts and minds of the disciples, it would infect them and pollute the truth Jesus had given them to proclaim about Himself and His kingdom.

We can never be too careful about detecting and avoiding false doctrine. Only a small deviation from the Word may get into an individual or a church, but before long it will grow and infect everything. Our Lord did not often say “Beware!” but when He did it was important!

**Grassmick, J. D. (1985). *Mark*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 136-138) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

#### 7. THE FEEDING OF THE 4,000 (8:1–10) (Matt. 15:32–39)

In Mark 8:1–30 Mark presented a series of events that parallels his sequence in 6:32–7:37. Despite the replay of events and teaching, the disciples were still slow to “see and hear” who Jesus really is (cf. 8:18). In both narrative cycles the feeding of a multitude played an important role (cf. 6:52; 8:14–21).

8:1–3. **During** Jesus’ ministry in the Decapolis region (cf. 7:31), **another large crowd gathered** (cf. 6:34), probably both Jews and Gentiles.

After listening to Jesus’ teaching **three days**, they had **nothing to eat**. They were weakened by hunger so that **if** Jesus would **send them home hungry**, they would **collapse on the way** as **some** had **come a long distance**.

Jesus had **compassion** on them in their physical need (cf. 6:34) and called the disciples’ attention to it (contrast 6:35–36). He took the initiative to feed the multitude who chose to forgo food in order to be nourished by His words.

8:4–5. The disciples’ question highlighted their slowness in comprehending the significance of Jesus’ presence with them in a new crisis. It also showed their inadequacy to meet the need; yet they indirectly referred the matter back to Jesus (contrast 6:37).

Jesus’ question concerning the amount of **bread** available clearly indicated His intentions, and was an invitation for the **disciples** to use the resources they had—**seven** loaves. They also had “a few small fish” (cf. 8:7; Matt. 15:34).

8:6–7. The feeding of this crowd occurred much like the feeding of the 5,000 (cf. 6:39–42). The Greek participles translated **taken** and **given thanks** (*eucharistēsas*; cf. 14:23), and the verb **broke** are in the aorist tense, expressing decisive acts, whereas the verb **gave** is in the imperfect, showing that Jesus “kept on giving” the bread **to His disciples** for distribution (cf. 6:41). **He did the same thing with** a few small fish.

8:8–9a. In abrupt fashion Mark stressed the sufficiency of the miracle (all **ate and were satisfied**), the abundance of the provision (**seven basketfuls** of food remained), and the large size of the crowd (**about 4,000 men** besides women and children; cf. Matt. 15:38).

The baskets (*spyridas*) on this occasion differed from those used in feeding the 5,000 (*kophinoi*, Mark 6:43; cf. 8:19–20). They were rope or mat baskets sometimes large enough to carry a man (cf. Acts 9:25). Thus the 7 basketfuls (perhaps a basket for each loaf used) of Mark 8:8 likely held more than the 12 basketfuls of 6:43.

8:9b–10. Dismissing the crowd, Jesus immediately (*euthys*; cf. 1:10) entered a **boat with His disciples** and crossed the Sea of Galilee **to the region of Dalmanutha**, a town (also called Magadan; cf. Matt. 15:39) near Tiberias on the lake’s western side (cf. Mark 8:13, 22).

#### 8. THE PHARISEES’ DEMAND FOR A SIGN (8:11–13) (Matt. 16:1–4)

8:11. The religious authorities (cf. 3:22–30; 7:1–5) **came and began to question** (*syzētein*, “to dispute, debate”) Him. They wished **to test** (from *peirazō*; cf. 1:13; 10:2; 12:15) **Him**, to get Him to prove the source of His authority (cf. 3:22–30; 11:30; Deut. 13:2–5; 18:18–22). They were seeking (from *zēteō*; cf. Mark 11:18; 12:12; 14:1, 11, 55) from Him **a sign from heaven**, one with divine authorization. In the Old Testament a “sign” was not so much a demonstration of power as an evidence that an utterance or action was authentic and trustworthy (cf. TDNT, “*sēmeion*,” 7:210–6, 234–6). The Pharisees did not demand a spectacular miracle, but that Jesus give unmistakable proof that He and His mission were authorized by God. They believed quite the opposite (cf. 3:22).

8:12. Jesus **sighed deeply** (cf. 7:34) and asked a rhetorical question that reflected His distress at their obstinate unbelief. The words **this generation** denoted the nation of Israel represented by those religious leaders (cf. 8:38; 9:19; 13:30). They continually rejected God’s gracious dealings with them (cf. Deut. 32:5–20; Ps. 95:10). **Miraculous** is not in the Greek text.

With a solemn introductory formula (**I tell you the truth**; cf. Mark 3:28) and a Hebrew idiom of strong denial (cf. Ps. 95:11; Heb. 3:11; 4:3, 5), Jesus rejected their demand: **No sign will be given to** “this generation.” Matthew cited the only exception, “the sign of Jonah” (Matt. 16:4), that is, Jesus’ resurrection (cf. Matt. 12:39–40).

In Mark, there is a distinction between a miracle (*dynamis*) and a sign (*sēmeion*). The former evidences God’s presence and power in Jesus. An appeal for a miracle can be a legitimate expression of one’s faith (e.g., Mark 5:23; 7:26, 32). But such an appeal is illegitimate if it arises out of unbelief, as was true of the Pharisees.

8:13. Jesus’ indignation was evident by His abrupt departure. He **crossed** the Sea of Galilee **to the** northeastern shore once more. This ended His public ministry in Galilee.

#### 9. THE DISCIPLES’ FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND JESUS’ WORDS AND DEEDS (8:14–21) (MATT. 16:5–12)

8:14. Their hasty departure (v. 13) probably accounts for the disciples' failure **to bring bread**. They had no food in the boat **except for one loaf**, a sufficient amount with Jesus on board (cf. 6:35–44).

8:15. With the encounter near Tiberias (vv. 11–13; the site of Herod's palace) still fresh in His mind, **Jesus warned** (lit., “kept giving orders to”; cf. 7:36) **them to be** continually on guard against **the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod** Antipas.

A small amount of yeast can affect a large amount of bread dough when they are mixed. Yeast was a common Jewish metaphor for an invisible, pervasive influence. It often, as here, connoted a corrupting influence. In this context the yeast referred to a gradual increase of unbelief. This lay behind the Pharisees' request for a sign even though their minds were already made up (cf. 8:11–12; 3:6). So it was with Herod (cf. 6:14–16; Luke 13:31–33; 23:8–9). As indicated by Jesus' question (Mark 8:12), this attitude had affected the whole nation of Israel, and He warned His disciples against it. In contrast, He called them to faith and understanding without signs (cf. vv. 17–21).

8:16. The disciples totally ignored Jesus' reference to the Pharisees and Herod. They heard “yeast” and assumed Jesus spoke of their **bread** shortage.

8:17–18. Jesus' rebuke is expressed in five penetrating questions that showed their persistent lack of spiritual understanding (cf. 4:13, 40; 6:52). Since He was **aware of their discussion** (cf. 8:16), His rebuke was not because of their failure to grasp the meaning of His warning (v. 15), but at their failure to **understand** the meaning of His presence with them. Their **hearts were hardened** (cf. 6:52). They had **eyes but failed to see and ears but failed to hear** (cf. Jer. 5:21; Ezek. 12:2). In this sense, they were no better than those “outside” (cf. Mark 4:11–12). They also had short memories.

8:19–20. The questions about the two miraculous feedings (cf. 6:35–44; 8:1–9) indicated that the disciples had failed to comprehend the meaning of what they had seen, and to discern who Jesus really is.

8:21. The climactic question, **Do you still not understand?** was more of an appeal than a rebuke. The emphasis on “understanding” (vv. 17–18, 21) expressed the goal of Jesus' words and works which had not yet been reached.

***Church, C.L. (1998). Mark In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 435). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.***

### **READING THE SIGNS (8:1–21)**

Feeding the four thousand represented Jesus' miraculous provision for the Gentiles much as the feeding of the five thousand represented His care for the Jews (6:30–44). Mark's Roman readers doubtless saw that those who came “a great distance” to be with Jesus foreshadowed the church's mission to the ends of the earth.

The Pharisees' demand for a sign from heaven recalls the Israelites' testing God in the wilderness (Deut. 6:16; 33:8). Jesus perhaps refused to give a sign because ample opportunity had already been given for those with eyes to see what He was about.

The yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod represents their bad influence. The disciples again lacked understanding. Mark did not specify just what the disciples should have “seen” about Jesus—perhaps that they had no need to worry about bread with Jesus there to provide for their needs.

***Leavell, L.P. (1972). Mark. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 624-625). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.***

*The passage*—In 8:1–9 we have the miracle of feeding the four thousand. Some commentators hold that this is merely a repetition of the previous miracle when five thousand were fed. That view would question the integrity of both Mark and Matthew, for both record the two feedings. The feeding of the five thousand involved a Jewish crowd. This feeding, taking place in the Decapolis region, involved Gentiles primarily.

It is possible that this is another step in the breaking down of the wall of prejudice. Jesus showed no partiality because of race. His ministry was to all men, both Jew and Gentile.

In 8:10–21 there is another record of the Pharisees' attempt to trap Jesus. Though Dalmanutha cannot be positively identified, it is obviously on the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee, and out of strictly Gentile country.

Beginning in 8:13 through 9:29, we find the fourth withdrawal. During this time Jesus sought to give the twelve greater understanding regarding his purpose. In 8:21 he asked if they were not beginning to perceive. The miraculous feeding of two multitudes should have given them new insight.

The leaven of the Pharisees must have been spiritual blindness. This sin led to the rejection of Jesus Christ in favor of the maintenance of tradition. The twelve must interpret Jesus and his ministry in light of what he was doing, not in terms of their preconceived ideas of the Messiah.

***The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Mark 8:1-21. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.***