

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 12/12/04 Brad Brandt

Mark 8:1-21 "The Danger of Missing the Point about Jesus"*

Main Idea: In Mark 8:1-21 we discover how easy it is to miss the point about Jesus. In this account we see three responses by Jesus with three kinds of people.

I. Jesus cares for the needy (1-10).

A. We see His compassion (1-4).

1. The disciples saw a problem.

2. Jesus saw an opportunity.

B. We see His sufficiency (5-10).

1. When Jesus works little becomes much (5-7).

2. When Jesus works people are satisfied (8-10).

II. Jesus confronts the greedy (11-13).

A. The Pharisees asked loaded questions (11).

1. They sounded spiritual.

2. In reality they were playing games.

B. Jesus denied their request (12-13).

1. The Lord isn't interested in satisfying our curiosity.

2. The Lord is interested in changing lives.

III. Jesus corrects those who have missed the point (14-21).

A. The disciples forgot bread (14).

B. Jesus warned about yeast (15).

C. The disciples thought He was talking about bread (16).

D. Jesus used questions to teach vital lessons (17-21).

1. There are bigger problems than the lack of bread (17).

2. There is no problem too big for the One who multiplied bread (18-20).

3. We really have a problem when we fail to understand (21).

Make It Personal: What do you think about Jesus *really*?

To begin, I'd like to share a couple of stories about misunderstandings.

A "do it yourself" catalog firm received the following letter from one of its customers: "I built a birdhouse according to your stupid plans, and not only is it much too big, it keeps blowing out of the tree. Signed, Unhappy. The firm replied: "Dear Unhappy, We're sorry about the mix-up. We accidentally sent you a sailboat blueprint. But if you think you are unhappy, you should read the letter from the guy who came in last in the yacht club regatta."

Another story. Neil Marten, a member of the British Parliament, was once giving a group of his constituents a guided tour of the Houses of Parliament. During the course of the visit, the group happened to meet Lord Hailsham, then lord chancellor, wearing all the regalia of his office. Hailsham recognized Marten among the group and cried, "Neil!" Not daring to question or disobey the "command," the entire band of visitors promptly fell to their knees!

Communication is an amazing thing. Misunderstandings can be amusing, usually after the fact. But some misunderstandings carry tragic implications.

This morning we are returning to our expositional series in Mark's gospel, "Straight Talk about Jesus." In the passage before us, Mark 8:1-21, we discover how easy it is to miss the point about Jesus. It's the familiar story of the feeding of the 4,000. There's much we can learn from this miracle—and from how the disciples

responded right after the miracle. As we'll see, they missed the point.

We often do that, don't we? The Lord does something great in our lives, intending to teach us about Himself and how to live for Him. But we don't "get it." We miss the point. It's helpful to look at a passage like this one and see how Jesus deals with people who miss the point. In Mark 8:1-21 we see three responses by Jesus to three kinds of people.

I. Jesus cares for the needy (1-10).

Verse 1 begins, "During these days." Stop and consider the context. What days? Jesus has begun His final year of earthly ministry. The cross is coming. He's ministered to large crowds all over Israel, but His emphasis has shifted. He's spending more and more time with His chosen disciples, preparing them to minister once He returns to heaven.

We'll see another crowd in a moment, but this is a different kind of crowd. In chapter 7 Jesus left the Jews and went to minister in Gentile territory, to Tyre in verse 24, and to the Decapolis region in verse 31.

Mark is writing this biography of sorts about Jesus about thirty years after Jesus returned to heaven. He's writing for a Roman audience to help them know the truth about the Lord. One theme he emphasizes over and over—and we see it here again—is that Jesus cares for the needy. In verses 1-10 Mark helps us see two of the characteristics associated with Jesus' compassion.

A. We see His compassion (1-4). Verses 1-4—"During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.' His disciples answered, 'But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?'"

Mark begins by sharing the detail about another large crowd. Everywhere Jesus went the crowds flocked to Him, so much so He could scarcely find time to be alone. I don't know about you, but when I see a crowd my first thought isn't a good one. Crowds typically mean inconvenience for us—a crowded road means more pressure driving, a crowded room means a harder time finding a seat, and so on.

But note how Jesus responded, "I have compassion for these people," He said.

I found a story about Mamie Adams. According to the story Mamie always went to a branch post office in her town because the postal employees there were friendly. She went there to buy stamps just before Christmas one year and the lines were particularly long. Someone pointed out that there was no need to wait in line because there was a stamp machine in the lobby. "I know," said Mamie, "but the machine won't ask me about my arthritis."

Here's something we tend to miss about Jesus. When the Lord saw someone who was hungry, or cold, or suffering physically, His heart went out to them. Yes, He knew they needed more than food or clothing for man's greatest problem is a sin problem, which is the primary reason He came, to go to the cross and provide for man's sin problem. But physical problems are real, too, and when Jesus saw them His heart responded.

It's interesting to see the contrast between Jesus' and the disciples' perspectives on the crowd.

1. *The disciples saw a problem.* "Where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" they ask.

Our first instinct often is *not* to help. "Let somebody else meet the need," we tend to think. "After all, what can

I do anyway?"

Jesus has compassion, and He wants us to like Him. Mark says that when Jesus saw the hungry crowd, He spoke to His disciples about the situation. He told them, "I have compassion on these people"—the unspoken question, "What about you?" And here's what He saw, "They're hungry, and if I send them home in this condition they may faint on the way."

The disciples responded, "What can we do about it? Where are we going to find enough bread to feed this multitude, especially out here in the middle of nowhere!" The disciples can't figure out how they could help with this massive need.

You say, "But hadn't they already seen Jesus feed a crowd like this?" Yes, back in chapter 6 when Jesus fed a group of 5,000 hungry men plus women and children.

"Well then, why didn't the disciples remember that?" you ask. Let's not be too hard on the disciples. We're often like them. Have you ever forgotten what the Lord did in the past when you faced a present problem? We'll come back to that thought momentarily.

So to the disciples the crowd presented a problem. Jesus saw it differently.

2. *Jesus saw an opportunity.* It's so easy to become numb to need. The needs of hurting people are so abundant we can easily shut our hearts to them. Not Jesus. His compassion is unfailing, and His intent is that His followers reflect His heart.

One of the most joyous Jewish holidays is the Feast of Purim. Purim celebrates the Jews' deliverance described in the book of Esther. It's a time of giving gifts, and one of the regulations is this. No matter how poor a person is, he must find someone poorer and give him a gift.

One of the men I met in Ukraine last month is Vitali. Vitali is a young man in his 20's. He's very poor, as are most of the men with whom we work. Vitali approached my teaching partner, Rick, at the end of the week long class with an interesting request. "Can I have that map of the world you used in our church history class?" Quite frankly, the map probably cost merely a couple of dollars. "Sure," Rick answered, "if you want it." Vitali responded, "Thanks, but it's not for me. My sister's birthday is coming and I wanted to be able to give her a gift. I will give it to her as a birthday present."

Vitali, like his Savior, looked at needs as opportunities to demonstrate compassion.

Keep this in mind. Jesus didn't feed every hungry person in Israel—though He could have. And He didn't heal every sick person He met—though again He had the power to do so. There is what Cole calls a "curious selectiveness" in Jesus' ministry when it comes to meeting physical needs. Sometimes He did, while at other times He didn't.

There may be a clue here as to the reason He fed this group. In verse 2 Jesus acknowledges these folks had been with Him for three days without eating. Think of what that detail indicates about these people. They'd come to *hear His teaching*.

Here's an important difference between the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000. According to Mark 6:35 the feeding of the 5,000 took place at the end of the first day. In other words, Jesus spent an afternoon with that crowd and then fed them that evening. Ironically, John 6 indicates that after the miracle that first crowd tried to make Him king by force (6:15) and later became offended by His teaching when He claimed to be the bread of life (6:60, 61, 66).

The crowd in Mark 8 is different. The feeding of the 4,000 happened after three days of teaching. These

people had been listening to Jesus for three days and they couldn't get enough of His teaching. They didn't come to Jesus to get physical food but spiritual. The physical food followed the spiritual food.

J. Vernon McGee suggests there's a lesson here for us, observing, "Are we using church dinners to get the crowd? If so, then our motive is wrong. Many churches can get people out in the middle of the week only if they have a banquet. Some Bible classes depend upon the food to draw people in for the message."

Don't miss the difference between the crowd in Mark 6 and the one in Mark 8. The folks in Mark 8 weren't like the previous folks who wanted Jesus' "free lunch" program. They came to learn. And that's what they did on day one—with no miraculous meal provided. And on day two—again with no "free lunch." And on day three. And apparently they were preparing to walk home on an empty stomach. They didn't *expect* a meal. As far as they were concerned, they'd already had one, a spiritual feast.

Cole observes, "It was not merely that they were hungry, but that they had become hungry in God's service, and so theirs was to be an experience of 'seek first his kingdom...and all these things shall be yours as well' (Matt. 6:33)... For such people Jesus would work a miracle, and give them food that they had not sought first."

By the way, why did this crowd assemble in the first place? I can't prove this but here's a possible explanation. Back in Mark 5 Jesus healed a demon-possessed man who'd been living in the tombs. We call him the Gerasene demoniac, for the miracle occurred in the region of the Gerasenes. That's also part of the region called the Decapolis which is where Jesus did the miracle we're considering. Do you remember what happened after Jesus healed that man? The people begged Jesus to leave them (17). In addition, the healed demoniac begged Jesus for permission to come with Him (18). But Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you." And verse 20 states, "So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed."

Is it possible that this crowd assembled to hear Jesus for themselves because of the missionary activity of the healed demoniac? If so, what a vivid illustration of how God can use one person's testimony to cause a whole region of people to seek the Lord.

As the story unfolds we see a second characteristic of Jesus. In addition to His compassion...

B. We see His sufficiency (5-10). Verse 5—"How many loaves do you have?' Jesus asked." The Lord loves to involve His people in His work. He loves to use what we have so that we become participants rather than spectators in gospel ministry.

Verse 5—"Seven,' they replied." We're not told where they got the seven loaves this time. There's no mention of a little boy with a sack lunch as in the case of the feeding of the 5000 (John 6:9).

Verse 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." Note again how Jesus involves the disciples. After giving thanks for the bread to show the source of the meal to follow, Jesus distributed the miracle meal through His chosen men.

Verse 7—"They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them." This seems to indicate Jesus prayed twice, once for the bread and again for the fish.

To reiterate, the miracle Jesus did was for the disciples' benefit as much as for the hungry crowd. He's teaching them (and us) something vital, namely this...

1. *When Jesus works little becomes much* (5-7). Seven loaves and a few fish, what's that? Not much. But in

the Master's hands little becomes much for He is the sufficient One.

Please note this is no gourmet meal. It's simply bread (probably barley bread, the food of the common poor) and fish ("small ones," we're told; salt-fish about the size of sardines, typically eaten as relish with dry bread). Granted, Jesus could have made a five course lobster meal with all the trimmings had He so desired, but He didn't. Even that teaches us something important. Jesus cares for our needs—indeed He cares and delights in providing for our needs—but He doesn't exist to satisfy our cravings. Having said that, please don't misunderstand. He does satisfy. Yes...

2. *When Jesus works people are satisfied (8-10).* Verse 8—"The people ate and were satisfied." That's interesting. Many people today have lobster and steak and everything else this world has to offer, yet aren't satisfied. They have the finest that money can buy, yet are miserable. But Jesus gave people the diet of the poor, yet it satisfied them. Why is that? It's because He who gave us life is the only One who can truly give satisfaction in life. Those who look to Him are those who are satisfied. Those who don't always end up wanting *more*.

Critics of the Bible have tried to say the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000 were the same story told twice (in their attempt to remove the supernatural from the Bible). But there are significant differences between the two feedings. Here's a key one...

Verse 8 concludes—"Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over." After the feeding of the 5,000 the disciples picked up *twelve* baskets of leftovers, one for each of them. Here the number is *seven*, and Mark uses a different Greek word for basket: *spyris* instead of *kophinos*. *Kophinos*, the word used in the feeding of the 5,000, is a small wicker basket in which the Jews carried food while traveling. The word in our account, *spyris*, refers to a large basket (Paul was lowered from the wall in Damascus in one in Acts 9:25). So after the feeding of the 4,000 the disciples gathered up seven large baskets (hampers) full of bread.

Verses 9-10—"About four thousand men were present [with women and children the number could have exceeded 12,000]. And having sent them away, he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha."

The narrative quickly moves from the miracle to what happened right afterwards. Mark tells us that Jesus left with His disciples [after the feeding of the 5,000 He sent them ahead and joined them later by talking on the water; this time they leave together]. They went to the Dalmanutha region (Matt 15:39 says Magadan), probably on the western shore of the lake. As it turned out He there encountered a response very different from the teachable folks in the Decapolis.

In scene one Jesus cares for the needy. In scene two...

II. Jesus confronts the greedy (11-13).

The Pharisees, that is. Verse 11—"The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven." Some questions are for learning but others are for making a point. Remember, Jesus has been spending time in Gentile territory prior to this. That wouldn't have pleased the separatistic Pharisees very much, so they approach Jesus with some questions, *loaded* questions.

A. The Pharisees asked loaded questions (11). This isn't Jesus' first negative encounter with the Jewish leaders:

2:16-17 The Pharisees criticized Him for eating with tax collectors.

3:6 The Pharisees began to plot how they might kill Jesus.

3:22 The teachers of the law said he was possessed by Beelzebul.

7:1 The Pharisees attacked Jesus because His disciples ate with unclean hands.

It was after this last confrontation that Jesus left the "hot seat" in Israel and went to minister in Gentile territory (in chapter 7). In 8:10 He returned to "Jewish" territory and in 8:11 the Pharisees track Him down. Note two things about their words.

1. *They sounded spiritual.* "Give us a sign from heaven," they asked. Sounds legitimate, at first. "We'll believe in You, Jesus, but we need proof first. After all, there are a lot of false Messiah's out there. Give us a sign and then, once we know for sure You are from God, we'll accept You."

The Pharisees weren't satisfied with "earthly" miracles. They wanted one "from heaven," perhaps referring to fire from heaven (like God did in Elijah's day) or manna from heaven (as He did in Moses' day).

It may sound spiritual, but something's quite wrong with their request. What is it? Jesus HAS been giving them signs and proofs of His divine authority, the very indicators the Old Testament gave to identify the Messiah. He's healed the sick, given sight to the blind, set the demon-possessed free, and even raised the dead. He's announced the kingdom of God by preaching a message of repentance. No, the Pharisees don't need a sign. They need to *respond* to what they've already received.

They sounded so spiritual. However...

2. *In reality they were playing games.* These were proud men who loved themselves and loved their religious system. They had no intent whatsoever in believing in Jesus, only in getting some dirt on Him so they could get rid of Him.

How did Jesus respond?

B. Jesus denied their request (12-13). Verse 12—"He sighed deeply [this is the only time this Greek word appears in the NT, *anastenazo*] and said, 'Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it.'"

It grieved the Lord. Standing before Him are the men who are supposed to be the religious leaders of God's chosen people. If anybody should embrace the Messiah, they should. They know the Old Testament Scriptures. They're men of prayer, or so they say. They're supposed to be spiritual. But that's the problem. They weren't what they were supposed to be. In actuality they were hardhearted and blind.

It grieves the Lord when people refuse to believe His Word. It especially grieves Him when people say they want to learn more of His Word, not in the interests of belief, but as an excuse of unbelief.

There's a lesson here for us all.

1. *The Lord isn't interested in satisfying our curiosity.* If that's why you read the Bible and why you come to church, merely to gain information to support some personal agenda, please hear the deep sigh of the Savior. He is not pleased. Know this...

2. *The Lord is interested in changing lives.* He can change anyone—no one is too far gone. And He *will* change anyone who comes to Him. That's His agenda, to transform lives. That's why He went to the cross, to break the power of sin, to set sinners free so they could begin to live for the glory of God. That's His agenda. Is it yours?

Verse 13—"Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side." Yes, Jesus cares for the needy, but He also confronts the greedy. One more scene...

III. Jesus corrects those who have missed the point (14-21).

A university student was seen with a large "K" printed on his T- shirt. When someone asked him what the "K" stood for, he said, "Confused." "But," the questioner replied, "you don't spell "confused" with a "K." The student answered, "You don't know how confused I am."

That's about how the disciples felt by the end of scene 3, *confused!* Here's what happened. Jesus and His disciples left Dalmanutha and traveled back to the east side of the Sea of Galilee. On the way the Lord used the travel time to teach His men a lesson. Unfortunately, the disciples had a problem that plagues most of us, that is, the tendency to miss the point of what the Lord is trying to teach us. Here's how it happened.

A. The disciples forgot bread (14). "The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat." I wonder what happened to all the leftover bread from the feeding of the 4,000? We're not told, but it's gone.

Which of the twelve was responsible to pack the bread basket? Again, we're not told, but whoever it was goofed. Apparently, the others had taken notice and brought up the subject. Then Jesus spoke...

B. Jesus warned about yeast (15). "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."

Note we have two subjects of discussion in the boat. The disciples are thinking about their next meal. Jesus is thinking about their last confrontation. They're talking bread. He's talking yeast. Similar subjects, different connotation. That's when the confusion began.

C. The disciples thought He was talking about bread (16). "They discussed this with one another and said, 'It is because we have no bread.'"

You say, "What did Jesus have in mind when He mentioned 'yeast'?" Every Passover season the Jews were instructed to remove all yeast or leaven from their homes (Ex. 12:18-20). In the Bible leaven often symbolizes evil. It's small, but powerful. It spreads and infects what it touches. That's what Jesus had in mind.

The Pharisees held to some very dangerous notions about the Messiah and God's kingdom, and the Lord knew it. He didn't want His men to allow these destructive ideas to enter their thinking, for He knew the results would be terrible. He knew that if His men weren't careful, their minds would be corrupted by the Pharisees' false notions.

Beloved, false doctrine is a greater threat than most of us realize. When we begin to believe something that's not in God's Word, even a small deviation, it won't be long before it will spread and contaminate our lives and perhaps the lives of others around us. Jesus didn't often say, "Be careful!" but when He did He expected His disciples (and us) to pay special attention to a very real threat.

"Watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees"—that is, watch out for wanting God to give you a sign when He's already given you all you need in His Son—"and watch out for the leaven of Herod, too, for he like the Pharisees also wanted a sign."

That's the point. When Jesus is speaking to you, you don't need a sign from heaven. What you need is to believe Him and accept His Word. So watch out!

Unfortunately, the whole thing went right over the disciples' heads.

"I told you, Peter, pick up the bag of bread before you get on the boat."

"Hold on, Bartholomew. I got the bread the last time. It's your fault Jesus is upset with us. You should have picked up the bread." They all missed the point.

Then Jesus spoke. Verses 17-21—"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? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

Notice the questions Jesus asked, eight of them in the NIV. Question after question, questions intended not to rebuke the men but to teach them.

D. Jesus used questions to teach vital lessons (17-21). I see three lessons here.

1. *There are bigger problems than the lack of bread (17).* "Why are you talking about having no bread?" There's nothing wrong with talking about bread—we need bread to live, and Jesus Himself just made enough bread to feed 4,000 men. But when Jesus got into that boat He had a subject of far greater importance than bread on His mind, one that apparently should have been on His followers' minds, the Pharisees.

If you forget bread you might miss a meal or two, but nobody ever died from that. If you don't come to grips with the destructive influence of the Pharisees you'll miss more than a meal. The destiny of souls is at stake.

My friends, there are bigger problems than the lack of bread. There are people all around us who are heading for eternal destruction. Some of us may be in that number. Sadly, far too many of us don't think about that subject. We're thinking about that next business deal or vacation or ballgame. We're thinking about *bread*.

2. *There is no problem too big for the One who multiplied bread (18-20).* "Don't you remember?" Jesus asked. "How many baskets of bread did you pick up after I fed the 5,000?" "Twelve," they answered. "And how many after the 4,000?" "Seven," they responded.

Do you see the point? Why would you worry and argue about one loaf of bread when you have Jesus with you in your boat? You wouldn't, unless you forgot about Him.

Ponder Wiersbe's comment, "God's people often have a tendency to forget His blessings. 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."

3. *We really have a problem when we fail to understand (21).* Jesus ended with the same question He asked towards the beginning, "Do you still not understand?" It's not enough to hear God's Word. We must *understand* it. We must *embrace* it.

Make It Personal: What do you think about Jesus *really*?