

## The Real Jesus, Mark 8:1-21, The One Where Jesus Gets Frustrated, 7/31/22

As we continue to follow Mark's gospel we see Jesus on an extended journey through gentile territory, remember last week we said he left the Sea of Galilee and traveled up to Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia and then down to the Decapolis, the 10 Roman cities on the East of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is demonstrating that he is not only the Savior of the Jewish people but the nations, not just a Savior for those who have the right beliefs and morals, but he came to save those who are in spiritual darkness, the outsiders. And the compassion of Jesus toward the outsiders is on full display during this months long journey. In Chapter 7, He frees a woman's daughter who was in bondage to a demonic power, then he heals a man who was deaf and mute. And chapter 8 is a continuation of Jesus' compassionate ministry to the outsider Gentiles.

**Mark 8:1** *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.* This word compassion is the word *splagchnizomai*, say it with me, that's a fun word to say. Bowels. Your gut.

<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 distribute to 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.* How many of you are experiencing Déjà vu? Wait, didn't this happen already? Loaves and fish...maybe you feel like you are in a dream...you are, none of this is real...JK. This is very similar to the miracle that took place in Mark 6 with some changes to the math. The most notable distinction is that last time Jesus was on the west side of the Sea...Jewish people, this time Jesus performed this miracle on the East side...Gentiles. And interesting, did you notice the repetition of seven- loaves, and seven baskets? scholars believe that is representative, because 7 is number for the Gentiles, "The Land of the Seven"- Seven Gentile nations at the time. Jesus is training his disciples and us that He has coming with compassion for the whole world. Animistic tribes in Papua New Guinea, Hindus in India, Muslims in Middle Easterners, Communist Atheists in China, and Capitalists in the West...he's preparing the disciples and us for the great commission to go into the whole world and to feed them, not only with physical bread, but the bread of life- the Gospel message of Jesus. He's preparing us

to go across the cubicle, across the street, across town, across generations, party lines with compassion and with the bread of life.

*After he had sent them away, <sup>10</sup> he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.* We don't know for sure where this location is but most scholars would say this is the Aramaic word for the town known at Magdala (Mary Magdalen was from). Let me show you a **map**. And what that means is that Jesus finished his ministry in Gentile territory on the East of the sea, sailed West across the sea, back to...where? Yes! Jewish territory. And wouldn't you know it? Guess who's waiting for him on the other side...Yup it's the pharisees.

*<sup>11</sup> The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven.* The picture here is that the Jewish religious leaders came to interrogate Jesus. This isn't questioning out of earnest seeking, this is hostility and unbelief. Notice they want a sign from heaven. Because after all, the blind seeing, the deaf hearing, freeing those in bondage, feeding thousands, all signs prophesied that the messiah would do...that just wasn't enough. And the reality is nothing would ever be enough. And that was the problem, because they wanted a messiah on their terms. Commentary: *"The kind of messiah they want will never come. They are determined to find a compliant superman who is endowed with heavenly powers and will fulfill their earthly program; the messiah of their dreams."*<sup>1</sup>

I wonder, might we have the tendency today to be a bit like the pharisees? We call this series the **Real Jesus**[Title Slide]...because what is in vogue today is to have a DIY Jesus, a Messiah of our dreams, who fits our reality, our feelings of what is good, based on our modern sensibilities. "I believe in a savior but only if he would never judge my lifestyle and accepts everyone as long as they are sincere." "I believe in a savior but only if he gives me the life I want." "I believe in a savior, but only if he conforms with all my political ideologies." What if I said "I believe in gravity, but only if it allows me to float down safely when I jump off the roof." Your opinion is not what is most important, in that moment reality is most important. And so we say, "Jesus show me a sign! Be my compliant superman who meets my demands." And He says, "Nope. I am a Savior you cannot control. I'm not here to comply with your agenda, faith means you complying with my agenda." One of the main reasons there are people deconstructing their faith is because the savior of their dreams wasn't the savior of reality. They are deconstructing a DIY Jesus, not the Real Jesus.

*<sup>12</sup> He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, 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.* Instead of a sign Jesus replies with a sigh. Jesus refuses to play their games. And he leaves and heads back across the sea. What began with the pharisees as doubt has developed into full-blown unbelief. Doubt and unbelief are not the same. Doubt can be healthy skepticism, the attempt to discern to see if something is true. It's OK to struggle with doubt. And if you never doubt anything you are going to be a target for predators, scams, cults and fake news.

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<sup>1</sup> I could not locate the name of the theologian.

Unbelief is when doubt turns cold and self-centered. What the Bible calls hardening of the heart, or spiritual blindness and deafness. It turns away from the truth out of sheer stubbornness, pride and self-will. Voltaire, the French atheist “Even if a miracle should be wrought in the open marketplace, before a thousand sober witnesses, I would rather mistrust my senses than admit a miracle.” Jesus sees the hardness of their hearts and says- enough is enough. This is a pivot point, there isn’t another story of Jesus interacting with the Pharisees until his arrest. He walks away and concentrates his efforts on those who want their spiritual eyes and ears opened. Jesus is a gentleman. If we harden our hearts, he will let us do it, to our own detriment.

But Jesus isn’t only frustrated with the pharisees, his own disciples seem spiritually dull, blind and deaf as well. <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.”* Now this is classic Jesus. He takes an opportunity for a teaching moment, and he does so in enigmatic fashion...on purpose to make you think, to draw you in. He’s never on the nose. Because you don’t learn when it’s on the nose, you learn when you have to go...hmmm.

What is Jesus talking about? Yeast...or better...leaven was made by keeping back part of the dough for maybe a week and it would ferment. And you would use it as a homemade rising agent for the next batch...like friendship bread. Friendship bread is the chain email of baking...you know “If you love our country pass this poem along to a 10 other people.” Now if you are into baking, you might be excited when someone gives you starter baggy for **Friendship Bread [Picture]**. But when someone gives it to me it would be more like “obligation bread.” Here’s a baggy of moist yeast...**[Mark 8:14-15 slide]** But leaven was also dangerous because it was easy for it to go bad and infect and ruin the next batch. And so in the ancient world it was a metaphor for corruption. It’s subtle, and seems at first to be a good thing, and so you even pass it around, but it’s dangerous, it spreads and, in the end, it’s lethal.

This is Jesus’ warning of the pharisees and Herod. What is the leaven of the pharisees and Herod? Well it’s interesting because they are essentially opposites. The pharisees were an ultra-right-wing, traditionalist, nationalistic sect. And Herod was a leftist, pagan, sellout to Rome. The only thing they had in common was unbelief. Jesus was not the messiah they wanted. He says “Watch out for the corrupting influence on both sides that would keep you from making me the focus.” And this is a good warning for us today. Watch out! Don’t get co-opted by the right or the left ideologies of the day and think they are the answer instead of the gospel of Jesus. He is the way, the truth and the life. Not Trumpism, not nationalism, not capitalism, not liberalism, not socialism, not globalism. Every ism and ology will eventually turn on Jesus when he doesn’t comply with their way. Jesus is too compassionate, merciful, multi-cultural and inclusive for the far right. Jesus is too judgmental, narrow, hierarchical, and exclusive for the far left. You will never go wrong if you stick with the Real Jesus.

Now that’s a little gem of a teaching from Jesus...But the disciples don’t get any of that. <sup>16</sup> *They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.”* If you want to feel

better about yourself, here's a good place to experience that. Jesus is trying to teach them deeper spiritual truths...and they are like, "I think he's frustrated at us because we forgot to bring the bread basket. Thomas you were supposed to get it!" "No, I thought Bartholomew had it!" Bart is like, "No, it's probably one of the disciples that no one ever talks about like Thaddeus." So Jesus is like, "Seriously?" <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?"

He's saying, "Guys, you still don't get it. You still struggle to trust me and believe in who I am. If I fed the 5000, if I fed 4000, don't you think I can handle a meal for 13?" And because the disciples are caught up in their doubts they are missing out on the deeper places of faith Jesus wants to take them. Now, here's the good news. These same disciples eventually move from doubt to trust, from spiritual dullness to deep awareness and sensitivity to the Spirit. These same disciples worried about a meal will end up with a faith that will move spiritual mountains and flip the world upside down. Jesus is patient with them because he knows the trajectory they are on. Just like the pharisees they might have started with doubt, but the pharisees trajectory was toward unbelief, but their trajectory was toward trust and belief.

Jesus' questions are for us today. Because we many of us here may be struggling with doubt. And doubt isn't always bad. It's okay to have doubt. It's a starting place. But doubt can make us dull and miss out on the deeper faith where He wants to take us. Doubt can move toward unbelief. When we camp in doubt too long it can turn into leaven that corrupts. This is why Hebrews 3:13 warns us *See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.* But we want to be on the disciples' trajectory...one that says, like the man we will encounter in the next chapter- "Lord, I believe, help me with my unbelief."

**So what do we do with our doubt?** How do we make sure we don't head toward the trajectory of the pharisees and head in the trajectory of the disciples? Let me point out four responses from our text today.

**#1 Bring your Questions to Jesus.** Notice the pharisees came to question- to interrogate Jesus...trying to prove him wrong. While the disciples come to Jesus in v.4 asking how he will feed the crowd. "Jesus you say you want to feed them, but I'm having trouble seeing how." Both question Jesus, but the heart of their questions are completely opposite. God's door is wide open to questions. But interrogation is when you demand God meets you on your terms.

Consumeristic Christianity. You need to do these things for me or you aren't God. "God I'm struggling to see how you intend to bring good out of my circumstances but I am trusting you."

**#2 See God's Fingerprints in your Life.** <sup>18</sup> *Do you have eyes but fail to see?* So often we don't see. God is at work all around us but we still can't see. All we see are the dark spots. We miss his presence. "We have no bread." God is giving you signs all around you! We look for God in the miraculous but miss Him in the mundane. Oxygen, laughter, children, work in the church. If you follow Jesus...and even if you don't, the fingerprints of God are all over your life.

**#3 Hear God's Whisper in the Stillness.** *Do you have ears but fail to hear?* If you are struggling to hear God, it's probably not because he's silent but because your life is noisy, distracted and hurried. If you are in a crowd or a party and you want to connect with someone what do you do, you pull them aside, you get alone and talk. God is whispering to us in the crowd, but we don't hear him. We need to relearn the art of silence and solitude. Getting away from the wall of sound that blocks you from hearing God. Carve out space in our life to hear...it is usually a whisper, soft-spoken God. Because God is after intimacy with his children.

**#4 Remember God's Faithfulness in your past.** *Don't you remember?* He points them to the bread and loaves...recount my faithfulness. Do you remember what I did? We forget so fast don't we? It is God amnesia.<sup>2</sup> Journal, recount prayers that God answers. Sing songs that tell of God's work. Listen to the stories of God's faithfulness in community with one another.

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<sup>2</sup> John Mark Comer phrase.