



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 8:1-21

Mark 8

"Bread, Signs and Leaves"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Mark chapter 8 and we're going to look at verses 1 through 21. Mark writes – now let me – it's been what, two weeks since we last looked at Mark, so you'll remember the Lord had left Galilee and gone up to the Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon and then he had, after healing the Syrophenician woman's daughter of a demon, had gone southeast to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee in the region of Decapolis and had healed a man who was deaf and dumb there and encouraged the people not to spread the word but they had done so anyway and a large crowd had gathered. That's where we left off, and so we begin with verse 1 of chapter 8:

In those days again when there was a great multitude and they had nothing to eat, He summoned His disciples and said to them, "I feel compassion for the multitude because they have remained with me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away fasting to their home, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a distance." And His disciples answered Him, "Where will anyone be able to find enough to satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?" And He was asking them, "How many loaves do you have?" and they said, "Seven." And He directed the multitude to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and began giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the multitude. They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as

well. And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven full baskets of what was left over of the broken pieces. And about four thousand were there and He sent them away. And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and they came to the district of Dalmanutha.

And the Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. And sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation." And leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side.

And they had forgotten to take bread and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread. And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." "And when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him, "Seven." And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow now for a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious Heavenly Father, we again come to you this morning gratefully acknowledging that we are here in this place by your grace and that you have led us here in your providence to consider this passage of Scripture. To consider the great provision that our Lord makes for His people, the provision that has been made in His death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension to the right

hand where He now sits as our great high priest, interceding for us, coming to our help as one who is able to give help in time of need, as one who sympathizes, as one who has compassion.

We're reminded of all these things in this great passage that we consider this morning. We pray that as we look at these things that you would instruct us and that you would teach us. We recognize that to understand your truth, ultimately you must be our teacher. We cannot perceive the things that you would have us to learn, we cannot understand them. Our hearts would be very much like the hearts of these disciples after they had received such blessing, such revelation from our Lord. Hard hearts, dull hearts, ears that don't hear. In order for us to understand, we must be taught of you, and that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

And so we come to you with that recognition, Lord. We are not sufficient to understand. We are not sufficient to learn and to do all that you would have us to learn and to do, and so we pray that you would bless us with knowledge and the discipline and the desire to live according to that knowledge. So may this be an enjoyable time and a profitable time of study. We thank you for the privilege we have to come together. And as the people of God, as the redeemed people of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, we gather together to study the Scriptures. That is a privilege, and we also have the great privilege, Father, of interceding for one another, of remembering ourselves in prayer and seeking your help and remembering one another, and we do that in the few moments that we have.

We pray that you would bless those in need, encourage those who need encouragement. These are days in which many can be discouraged over physical problems, over financial problems, and you know the needs and the difficulties of each and every one of us. Help us to look to Christ and to remember that we are in your hand, and in your hand we are in a secure place. You know our needs and you are guiding and directing our lives according to your Will and you're working out your Will in our lives.

And we have every reason to be encouraged and to know that even in the difficult times, you are perfecting us and conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ. And we all need that encouragement. We pray that you'd give it and that you'd give it particularly to those who are struggling at the present time and pray that you might give healing and that you might make provision financially and bless spiritually with encouragement, pray for ourselves as we sing our final hymn. We pray that you'd bless it to our hearts and prepare our hearts for the instruction of Scripture and bless our time together, that it would be an enjoyable time and a profitable time and that in all that we do, we'd be edified and Christ would be exalted. Pray these things in His name. Amen.

[Message] Years ago, I had a Hebrew professor who began the course by giving us three rules for studying the language, which if followed would assure us of learning Hebrew. First rule was review. The second rule was review, and the third rule was review. Review, review, review. Unfortunately, that's about the only thing I can remember that he taught that year but reminds us of the fact that that's a good series of rules to learn because to learn anything it's necessary to review continually because we are continually forgetting what we have learned. I think that's pretty much true across the board but particularly true in spiritual matters. Learning spiritual truths doesn't come easy.

Now, why is that? What's the reason for the problem? Well, I think to a large extent the problem occurs because we are continually being fooled by our eyes. We are constantly facing the temptation to live by sight and not trust in the Word of God, to trust in our senses and not trust in the things that the Lord has revealed to us. In other words, we all struggle with the sin of unbelief and I think that's common to man. It was true of the disciples. They, too, faced that same temptation. In fact, I think one reason that the Lord had the disciples was to give us good object lessons and they are that.

They did and they said the same foolish things that we so often do and say, and by the grace of God, we are able to learn from their mistakes and we're able to learn from them because the Lord in His grace was continually, patiently dealing with them and repeating the lessons that they should have learned. I think we see that in the events that we consider this morning.

The passage begins with a miracle in which the Lord feeds 4,000 people. It's very similar to the incident back in chapter 6 when He fed 5,000 – really, 5,000 plus, maybe some 10 to 15 thousand people. In fact, the similarities have made some who study the Scriptures conclude that what we really have here is only one feeding and that the feeding that is recorded in chapter 8 is really the same feeding that was recorded back in chapter 6 only it's re-told as two different feedings. But there are a number of reasons for taking this as two separate events. For one, the language differs between the two. And then the statistics are different.

A different number of people were fed with a different amount of food used to feed them and a different amount of leftovers were gathered up at the end of the incident. Further, verse 19, the Lord Himself refers to two separate feedings. What seems to give credence to the critics' argument that there was only one feeding and not two is verse 4 where the disciples, when faced with the problem of feeding this great multitude, say, "Where will anyone be able to find enough to satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?" Why is it that after the miraculous feeding of over 5,000 in chapter 6 that they say that?

Why don't they turn to the Lord and they say to Him, "Well, you know the answer to that, you're the one that can do that, you're the one that fed the 5,000 earlier, you can provide for them"? How could they forget? Well, to be fair to the disciples, maybe they didn't forget. According to John 6:26 where this, that same event of the feeding of the 5,000 is recorded in John's gospel, the Lord, upon feeding the multitude, rebukes the crowd for just wanting food. And so perhaps

the disciples, reflecting back on that, remembering that event quite clearly, thought it better to not bring up the subject, following that rebuke.

Further, the Lord was sometimes reluctant to perform miracles, and so the disciples may have been so impressed by that that they didn't expect the Lord to solve the problem in a supernatural way. In other words, they knew that they were to look for a natural solution to some of their problems. These are all plausible explanations and explanations that various commentators have given, but knowing human nature and knowing the history of these 12 men, I'm more inclined to believe that they really didn't learn the lesson back in chapter 6 in that previous miracle and they didn't trust the Lord. It didn't occur to them at this moment in a very similar circumstance to look to Him.

And that shouldn't surprise us. As one writer puts it, "We must never lose sight of a human being's vast capacity for unbelief." Even the most mature Christians have experienced the power of God and then later when they're tested, they have acted in unbelief. Peter is an example of that. Later, during his apostolic ministry, he has a gross failure in Antioch. You can read of that in Acts 2. The apostle Paul had to rebuke him to his face. Go back centuries earlier, look at the prophet Elijah. A great man of God, Elijah stood on Mount Carmel, he defeated the prophets of Baal in a magnificent contest. And then shortly after that, we see him fail in his faith, and in severe failure, he flees to the south before the anger of Jezebel.

We could give numerous examples. Just reminds us that so often we need to go through experiences more than once to learn the lessons that God would teach us. So the disciples' response here presents no problem for two different feedings of multitudes. Nor do the similarities in the two events. The Lord often repeated His miracles, and as we've noted, there are significant differences between the two miracles, and those differences add to the principal lesson that

the Lord is teaching. And those added lessons, I think, are very significant. We want to take a good look at them.

One of those added lessons is the reminder that regardless of how often truth is repeated and reviewed and explained, there are people who will never learn the lesson because they don't want the truth. Unbelief hardens the heart and repeated unbelief with repeated lessons makes a heart increasingly insensitive to the truth, and we have all of that gathered up in this passage. Two different types of people come before us occasioned by this great miracle in which the Lord feeds a multitude, and all of it's very instructive for us.

The account begins "in those days," meaning in the days in which the Lord was in Decapolis on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. The Lord had come there from Tyre and Sidon in the north, and He had come down to that region and there He had healed a deaf mute. He had tried to prevent word from spreading because He didn't want to become known as simply a "miracle worker" but in spite of the warning, the people did speak the word. They spread the word of His healing, it got out, and the crowds gathered, and since this was a gentle region, these were principally if not completely Gentiles that had come to Him.

And we read in verse 2 that they had been there with Him for three days, probably sitting there under His instruction, listening to His teaching. That's a long time and it shows just how effective and how clear and how captivating His teaching was. That's one thing that we see throughout Mark either directly stated and people marvel over what an effective and what a magnificent teacher He was, and if it's not stated explicitly as it was back in chapter 1, then it's certainly implied by something such as this. Three days they sat and listened to the Lord teach, fascinated with Him, fascinated with His teaching. They didn't want to go home.

That became a problem, however, when after three days they ran out of food. When that occurred, verse 2 states that the Lord felt compassion for them. That was a common response of our Lord. He's

often said to have had compassion for others. Here, it was for the multitude because of their hunger. He, too, probably felt hunger Himself, but His compassion was not for Himself, His thoughts were not for Himself, His thoughts and His compassion were for other people, it was for this multitude who felt hunger.

William Hendriksen calls our Lord the Great Sympathizer and He is that. He knows all of the difficulties of life having lived out a life as a man, having experienced life in a fallen world. Though a man without sin yet He experienced the same difficulties and the frustrations that we go through, and because of that, He can sympathize. In fact, one of the reasons that He is such an effective high priest is because He knows the difficulties of this world, He knows the hardships that human nature must endure, and He can sympathize. And because He can sympathize, the author of Hebrews says He can come to our help in time of need.

So having compassion for these people and their hunger, He will give help, He will become the solution, but first He puts the problem to the disciples. He says, "The people are hungry, and so what are we going to do? If we send them home, they will faint on the way. Many of them live some distance away. What should we do?" Now, that's a distinctly different way of approaching the situation from what occurred back in chapter 6. If you remember what occurred then, it was the disciples that came to Him with the problem, and they requested that He send the multitude away, send them home. "It's getting late, there's no food," and here He comes to the disciples, and He doesn't suggest that they send them away; He suggests that they do something to meet their need.

The point is He comes to them, He takes the initiative, and that underscores the very nature of our Lord's ministry toward us. He takes the initiative. John puts it simply, he puts it directly when he writes in 1 John 4:19, "We love." We love God, we love on another, we love because He first loved us. Because He loved us, because He had compassion on us while we were helpless, while we were sinners,



while we were enemies, to draw upon Paul's statements in Romans 5, because He took the initiative in His grace at that time when we were not taking the initiative toward Him at all. We were turned away from Him because He took the initiative. We are now His children, we are now His friends, and the Lord's compassion for the multitude in this passage illustrates the compassion, the mercy, that He has toward us.

He is great in His compassion, and all that we are, all that we have can be traced to that fact, that He takes the initiative. Not just in our salvation. Principally there but throughout our life at every moment of our life, He's taking the initiative on our behalf. He's compassionate toward us. And the compassion He had, He wanted His disciples to have as well. A true disciple has compassion on others. When he sees people in need, he or she wants to help regardless of who that person in need is. And so He sets the problem before them and in so doing, he puts them to the test, one that very clearly they failed because we read in verse 4 their response: "Where will anyone be able to find enough to satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?"

Now, on the surface, they seem to have a point. They're saying, "Look around, we're in a wilderness. There isn't a Jack-in-the-Box in sight. No place to make provision for food. There's nothing." A wilderness is just that, it's a wilderness, it's a place without anything to sustain life. "So how can we make provision for these people?" And it's true, they were in a wilderness and a wilderness is the last place you would expect to find anything to make provision for people and certainly for a multitude of people like this. Some soundness to their reason on the surface.

But the problem with their reasoning is they'd been in a wilderness before with hungry multitudes before and the Lord provided the food from five loaves and two fish. How could they fail to make that connection? Well, we can't help but wonder that, and yet again, their failure really shouldn't surprise us. That's characteristic of the people of God. You trace that through the history of God's

people and you see it time and time again. Israel did it right after their miraculous deliverance from Egypt. After the parting of the Red Sea, after being delivered from that pursuing enemy of the Egyptian army, after all of that they set out on a March through the wilderness led by God in a pillar of cloud.

But it wasn't long before they became hungry, they began to grumble, they began longing for the pots of meat back in Egypt, accusing Moses of bringing them out into the desert to kill them as if it had all been some cruel joke, as though God had not made any promises about delivering them, as though God hadn't made any provision in the past, in the immediate past, for their needs. So they began to grumble and they began to complain and the Lord answers Moses. He says, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you," and the Lord made a miraculous provision for them there in the wilderness.

What Israel did, what the disciples did, what we so often do, is look at the circumstances and judge reality by what we see. And here, the disciples saw the wilderness and they couldn't imagine how any kind of provision could be made for that multitude of people. They were living by sight, and as a result, they forgot the person who was with them, forgot His power, forgot the promises of God. We go through a trial in life, we forget that He said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," forget that He commands throughout the Scriptures, "Fear not." Forget those promises.

Or we remember the way in which He blessed us in the past but aren't so sure that we can count on that in the present because after all, well, it's a new day, it's a new set of problems, a new set of circumstances, we're not sure that He'll do for us today what He did in the past. So really, we're not very much different from these disciples and from so many others that we find in the Scriptures. But notice, their failure is met by the Lord's patience and He deals with them very graciously. He doesn't rebuke them, he simply repeats the miracle.

We read in verse 5 and following how He asks them how many loaves they had and they answer seven. He then directs the multitude to sit down on the ground. He gives thanks for the bread. He broke it, gave it to the disciples to distribute to the people. Then in verse 7 He blessed a few small fish, distributing them, and verse 8 states they ate and were satisfied and they picked up seven full baskets of what was left over of the broken pieces and about 4,000 were there, and He sent them away.

Now, this was not a mere repetition of the feeding of the 5,000. There are clear differences in detail and differences in purpose. By repeating the miracle, He shows on the one hand that we can expect Him to repeat His blessings. If He's provided for us in the past – and He's provided for all of us in the past – we can be assured that He'll provide for us in the present and He'll provide for us in the future. We can trust Him to meet our needs and I think this is one of the principal points that He brings out. He doesn't just help us once, He's helping us continually, and He repeats that blessing, and this is an evidence of that.

Also, there's a difference here in the word "baskets." That may seem like a minor point, but I think there's some significance here. This is a different word for baskets than the one that was used back in chapter 6. These baskets were much bigger. We get some sense of how big the baskets here in chapter 8 were by looking at Acts 9:25 where the same word is used of the basket in which the apostle Paul was lowered from the wall when he made his escape from Damascus. So these baskets are big enough to hold a man. Large baskets. So seven baskets full or hampers as some have translated this, filled with leftovers, and that probably indicates that this was a much greater supply made after this feeding than was made after that previous feeding.

But what we have with both feedings is the fact that in both situations, the people were all satisfied and there was an abundance left over. Evidently, a greater abundance this second time than the

first time, but in both cases, there is an abundance left over, and it's a reminder to us of the Lord's sufficiency for every need that we face. There is no situation that He cannot deal with, that He cannot meet, and meet with an abundant supply. Paul makes that very point in the prayer that he prays in the middle of the book of Ephesians, in Ephesians 3:20 where he writes: "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think," and He's always ready to give help in time of need.

So there are significant differences between the two events, but at the same time, the miracle repeats the main point that it was designed to illustrate, the point that was made back in chapter 6, and that concerns the nature of our Lord's ministry, the nature of His death, a death which was in the place of sinners, the breaking of the bread in His own hands symbolizes the breaking of His body on the cross, which was a voluntary offering up of a sacrifice, the sacrifice of Himself. Later in Mark's gospel in chapter 14 at the Passover meal, He will take the bread in His hands and after blessing it, He'll break it and He'll give it to the disciples with the instructions "Take, this is my body."

And the eating of it symbolizes that we receive spiritual life through Christ by receiving Him through faith and in so doing receiving the forgiveness of sins. That is through Christ, it's on the basis of His death on the cross. That was signified in the miracle in chapter 6, but here He teaches it all over again. It's the same point being repeated. Review, review, review. We need to have these things reviewed for us, and the Lord is repeating a point that needs to be continually reviewed in our own minds of the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the sufficiency of that and being reminded of who He is and how important He is to our existence.

Sunday evenings, we try to do that with the breaking of bread, the celebration of the Lord's supper, and each Sunday night we remind ourselves of the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection and what that has accomplished for us. So it's again taught here. But something is

added here that's different from what occurred in chapter 6. In chapter 6, the audience was principally Jewish. Here at Decapolis, it was largely – if not entirely – Gentile. And so putting the two together, the Lord was signifying that He came to satisfy the spiritual hunger of both the Jew and the Gentile, that He truly is the Savior of the world. And that's the one whom we worship, the Savior of the world. Savior of all who put their faith in Him, whether they are Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, rich or poor – regardless, He is the Savior of all kinds of men.

Now, following this we read in verse 10 that immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha. The identity of Dalmanutha is uncertain, but it was probably located somewhere on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, just north of Tiberias, the capital of Herod's domain there in Galilee, in Perea. What is certain, however, is that the Lord was back on Jewish soil and had reentered Pharisee country because we read in verse 11: "When he did disembark from the boat, the Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him." They just couldn't leave Him alone.

They wouldn't follow Him over to Decapolis where those unclean Gentiles live but as soon as He got back to Galilee, they were there, and Mark says, seeking from Him a sign from heaven. They wanted some sign, some token, something that would signify the truthfulness of His teaching. Now, this really is even more incredible than the disciples' failure. He'd already filled the land with infallible proofs, all kinds of miracles, but those weren't enough. They wanted something even greater. They wanted a sign that would confirm the divine origin of His ministry and of His miracles.

You see, they didn't question that He'd done miracles. They'd witnessed some of His miracles. Wasn't a question of was He doing supernatural acts but they, if you'll remember, had attributed all of that supernatural power to the devil. He'd done it in the power of Beelzebub. And so if He was going to change their minds, they

needed a really big sign. They needed something that was monumental, not one of these little miracles like cleansing a leper or raising the dead. They wanted a heavenly sign, something like a miracle of manna falling down from heaven.

Maybe they'd heard about Him feeding that multitude over in Decapolis and they're saying, "We want something even greater. Make the loaves of bread fall out of the sky or perform a miracle like Joshua did, making the sun and the moon stand still or call down fire from heaven like Elijah did on Mount Carmel. If you do that," they were saying, "then we'll believe you." It was all a smokescreen and Mark makes that very clear because he concludes verse 11 by saying that they were testing him. The Lord knew that and knew that no sign was necessary, and so Mark writes in verse 12: "And sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, 'Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation.'"

In Matthew's account, the Lord adds that "an evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign." On this point, Don Carson writes in his chapter in the book *Power Religion*: "The demand for a sign carried the danger of reducing the Lord to a clever magician, able to perform tricks on demand, with the result that Jesus would have to buy faith and allegiance by a constant flow of miracles done on demand." Any generation that seeks to bargain with the Lord or seeks to bring the Lord under its control by making demands upon Him is an evil generation, and that's the Lord's point, and the added sign would really have proved nothing.

We think that signs would prove a great deal but they really don't prove anything ultimately, and I think that's brought out by the Lord later on in chapter 13 when He states that in the future, in a day future to our own day, false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show signs and wonders in order, if possible, to lead the elect astray. Now, that suggests that men can do extraordinary things and be extraordinarily deceptive and come very close to deceiving even the elect themselves who possess the Holy Spirit. But it's all false.

It's all a lie. But wonders can be performed and yet that doesn't prove the truth of the one doing the wonders.

Signs don't necessarily prove anything, and it's wrong to seek signs. So the Lord says no sign shall be given to this generation, meaning no heavenly sign, the kind of which they were asking or demanding. Now, in Matthew's account, He does say that they would be given the sign of Jonah. That's a reference, however, to the resurrection, and what the Lord was saying was that faith was to be based upon His death and His resurrection. Faith in miracles is no saving faith but faith in the death and the resurrection of our Lord, that's saving faith and that's all that's necessary. That's all we need. And yet there are many today within the church who are seeking signs.

In fact, one prominent movement, which we've referred to before, calls itself Signs and Wonders and advocates power evangelism in which stress on miracles such as mind-reading, exorcisms, healings, stress on that is made as being very important for effective evangelism, as something that's perhaps even necessary if people are going to be converted to the gospel. And yet we look at this event and what's the Lord do? He withholds signs and wonders and, as we saw at the end of chapter 7, repeatedly discouraged people from telling others about the miracles that He had performed. So this modern sense of urgency about signs and wonders doesn't fit with the Lord's words and the Lord's deeds.

Now, we shouldn't draw the wrong conclusion from this. Miracles did have a subsidiary role in establishing the faith. The author of Hebrews states that. If you were attending the Wednesday night study a few weeks ago, Dr. Johnson made this point in Hebrews 2:3-4, and so we'll review that for a moment because I think it applies to the point that I'm making. There, the author of Hebrews writes that the gospel was "confirmed by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them both by signs and wonders and by various miracles."

Now, that expression "bearing witness" is a participle. Maybe we're reviewing a bit here our grammar, but a participle is not a verb. It's like a verb. It's a cross between a verb and an adjective. But verbs have tense, past tense, present tense, future tense, and varieties in there. The participle, however, gains its tense from the main verb and the main verb in that sentence is the word "confirmed." It's a past tense and so the tense of the participle, bearing witness, also has that past tense. So what the author is saying is that in the past, for a period of time, the Lord and his apostles were giving corroborative evidence for the truth of the gospel with signs and wonders and miracles.

But from the standpoint of the author of Hebrews, that was in the past. That wasn't happening in his day. That time was over. The confirmation has been made. That doesn't mean, having said that, having said that miraculous gifts, such as prophecy and healing and tongues and such as that, because they have ceased in our day, that God doesn't answer prayers in dramatic and unusual and even miraculous ways. He does, He does do that. And the point here is not when or if the gifts or miracles would cease. That's not Mark's point and that's not the point of the Lord's rebuke.

The issue is motives and seeking signs from impure motives, that's what the Pharisees were doing and the motive behind the modern interest in signs and wonders is, to my mind at least, a little suspect. Again, Don Carson goes on to point out that this present-day focus on power is typical of Western culture, and I think we can also say probably typical of the Roman culture of Mark's day because Rome was big, Rome was powerful, and there was that temptation to lean on that and on the conviction that if it's big and if it's strong, it must be good.

And the things that the Lord was saying here would have addressed Mark's day and the church at Rome to whom this book was written as well as it would address us because we have that same mentality of thinking that the big and the strong are what are good and



what are virtuous, and in light of that attitude, Carson writes, "There is so little perception that God's power is perfected in weakness, that we triumph as we endure, and frequently that we conquer as we suffer. There is so little call to self-denial to the way of the cross." You read through the Scriptures, God's great work today is performed through the weakness of vessels such as us, performed through the foolishness of the gospel, modern interest in power and signs.

It may be from a different motive than the one that we see here in these Pharisees, but so often, as with the Pharisees, the motive is just as wrong. And further, the idea that miracles convince people of the truth is wrong. It's not correct. The Pharisees proved that. They had witnessed miracles. They knew all of the reports that had gone out throughout the land. They'd seen miracles themselves and they still opposed Him. And so the Lord knew that further review with these men was of no use. Their unbelief had hardened their hearts. They weren't listening to the truth, they didn't want the truth, and so no miracle short of regeneration, no miracle short of a changed heart, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, would bring them to a conviction of the truth and a desire for the truth.

That work of regeneration, the work of the Holy Spirit, comes through the preaching of the gospel, and they were rejecting that gospel. In fact, the emphasis throughout the New Testament is on the Word of God, it's not on miracles and signs and such as that. Paul says so in Romans chapter 10, says faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ comes from the preaching of the gospel. Men aren't to seek signs, they're to seek the truth of the Word of God and Paul says as much in 1 Corinthians 1:22-23: Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom but we preach Christ crucified, the power of the Word of God. There's nothing more important than preaching the gospel and teaching the Scriptures.

Well, the Lord could see that nothing good could come from a discussion with the Pharisees, and so He and His disciples left them and crossed over to the other side, to the northeastern region of the

Sea of Galilee, and evidently their departure was abrupt because the disciples had neglected to buy food for the trip. And so the Lord took the opportunity to warn them about the error of the Pharisees while the encounter was still fresh on their minds. We read in verse 15 that He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

He calls their error "leaven," which is a common Jewish figure for corruption, and a very effective one because leaven or yeast permeates a whole lump of dough in a very unseen way, which is representative of sin and how it, in an insidious way, overtakes a person unawares, just gradually creeps in and overtakes their life. Well, Mark doesn't state what the leaven or the sin is, but the context would suggest that at least generally it's unbelief, and Matthew in his account makes that very plain and gives a specific statement of what it is when he says that it is false teaching.

The teaching of the Pharisees was false because it was a teaching of ritualism, it was a teaching of the traditions which had been elevated to as high or higher a position than the revelation of God, and so they were saying that salvation was obtained not by faith in God's provision of sacrifice but through the traditions, through the efforts of men. We obtain our salvation by our works and by our own merit, by our own efforts. Herod was a secularist, and there was a whole party of the Herodians who were, like him, secularists. That seems different than the Pharisees who were religious men, religious men, secularists, and yet they were alike in a fundamental way.

And if we can reduce that common denominator between the two, it's that they both lived by sight, that ultimately in the final analysis, the religion of both of these people was an earthbound religion. Demanding a sign showed that later. Herod will do the very same thing. When the Lord meets him at his trial, Herod will demand from Him a sign. Same thing that the Pharisees were doing, and in both cases it shows that they all lived by sight and not by faith. That's the common denominator, living by sight, not living by faith.

It's denying the need of faith by rejecting the Word of God, rejecting the revelation that God has given in His Son.

But the disciples in all of this didn't catch on immediately and puzzled over the Lord's statement for a moment and then concluded that what he was talking about was the fact that they had no bread. The Lord was teaching them spiritual truth and they were thinking about eating, they were thinking about literal bread, and so He rebuked them in the remaining verses for being so concerned with bread that they missed the warning that He had given. He says, verses 17 and 18, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? Having ears, do you not hear?"

They seemed already to be somewhat permeated by the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod, showed the same kind of spiritual dullness as they did, because like the Pharisees, like Herod, they were living by sight. They were concerned with the material. Then through questions and answers, He reviews the details of the miracles of the feedings. We read: "Do you not remember when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." "And when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him, "Seven." And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

They knew the details but they failed to see beyond them, they failed to apply to themselves the lesson of His abundant provision for them. He's the Messiah, He's the Christ, He's the Son of God, He's the great provider and with Him in the boat, they didn't need to worry about bread, they didn't need to worry about material things any more than they did when they were in the wilderness. And so to direct them to think more deeply about that revelation, He asks them the question of verse 21: Do you not yet understand? In other words, how many times do the miracles need to be repeated? How many times do we need to review this lesson?

Whenever we are overly concerned with the material, with the details of this life, we will lose sight of the spiritual, and that's the temptation that we fight every day, the temptation to live by sight rather than by faith. That's why we don't learn more quickly than we do. That's why we so often need to review those lessons over and over again. Like the disciples, so often we don't think according to revelation; we think according to sight, according to the world around us. We look at the wilderness and we measure reality by that. Fortunately, the Lord is patient and He doesn't give up on us. He reviews the lessons with us in love and does so for our training and for our good.

Another interesting, significant similarity between those two incidents, this one in chapter 8 and that one in chapter 6, is back in chapter 6 verse 52, Mark writes that their hearts were hardened. Here we come to the end of this miracle and the Lord asks them are their hearts hardened. Here they go, two great miracles, a progress in their development, and still they've got hardened hearts, and yet look at the disciples and what they became. They became the great apostles. They became men of faith, men of deep understanding, and so I think that reminds us that there's hope for us still.

We go through events like this and we fail and we stumble and we don't learn the lessons, but God's not finished and He doesn't cast us off. He continues to teach us. He's faithful in that. But to understand, we have to give attention to His revelation. We can never live by faith in His Word unless we know His Word, and that involves study. We can never trust in His Word if we don't trust in Him, and we can't trust in Him unless we know Him, and we won't know Him unless we apply ourselves to the Scriptures. And as we do that, we will become increasingly familiar with our Lord and with His ways and His character and increasingly obedient to Him.

So we're to be a people who study and people who give attention to the revelation of God and follow it by faith, but first there must be faith in His Word. Do you have that? Have you trusted in Christ and

what He said? He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me." We come to Him by believing in the gospel, the good news that the Son of God died in the place of sinners so that all who believe in Him might obtain forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. If you have not believed in Christ, I invite you, encourage you, exhort you to trust in Him, believe in Him, and in so doing, be saved.

Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for the truth of Scripture, the promises that have been given to us, the assurance that we have that if we are yours, if we're your children, you're never going to abandon us, you're never going to forsake us, you're going to provide for us at every moment of our life and you are doing that, that we have a high priest who is compassionate, who sympathizes with us, who knows our needs, knows them better than we know them because He's been through them and He's continually interceding on our behalf. There's no reason to fear, no reason to become anxious, every reason to be trusting in you, and yet we confess our failure to do that. So often we don't trust.

Help us to do that, Father. Help our faith. Strengthen our faith. Strengthen our resolve to read the Scriptures and become students of it that we might grow in the grace, the knowledge of thee. Pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.