

A WINTER BIBLE STUDY ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Tuesday April 13, 2021: Session 7 - Readings
Galilee: "Of Miracles & Signs" – Mark 6:30-8:30

Feeding the Five Thousand

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Jesus Walks on the Water

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

1. Background: Bread Made from Nothing

By including both scenes of Jesus feeding the multitudes, Mark assumes that his readers are familiar with their Old Testament. Let's look back at an important Old Testament passage that should help understand the nuances of Mark 7–8.

Read this passage from Exodus 16:11–21.

The LORD spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.' "

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.'" The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it over until morning." But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

This section picks up after God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. The people started complaining pretty quickly, though, because they were out in the middle of the wilderness. **As you read the passage in Exodus, what sounds familiar to what you've read in Mark?** (Think specifically about the location where Jesus takes the disciples prior to feeding the 5000.)

1. Background: Bread Made from Nothing (Continued)

What do you think the people eating the bread Jesus had just multiplied would have thought? If Jesus is re-creating the something-out-of-nothing provision that Israel saw in the wilderness, what does that say about Jesus?

Jesus's provision through miraculous bread should immediately clue us in to two things: First, Jesus is God in-the-flesh and he will provide for his followers. But second, he's not about simply satisfying our cravings. As the passage in Exodus goes on, God's frustration with Israel grows because, rather than trust him to provide, they ignore his instructions and try to take advantage of his provisions.

In the same way, Mark presents the Pharisees in chapter 7 as also taking advantage of God's generosity, using their own legal traditions to ignore caring for elderly parents.

So, as you sit down to eat your next meal, stop and pray for a moment. In your prayer celebrate the provision that Jesus offers you—not just in the food you're about to eat, but also in the resources you need to be about his mission.

When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Healing the Sick in Gennesaret

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to

bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Chapter 7: The Tradition of the Elders

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"

2. Background: Ceremonial Cleanness

The Pharisees attacked Jesus and his followers for eating without first washing their hands. Mothers everywhere may applaud them, but Jesus rebuked them. Why? The Pharisees were focused on the wrong thing. They were not so much concerned about cleanliness—as in, not carrying dirt or germs—but rather cleanness, a term describing ritual suitability.

The concept of cleanness goes back to the Law of Moses, in which God instituted conditions on how he could be approached. To be in God's presence, a person needs to be in a state of holiness. A person who is clean is in a state of holiness; therefore, becoming clean is essential for entering into the presence of God. Likewise, anything that makes a person unclean separates that person from God.

Generally, anything associated with health or life would be designated as clean. For example, a perfect one-year-old lamb was an acceptable sacrifice, but a lamb that was lame—or nearer to death, less than perfect—was unacceptable. If something or someone was unhealthy or associated with death, they were ...

2. Background: Ceremonial Cleanness (Continued)

unclean. Skin diseases, illnesses, touching a corpse, or participating in sinful activities all could make a person temporarily unclean.

An unclean person could go through a process to become clean—make a suitable sacrifice (Leviticus 1:3–17), allow the right amount of time to pass (Lev. 15:19), participate in a symbolic ceremony, such as a ritual washing (Exodus 30:17–21). This was likely what the apostles did not do before eating, prompting the Pharisees' complaint.

In the Gospels, we see Jesus change the rules: he touched the unclean personally to cleanse and purify them, illustrating that he holds the power to transform the lives of individuals. Jesus's touch healed or restored dead people (Mark 5:21–24, 35–43), those with skin diseases (Mark 1:40–45), even those suffering an unnatural blood flow (Mark 5:25–34) to a state of cleanness.

In Mark 7:15, Jesus proclaimed that nothing going into a person can make that individual unclean—only things coming out of a person. In this passage Jesus abolished the defiling physical and animal aspects that made a person unclean.

He confronted the religious leaders by exposing their hypocrisy: they were very concerned about how the people followed every tiny regulation, which could be trumpeted about to show their "righteousness." They were too busy looking good to prioritize actually doing good: they were neglecting the commandments of God to love their neighbors, honor their parents, uphold justice, protect the vulnerable. It's easy to mask our inner motivations with outward activities. Take time to reflect: is this your faith life?

He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

Then he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, 'Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban' (that is, an offering to God)—then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this."

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

When he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. He said to them, "Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

The Syrophenician Woman's Faith

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Jesus Cures a Deaf Man

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

Chapter 8: Feeding the Four Thousand

In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, “I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance.” His disciples replied, “How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?” He asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” They said, “Seven.” Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

The Demand for a Sign

The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no

sign will be given to this generation.” And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side.

The Yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod

Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And he cautioned them, saying, “Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.” They said to one another, “It is because we have no bread.” And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” They said to him, “Twelve.” “And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” And they said to him, “Seven.” Then he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

Jesus Cures a Blind Man at Bethsaida

They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Can you see anything?” And the man looked up and said, “I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.” Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then he sent him away to his home, saying, “Do not even go into the village.”

Peter’s Declaration about Jesus

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

BACKGROUND ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Commentary on Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

By: Mark G. Vitalis Hoffman

This Gospel reading begins with an account of the disciples' return after they had been previously sent out by Jesus in Mark 6:6-13, and follows the unpleasantness of John's beheading described in Mark 6:14-29.

Verses 30-34 are the introduction to the "Feeding of the Five Thousand" account in Mark 6:35-44 and the incident when Jesus walked on the water in Mark 6:45-52. However, we skip over those two great stories. (I imagine these texts are omitted because they are included in Year A when Matthew 14:13-21 and 14:22-33 are read.)

Instead, we get verses 53-56 which provide a brief account of Jesus' healing ministry, before the purity controversy begins in Mark 7:1. All in all, there is not much substance with which to work in these verses. Still, I found three points which interested me. You will have to find your own poem.

Give It a Rest

In a Gospel which is so fast-paced and where so many things happen "immediately," it is a striking shift in verse 31 when Jesus tells the disciples to get away by themselves to rest. No doubt you could say something about the importance of rest and maybe even tie it into a Sabbath concept.

Unfortunately though, such messages often sound more like good advice than the Good News. Besides, we find out in verses 33-34 that Jesus and the disciples never get their little vacation. (For Jesus, after presumably three years of ministry, he would have to die to get three days of rest in the tomb!)

It may be a small point, but we do see that the success of the disciples in their ministry is not measured simply by how much they accomplish. Having been out on their own, now they are called back to Jesus. It is

the same with the Gospel. It's not a matter of how much we accomplish, but a matter of our relationship with the Lord.

What to Do for Sheep without a Shepherd

Mark 6:34 is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. It reads, "As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd."

We've seen similar scenes in Mark. This time the large crowd impinges upon Jesus and the disciples' plan for a little rest, but still Jesus has compassion. (The Greek used here is *splagchnizomai*, a great word denoting sympathy, mercy, and loving concern.)

Why does Jesus have compassion on them? "Because "they were like sheep without a shepherd." That is such a poignant and powerful image, and I suspect many of us often feel like we are in that position.

In chapter 10 of the Gospel of John, this image will be elaborated with the reflection on what it means for Jesus to be the Good Shepherd. For John, it ties in with Jesus being the one who knows and is known by the sheep. Most importantly, the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

If that is the case, then what would it look like for Jesus to show compassion to these "shepherdless" sheep in Mark? You might be anticipating something like how Jesus healed their sick and took the children into his arms. But that's not what the text says here. What does Jesus do? "And he began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34).

Okay, it's true, my calling is to be a teacher in the Church, so you can see why I like this verse! But it really is a remarkable way of thinking about ministry. In fact, I've worked with Christian educators to help them understand education as an expression of compassionate evangelism.

Yes, there are all sorts of ways we can express compassion by attending to the pressing physical needs people have, but it is just as important for us to be educating them by clearly and faithfully speaking the Gospel.

Recognizing Jesus

In verse 53, Mark states that Jesus and the disciples landed at Gennesaret on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee (also known

as the Lake of Gennesaret). It could well be that Jesus had previously passed through this area while travelling between Nazareth (twenty miles or so to the southwest) and Capernaum (a few miles further along the shoreline to the north). Still, this is the first mention of Gennesaret in Mark. What happens after they step ashore? “People immediately recognized [Jesus]” (Mark 6:54).

How did they recognize him? Had he walked a few yards on the water while getting to shore? Had they seen pictures of him posted in the marketplace? Or is the scene more like that in Mark 1:16-20 when Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James, and John? Without any apparent previous knowledge of Jesus, they left everything immediately and followed him. What had they recognized in Jesus?

It is remarkable that none of the gospels provide a physical description of Jesus. We will never be able to pin him down by virtue of his appearance. Rather, we will always have to recognize Jesus for who he is and what he does.

It is more than the miracles and healings Jesus performed or the things he taught. It may actually take the gift of faith to recognize the one who died on the cross as the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

So, there are my three points. But if you do still want a poem, Marty Haugen’s wonderful song, “Healer of Our Every Ill” works well with this text. In the fourth verse, we sing, “You who know each thought and feeling, teach us all your way of healing; Spirit of compassion, fill each heart.”¹

(Source: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-16-2/commentary-on-mark-630-34-53-56-2>)

Mark 7:1-23: Tradition!

By: InterVarsity

What are your favorite family traditions?

(Possibly a vacation spot, or something you do every year for the Holidays) Do any of your family's traditions annoy you? In today's passage, Jesus once again steps on some favorite traditions. *[Read verses 1-13.]* The Pharisees have traveled from Jerusalem for the sole

purpose of finding fault with Jesus. For the third time in Mark, they attack Jesus indirectly by targeting His disciples.

What is ceremonial washing & why was it important to the Pharisees?

(This elaborate ritual washing was more symbolic than hygienic. These rules were not even derived from Scripture, so Jesus rebukes them for giving too much weight to the "tradition of the elders".) Why does Jesus call them hypocrites? (They honored God outwardly, but not inwardly. They were zealous to honor God through their own traditions, but ignored God's explicit guidelines for honoring Him – His commands!)

According to Jesus, what is essential to true worship? (True worship involves drawing near to God with your heart, not just mouthing words of praise.) Staying focused on God during worship isn't easy. When your mind starts to wander, how do you focus your heart on God? (Try to block out surrounding people and unrelated thoughts. Close your eyes. Meditate on the words. Expound on the words in prayer to God.)

How did the Pharisees give precedence to tradition over Scripture? (On a technicality, they allowed sons to neglect helping their parents with possessions or savings which were designated in a vow. So, they let a human ritual take precedence over a God-given command.)

What traditions do we often place above God's Word?

What do Christ's words in this passage establish about the authority of Scripture compared to other writings? (Every other writing is subordinate to God's Word, our one rule of faith and practice.) *[Read verses 14-23.]*

What is Christ's main point here?

(Ceremonially unclean hands or foods do not affect your heart. It's not what you put in your body, but what comes out of your heart that matters to God. And Jesus lists the many evils that "come from inside and make a man unclean.") As were the Pharisees, are you focused more on your body than on your heart? Which do you care for more diligently? As we pray, let's commit our hearts completely to God and seek His help in living by His Word alone.

(Source: <https://interVarsity.org/bible-studies/mark-7a>)