

The Gospel According to Mark Do You Not Yet Understand?

Mark 8:1-21

Sunday, November 1, 2020

Introduction

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

After all that the disciples had seen and heard during their time with Jesus it can be easy to throw stones. We can shake our heads at their hardheartedness and unbelief in the power and care of Jesus. Yet for all we've learned of God from the Scriptures and for all we have seen Him do in history and in our lives, many of us still struggle to trust Him. We too, often fail to see Jesus for who He really is and to trust Him fully.

In Mark 8:1-21 we see the disciples' pattern of unbelief continue. As Jesus confronts them, their slowness to understand persists and draws a stern rebuke from Jesus. Jesus warns them of the danger of their unbelief, but we should also consider the mercy and longsuffering that is shown as Jesus allows them to continue with Him. We are so slow to trust Him, and yet He is kind and merciful to us in our weakness – continuing to call us to faith, and ready to accept all who turn to Him.

Another Miraculous Feeding (8:1-10)

- **Two similar but separate events** - In Mark 6 we read of another miraculous, mass feeding. While the two miracles share many similarities it's important that we recognize that they are two separate events in which Jesus is fulfilling specific purposes.
- **A miracle for the Gentiles** – While the first miraculous feeding took place in a primarily Jewish region, this mass feeding took place in a Gentile region. Once again we see Jesus demonstrating that He has come, not only for the Jews, but to save people of all tribes and nations.
- **A miracle for the disciples** – It seems clear from the context that a primary reason Mark recorded this second miracle was to show the disciples' dullness of faith and their slowness to believe. Like the people of God throughout the Old Testament, they struggled to remember the power and care of God (Exodus 14:10-12; Psalm 106:7-14).
- **A return to Galilee** – Immediately following this great miracle Jesus and His disciples return by boat to the western shore of Galilee.

The Unbelief of the Pharisees (8:11-13)

- **A demand for a sign** – Immediately upon His return to the Jewish region Jesus is confronted by the antagonistic demands of the Pharisees. This time they ask for a special sign from God to authenticate Jesus (Lk 16:31).
- **A rebuke for their unbelief** – Jesus knew the evil intent of the Pharisees and refused to submit to their demands. At the same time Mark reveals the heart of Jesus as He inwardly groans over the unbelief of the Jews.
- **Jesus leaves the Jewish region** – Once again we see a departure of Jesus from the Jewish region. From the context of Mark it seems right to see this as a symbol of the changing nature of Jesus's relationship with Israel.

The Forgetful Faith of the Disciples (8:14-21)

- **A lack of bread** – As Jesus and the disciples head back across the Sea, we read of yet another shortage of bread. Again there is a need for food in remote place and the disciples are quick to worry.
- **A warning against unbelief** – As they sail away from Galilee Jesus takes an opportunity to caution the disciples about the hypocrisy and unbelief of the Pharisees. Using a common metaphor (leaven) He warns them of the danger of unbelief, no doubt in response to their weakness in this area.
- **A revealing response** – While Jesus uses a somewhat common metaphor to warn the disciples, they miss His point altogether. Yet again their eyes are fully on the physical and they don't comprehend the spiritual nature of Jesus' warning and of their need to see Him more fully and rightly.
- **A rebuke of the disciples for their lack of faith** – Using a series of rhetorical questions Jesus rebukes the disciples. After all they have seen and heard they remain as those who have eyes but do not see and who have ears but do not hear.

Things to Consider – While there is much to be learned from this passage, we conclude with two warnings and one encouragement.

- **Warning One** - You can come near to Jesus and be very familiar with Him and yet never truly believe in Him or trust Him as the One you need. As those who are close to the things of God and people of God we must search our hearts to ensure that we have truly trusted in Him.
- **Warning Two** - Those of us who have trusted in Jesus for salvation can still be guilty of failing to trust Him in our day-to-day lives. We may know that Jesus saves and forgives and yet we struggle with anxiety and fear as we doubt God's care and sovereignty in our lives.
- **An Encouragement** - God is longsuffering and patient with us in our doubts and failures. If you have been slow to trust Him, take heart. He is merciful and eager to forgive all who call on Him (Exodus 34:6-7).