

Sometimes We Just Don't Get It

Mark 8:1-26

Introduction: 1) Repetition is a wonderful and effective teacher. Why? Because sometimes on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and even 4th attempt of instruction we just don't get it. For some slow learners like myself, it may be on the 10th, 11th or 12th try that a valuable lesson finally sinks in. If you happen to be like me take heart. We are in good company! Our Lord's apostles were just like us.

2) Mark 8:1-30 parallels in a most remarkable fashion Mark 6:30-7:37. We have very similar events that are recorded in the very same order and arrangements.

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| 1) | Feeding of a great multitude. | 6:30-44 → 8:1-9 |
| 2) | A boat trip | 6:45-56 → 8:10 |
| 3) | Confrontation with the Pharisees | 7:1-23 → 8:11-13 |
| 4) | A conversation about bread | 7:24-30 → 8:14-21 |
| 5) | A miraculous healing | 7:31-36 → 8:22-26 |
| 6) | A significant confession | 7:37 → 8:27 |

3) I believe these events quite likely happened sequentially in terms of their history. I also believe Mark recorded them in this order for the purpose of theology, especially as it relates to the issue of discipleship. Remembering and recalling what we have seen our Lord do in the past should help us trust Him in what He is now doing in the present. Unfortunately we are sometimes forgetful and even hard hearted (8:17). Sometimes in spite of seeing the Lord work in our past, we are not sure He can handle our present. Sometimes we just don't get it.

Transition: Four events in Mark 8:1-26 will prepare us for the great confession of Peter in 8:29. They, in a sense, bring us to the end of the first part of this, the shortest, of the gospels.

I. Jesus always has a plan but we may only see a problem. 8:1-10

- “In those days” is an indefinite time marker, but it also informs us that the miracle of the feeding of the 4,000 probably took place 1) in the region of Decapolis (7:31) and therefore 2) is an extension of His mission to the Gentiles. Jews may also have been present on this occasion, but it is almost certain the majority who had followed Him for 3 days were Gentiles.
- Some skeptics have denied there were 2 feedings, arguing that the author of Mark somehow got the tradition confused. However, there is no confusion nor is there a retelling of a story with a few changes in detail to make a theological point. Note a simple comparison of the difference:

Feeding the 5,000	Feeding the 4,000
5,000 men (+20,000 people)	4,000 people total
5 loaves and 2 fish	7 loaves and a few small fish
1 day in the wilderness	3 days in the wilderness
Springtime/North of Galilee	No mention of time/S.E. of Galilee
12 baskets full of leftovers	7 baskets full of leftovers
One prayer	Two prayers
Mostly Jews	Mostly Gentiles

Sure there are also similarities, but significant differences are evident. Further, and most decisively, Jesus clearly states there were 2 feedings in 8:19-20.

- Jesus has a plan. He wants us to see His love and concern for Gentiles as well as Jews. Yes, He is the long expected Jewish Messiah. He is also the Savior of the world (John 3:16). Note carefully His ministry to these lost, pagan, Gentiles.

1) Jesus cares.

8:1-3

Vs. 1 – they had nothing to eat.

Vs. 1-2 – He said to the disciples, “I have compassion” on them. In 6:35 Mark said

Jesus had compassion because He acted compassionately. Now Jesus

Himself, the only time it happens in Mark, says He has compassion.

Vs. 2 – 3 days they have been with me and “have nothing to eat” (2X).

Vs. 3 – 1) if I send them away they will faint (NIV, “collapse”); 2) some have come from far away. What careful attention to their situation. He saw each and everyone in their need just like He sees you and me!

2) Jesus provides.

8:4-7

- Once again Jesus involves his disciples in the problem. This is another teachable moment. So He calls them to himself (v. 1), shares His heart (v. 2), and explains the situation (vs. 2-3).
- The 12 respond with a question, not one of unbelief as much as it is of their bad location and lack of resources (v. 4). Further, they in essence put the issue back on Jesus. The implication is we can do nothing. What then will you do? Jesus you are the only hope! Good!
- Jesus quickly moves into action. First, in v. 5, He finds out just what is available: 7 small loaves of bread (v. 7 adds and “a few small fish”). Second, in v. 6, He seats the crowd, blesses the bread, and gives it to the disciples to distribute.

Third, in verse 7, a few small fish, sardines, are discovered. Well, He blesses these and the newly created dead fish that are perfectly edible (!) and has the 12 pass those out as well. He has taught the people twice (vs. 6&7) to thank God for their daily provision of food and to trust Him as their sole and sufficient resource to give them what they need. Sinclair Ferguson notes the miracles also [“foreshadows the gathering together of those from every nation under heaven to the heavenly feeding of God’s people”] (*Let’s Study Mark*, 119).

3) Jesus satisfies.

8:8-10

- Once again Mark provides a simple and succinct summation. All ate and were satisfied (v. 8). They gathered the leftovers and filled 7 large baskets (v. 8), baskets the Greek text informs us are much larger than the ones used in the feeding of the 5,000 (cf. 6:43). The number fed is now given at 4, 000 (v. 9). Jesus could now send them on their way home and He did (v. 9). Immediately, He boards a boat with the disciples and moves on to district called Dalmanutha (v. 10). Matthew 15:39 specifies it as Magadan, near Tiberius on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee.
- Just another normal day in the life of Messiah Jesus who satisfies (v. 8) all who follow after Him. Once again we see that a little can become a lot in the hands of the Creator God. What a great sign of the inbreaking of God’s kingdom.
- However, some still just don’t get it. Time to move to act 2 of this mini drama.

II. Unbelievers will demand a sign but reject one when they see it.

8:11-13

- Mark abruptly introduces another conflict with the religious Gestapo the Pharisees. We have been here before (2:6-7, 16, 18, 24; 3:1-6, 22; 7:1-5). In spite of his

feeding both the 5,000 men and the 4,000 people, in spite of his numerous miracles and teachings that give evidence that He is the Messiah, the Christ (cf. 8:29), they refuse what they see and hear and raise the stakes in their confrontation with Jesus. Once again we see a tragedy: my mind is made up about this fellow Jesus. Let's not let the facts get in the way.

1) They test the Lord. 8:11

Mark says they came and began to argue with Him. The word means to dispute or debate. Perhaps this is a resumption of the conflict in 3:22-30 and 7:1-5. Second, they ask for “a sign from heaven,” something that would demonstrate what He is doing, something amazingly they do not deny, is truly of God. Third, Mark reveals their motives, it was “to test him.” Their goal is again to discredit Him before the people who are following Him. Their goal is to trap Him, not test Him with a view of authenticating His ministry. It is one thing to put the Lord to a test in faith. It is another thing to test Him in unbelief.

2) They grieve the Lord. 8:12

For the second time in two chapters our Lord “sighs” with deep, deep emotion. This time His anguish and sorrow and grief was directed at minds that refused the evidence, hearts that remained hard, eyes that refused to see, and ears that refused to hear (cf. 8:17-18). They wanted a sign? Read the Scriptures! Listen to my words. See what I do! Beyond that, “no sign will be given to this generation.” If you cannot see God at work in Me, no evidence will convince you otherwise. Your demand for something more is nothing less than an expression of unbelief. I will not play your evil and wicked game.

3) **They lose the Lord.** **8:13**

Again Mark gets right to the point. Nothing more can be said. Nothing else can or will be done. Abruptly, almost as a sign of righteous indignation and divine judgment, Jesus leaves them. He returned to His boat with His disciples, and went away. Our Lord was so near to these religious zealots, and zealots they were (cf. Rom 10:2), but He had never been further away where it really mattered; in their hearts. Once more they have lost Him. Not long from now, they will crucify Him. Unbelief is an evil and terrible thing when it says no to the gospel and God's Son.

III. **Disciples will see great works but fail to full understand.** **8:14-21**

- The Pharisees were not the only ones who did not understand, had hardened hearts and did not spiritually see or hear. However, unlike the unbelieving Pharisees who were moving in the wrong direction, the disciples were making progress, slow that it was.
- Clearly they still had a ways to go as verses 14-21 and also 32-34 so plainly testify.

1) **We still misunderstand our Lord's words.** **8:14-16**

- Possibly due to a quick departure, they got in the boat with only "one loaf of bread" (v. 14).
- Amazing that with 7 large baskets full, this is all they snagged.
- Apparently they began to discuss their predicament, perhaps even blaming each other for their oversight. They failed to see the irony and even humor of the situation.
- I guess they also forgot who was in the boat and what He could do!

- Jesus uses this opportunity as another teachable moment using the visual aid at hand. He cautioned or warned them, “Watch out (pre imp.); beware (pre. imp) of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” (v. 15). What is His point? A small amount of leaven or yeast will permeate and affect the whole lump when mixed. The leaven of unbelief has gripped the hearts of the Pharisees and Herod and has taken control of their entire lives. Watch out! Beware! Don’t let unbelief take you down and away from the divine truth you see and hear in me.
- Verse 16: they don’t get it and begin again to talk about the fact they have only one loaf of bread (“no bread”). Jesus is speaking of spiritual matters but their minds are stuck on the earthly and mundane. They still misunderstand His words.

2) **We still may misunderstand our Lord’s work.**

8:17-21

- “Aware” of their discussion (v. 17), Jesus steps in with a series of questions, 9 to be exact.
 - 1) Why are you discussing ... no bread? (v. 17)
 - 2) “Do you not yet perceive or understand?” Sadly no. (v. 17)
 - 3) “Are your hearts hardened?” Sadly yes. (v. 17)
 - 4) “Having eyes do you not see?” Sadly no. (v. 18)
 - 5) “Having ears do you not hear?” Sadly no. (v. 18)
 - 6) “Do you not remember?” Apparently not. (v. 18)
 - 7) When I fed the 5,000 how many baskets full did you collect? Uh, 12. (v. 19)
 - 8) When I fed the 4,000 how many baskets full did you collect? Uh, 7 (v. 20)
 - 9) Do you not yet understand? Again apparently not! (v. 21)

These questions are not intended to shame but to instruct. They are delivered with precision and patience. For sure they are slow learners but then so are we. How hesitant we are to embrace the truth of Luke 1:37 which says, “For nothing will be impossible with God.”, of Phil 4:12-13 which says, “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”, of Phil 4:19 which says, “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Like the 12 disciples, we often see our Lord’s great works in our lives but fail to fully understand and trust Him.

IV. The blind may see but it may come gradually. 8:22-26

- These verses constitute a visual parable that, though historically true, pictures the spiritual pilgrimage and progress of the disciples. It is not an accident that Mark sandwiches it between 8:14-21 and 8:27-38. It is a perfect fit.
- This is another miracle we find only in Mark. The unusual means of the 2-step healing Jesus uses is intentional. It is meant to portray the gradual, step by step, understanding of the disciples.
- No one questions that Jesus could have healed this man instantly. That He doesn’t is unique and pedagogical. The disciples are slowly coming to see (v. 18) and understand (vs. 17, 21) that Jesus is the Messiah. However, even after Peter’s great confession in 8:29 they still have only partial sight and understanding. He is not the kind of Messiah they expected. Only after the cross and resurrection do they finally get it. They are just like this blind man who received his sight gradually.

1) We can bring the hurting to Jesus. 8:22

- They arrive at Bethsaida on the N.E. shore of the Sea of Galilee (cf. 6:45).
- They are immediately met by a delegation who brings “a blind man and begged him to touch him” (cf. 7:32). No doubt they have heard of the compassion (6:34; 8:2) of this man Jesus and what He is capable and willing to do. They believed “He does all things well” (7:37) and are hopeful He will do something good for their friend.
- We will never be disappointed when we bring our friends to Jesus and neither were they!

2) We can trust the hurting with Jesus. 8:23-26

Verse 23: Jesus is again tender in His treatment of this blind man as He had been with the deaf man in 7:31-37. Note the beautiful progression of the text: 1) He took the blind by the hand; 2) He led him out of the village to an area of privacy. 3) He does something unusual by spitting on his eyes and asking, “Do you see anything?” It is almost as if the Son of God did not expect complete healing at this point. I am sure He didn’t. He was not surprised.

Verse 24: The man responds, “I see men, but they look like trees walking.” I see some, a little, more than ever before. But, I still don’t see clearly.

Verse 25: 1) “Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again”; 2) “he opened his eyes”; 3) “his sight was restored”, 4) “he saw everything clearly.”

- I love what Sinclair Ferguson says about all this: “What is the significance of this? Was it that this man was a particularly ‘difficult case’ for Jesus? Hardly! Was this miracle then – like others – a sign? Yes! But to whom?”

To the man? No! – to the disciples. And this is confirmed by the fact that Jesus had already asked them about their vision of him (v. 18). He was now leading them by the hand to the point at which their sight would become much clearer, and Peter would confess ‘You are the Christ’ (v. 29). Their spiritual understanding did not come instantaneously, but gradually. They, too, needed the second touch from the hands of their Master.” (*Let’s Study Mark*, 125).

Verse 26 is one we have also seen before; Jesus sent him home with a command not to enter the village of Bethsaida. No need for a show. No desire to make him a spectacle. This miracle was for his physical eyes and it was for the disciples’ spiritual eyes. That it accomplished those two purposes was enough.

Conclusion: 1) Amazing grace how sweet the sound,

That saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost but now I’m found,

Was blind but now I see.

2) That was true for this blind man. It was true for the 12. It was certainly true for me. Now, what about you?