

01.10.10 / Mark 8:1-21

Passage Insight

What would compel someone to sit for three days, listening to someone teach, without food provisions required for either your time there or your trip home? That had better be some good teaching, some life-giving teaching. There is no shortage of examples in our culture where people with stunning relational capacity who are incredible orators are able to captivate, motivate, and direct the masses. If this is what's going on here, then Jesus is no different than the men and women of our day that fit this description. If this is not what's going on here, then this is revolutionary, and Jesus truly does change everything. So again, what would compel someone to seek Him with such intensity, to the point of physical discomfort for oneself and one's family? There must be something in Him that must come before meeting our physical needs. There must be something found only in Him that is of a higher priority than earthly food. It is this. For those of us who would seek our physical needs over our Lord's pure and perfect spiritual provision, we would do well to remember what we read in Matthew 6:33, ". . . But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." No doubt those on that hill for those three days came to know this to be true and hung on every word that Jesus spoke about His kingdom and God's perfect righteousness. In this, Jesus shows us that the miraculous is never the focus. Instead, the one who does the miraculous is the focus. When we seek Jesus, the source of the miraculous, by seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, the provision that we need will indeed be provided.

Immediately following the feeding of the four thousand here, Jesus is approached by the Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders of the day. By sharing with us stories of the Pharisees and how they approached Jesus throughout the New Testament, God has given us a tremendous opportunity to recognize in ourselves many of the sinful traits within ourselves. The truest desires of our souls are for depth, meat, and spiritual fulfillment that leaves nothing untouched. Because our sin keeps us from having the perspective to make godly decisions on our own, our purely human desires can't be trusted, because these desires seek to satisfy solely for the short term. These desires simply cannot be the foundation on which we build our framework for faith. When the Pharisees ask for a sign, they are doing just this – basing their potential faith on seeing they want, what they desire, on their perspective. For Jesus to give in to the Pharisees' demands for a sign would be like giving cookies to a child at dinner when he asks for them, even though as a parent you know the child needs to eat vegetables – to do this would not only fail to fulfill the purpose at hand, it would also be harmful to the child to give him cookies indefinitely. And so Jesus, in His infinite wisdom, withholds the requested sign out of love, realizing that to give them what they wanted would be worse than simply placating them, it would be encouraging their improper and prideful framework for looking at God. Jesus instead has patience and simply denies the request.

Following Christ is not about believing in what we see. It has more to do with ultimately seeing what we believe even though we can't see it. Jesus makes claims, extraordinary claims, about Himself. When we believe Jesus' claims, we don't start with sight; we instead start with faith, which then becomes sight in time. Here are some places we see this in Scripture:

Hebrews 11:1-3

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

1 Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

John 20:26-28

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Immediately following the confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus cautions against the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. Throughout Scripture, leaven signifies evil or distraction, and Jesus loves His disciples enough to warn them that the sin of the Pharisees that they have just witnessed is toxic will take over and affect everyone who comes into contact with it. Completely missing Jesus' point and thinking He is now speaking to them of earthly bread, the disciples, then, in their confusion and forgetfulness, find themselves on a rabbit trail far away from Jesus' point, leaving Jesus with the task of once again wrangling His closest followers back to the only thing that matters. . . Him.

This passage tells a similar story of feeding the masses with limited resources. While at first glance it may appear to be a slightly altered retelling of the same, there are notable differences, among them the location of the event. If the miracle in this passage is not the first of its kind, and the disciples present here were also present at the other, it begs the question, "How on earth could these disciples be so hardheaded as to ask how the people could be fed when they just witnessed it only weeks prior?" If you've not yet heard Pastor Tyler's sermon on this passage from 1/17/10, I would encourage you to listen to this sermon, where he specifically addresses this notion of spiritual amnesia / spiritual blindness, as it does an excellent job of addressing this question, calling us on our forgetfulness of the Lord's provision and challenging us to focus not on the miraculous, not on the provision, but on the source of all things, Jesus Christ Himself.

Application Questions (feel free to use the ones that best meet the needs of your group – you might even consider breaking up into groups of 2 or 3 and letting people explore some of these questions together and report back to the larger group)

God, the Perfect Parent

- 1) Where is God telling you no because you're asking Him for something to fulfill your short-term human desires (cookies at dinner)?
- 2) What should you ask for instead?

- 3) What needs to happen in your heart before you can honestly ask Him for this?
- 4) What's one thing you can do this week to move toward that?

Seeing and Believing

- 1) Where do you ask Jesus to prove Himself to you?
- 2) An honest look at this will reveal what you think about Jesus. What does it reveal for you?
- 3) Which of Jesus' claims about Himself and His kingdom do you fail to believe?
- 4) If His claims are true, what should your response look like?
- 5) How does your heart need to change for this response to be genuine?

Spiritual Amnesia

- 1) What did Jesus do last week in your life that you now take credit for?
- 2) What's at the heart of your desire to take credit for this thing?
- 3) What do you have to give up in order to give credit to Jesus?
- 4) What do you gain when you give Him the credit?

Sources

- The Bible Knowledge Commentary
- The Bible Reader's Companion
- Tyndale Bible Commentary