

THIRD SECTION

Wilderness Feeding, Testing and incomprehension (8.1-21)

Jesus Put to the Test by the Pharisees (8.10-13)

Overview

- The Feed of the Four Thousand (8.1-9)
- Pharisees Demand a Sign from Heaven (8.10-13)
- Discussion with the Disciples about leaven and bread (8.14-21)
- The section is bound together by:
 - A couple of sea crossing (8.10, 13)
 - The Theme of bread (8.1-9, 14-21).

Exodus & Mark

- In the background of this section is the imagery and theology of the exodus.
- The miracle of the feeding recalls the manna miracle of Exodus 16.
- This imagery is strengthened by:
 - The Pharisees' call for a sign (8.10-13)
 - Jesus subsequent warning about leaven. (8.14-21)

Scriptural Text

10 And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha. 11 The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him. 12 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." 13 And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side. Mark 8.10-13 (NRSV)

Unusual Features

- The passage and episode are short.
 - Jesus crosses the sea.
 - Exchanges three sentences with the Pharisees.
 - Then immediately crosses back.
- The Pharisees demand for a sign is also unusual.
 - In Old Testament, Jewish traditions, and the New Testament signs are most often given in order to confirm explicit to implicit claims that have already been made.

- Here the Pharisees demand a sign even though Jesus has made no explicit claim in this setting.
- Anti-climatic ending
 - Jesus response to their demand? Simply to say no sign will be given.

Chiastic Structure

8.10 - Jesus enters boat

8.11-Pharisees come out to test Jesus.

8.12a-Jesus sighs and wonders why this generation demands a sign.

8.12b-Jesus rejects the demand for a sign.

8.13-Jesu enters boat and goes to the other side.

Why Focus on the request?

- The focus seems to be on “the mystery of the dominion of God,”
 - This is the perplexing problem of why God’s power and purpose, instead of overwhelming all opposition, meets with skepticism and rejection.

Outsiders

- Passage begins with the Pharisees coming out to dispute with Jesus.
- The verb used may be in place to link the Pharisees with the outsiders of 4.11.
- This symbolic nuance of “came out” would fit with the blindness the Pharisees display in this passage.
- This too recalls that of the outsiders in 4.21.
- This blindness is reflected in their need for a sign when Jesus has just performed one.

Requesting Signs

- In the Old Testament, it is not always a sign of disobedience to request a sign.
 - Gideon laid a fleece before the Lord to determine whether God had chosen him as an instrument of military deliverance. (Judge 6.36-40)
 - Hezekiah asked for and received a sign that he would be healed of a grave illness. (2 Kings 20.8-11)
 - God insisted that Ahaz ask for a sign from heaven to confirm that God would deliver Judah. (Isaiah 7.10-12)
- Other passages express some skepticism about requesting signs, and there is a more negative view taken of those who request them.
 - In Deut. 13.1-5, a sign working prophet who preaches apostasy is to be put to death.

- The New Testament often describes false prophets as working signs and wonders (Mark 13.22; Rev. 13.13)
- Later in Mark, Jesus Himself will respond positively to the disciple's request to tell them the sign that the end time events (eschatological) are about to occur (Mark 13.4-31)
- But this differs for the Pharisees' request:
 - The Pharisees seek authentication that Jesus is telling the truth.
 - The disciples request assume the truthfulness of Jesus and seek insight on his prophecy regarding the end.

Testing Jesus

- The word testing carries with it the concept of examination, temptation, and provocation.
- In the background hover the image of the Israelites testing of God at Massa and Meribah.
- The themes and even the vocabulary of this Old Testament event (Dt 6.16; 9.22; 33.8; Psalms 95.7-11) invite us to drawn comparisons between these events in Israel's history and the behavior of the pharisees.

Connections to Exodus

- Some suggest that the people's request for a sign was disingenuous and really an attempt to rid them of Moses authority.
- The Pharisees demand may be similar - an attempt to remove any concept of divine authority in Jesus.
- The first 13 verse of Mark 8 thus echos the events of Ex 16.1-17.7
 - First a miraculous feeding in the wilderness.
 - Then a culpable testing by the demand for a sign.
- A small difference in the two text may reflects Mark's high estimation of Jesus.
 - In the Exodus passage, it is God whop is tested, not Moses.
 - Although the people's complaining is directed at Moses, the wording of the text makes the point that quarreling with Moses is the equivalent of quarreling with God.
 - In Mark, Jesus is tested, thus assuming the role of God in found in the Exodus passage.

Demonic Influence

- Testing may also have a demonic nuance in its meaning.
- In Matt 4.3 and 1 Thessalonians 3.5, Satan is the tester or tempter.
- Some Jewish traditions link Satan with the testing of God in the wilderness.

- Jesus' sign in the next verse seems to suggest a Satanic interpretation of "testing"
- In Matt 4.5-7 and Luke 4.9-12, two of Satan's test of Jesus are challenges that Jesus prove His divine sonship by performing miracles and signs.
 - One of the signs is the turning of stones to bread, which brings to mind the previous miracle.
 - Jesus responds to Satan's challenge by quoting Dt. 6.16 which again refers to the event at Massah and Meribah.

Jesus Sighs and Wonders

- the greek word translated sigh is the same verb used in the exorcism-like healing in 7.34.
- In Mark 13.20-23, Jesus prophesies that false christs and false prophets will arise and give signs that will deceive even the elect.
- God will not give authenticating signs on demand through Jesus, but false prophets will give deceiving signs, and will be followed by the masses (John 5.43).

Lesson 3: Jesus Rebukes His Disciples for Misunderstanding (8.14-21)

Scriptural text

Mark 8.14 Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. 15 And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod." 16 They said to one another, "It is because we have no bread." 17 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? 18 Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? 19 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." 20 "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" And they said to him, "Seven." 21 Then he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

The disciples have re-entered the boat but have forgotten to take bread with them, excluding the one loaf mentioned. This may have symbolic eucharistic meaning. 1 Corinthians 10.17 suggests that one loaf could be used at the Lord's Supper. Also in Mark's retelling of Jesus' miraculous feeding, which will be linked to the disciples' concern for bread in 8.19-20, we see a foreshadowing of the Eucharist.

Therefore the bread Jesus has provided in his feeding, and of which one loaf is left with the disciples in the boat, points forward to the bread Jesus provided to the Markan community in the Eucharist, which is the bread of life for all who come to him.

For Mark's readers, then, our passage would have been reminiscent of 4.35-41: the anxiety of the disciples is needless; they have Jesus in the boat with them, which may be a symbol of the church; and that is all they need.

Leaven

Jesu call to avoid the leaven invokes the Passover.exodus imagery, because Passover was the feast of the unleavened. It was the type the Jew removed all leaven from their house and was a remembrance of God's deliverance.

Leaven is not synonymous with yeast, which in ancient times was rare. Dough was leavened by mixing into it a small amount of the previous weeks dough which had been keep back for that purpose. Here the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod is contrasted with the bread that Jesus miraculously provided.

Leaven is associated in Rabbinic text with evil inclination perhaps because of its ability to permeate the whole lump. (Matt 13.33; Luke 13.21; Rom 11.16; 1 Cor. 5.6; Gal. 5.9)

In some contexts the association takes on eschatological coloring: the leaven is symbolic of the evil old age, and its purging symbolic for the longed for eschatological redemption. In the New testament, this may be the though behind 1 Cor. 5.6-8

1Cor. 5.6 Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? 7 Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

What is Leaven of the Pharisees and the Leaven of Herod

Matthew and Luke seem to not understand Marks phrase. In Matthew 16.6, 11-12, he changes it to the "leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees" and interprets it as the teaching to the two sects. In Luke 12.1, it limits it to the leaven of the Pharisees" and interprets it as hypocrisy.

The leaven is often a reference to evil inclinations, the destructive and anarchic impulse within the hearts of human beings which causes them to sin. The applicability of this image to our passage is confirmed by the continuation, in which the leaven is associated with the hardened heart (8.17) and because of its biblical rootage in Gen 6.5; 8.21. Evil inclination was intimately associated with defects of the heart.

Jesus is warning his disciples against being infected by the same evil impulse that has hardened the hearts of his enemies, the Pharisees and the Herodians.

Do you know perceive or understand?

His questions call to mind the passages from 4.12 and the judgement of further loss for those that harden their hearts. The form and content of the question are reminiscent of

those of the double question found in Isaiah 40.21, "Do you not know? Have you not heard?" These questions are repeated in Isaiah 40.28.

How does these passage impact your understanding of the disciples? How is that interpretation strengthened or challenged when you consider Deut. 29.2-4?

Deut. 29.2 Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, 3 the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. 4 But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear.

Although our passage probably owes more to Isaiah 6.9-10; Jeremiah 5.21; and Ezek 12.2, which speak of blindness and deafness in the house of Israel. The context of the Isaiah passage is very close to the Markan text for they both deal with God's power and His sovereignty, including the ability to give strength to the weary as a sign of eschatological redemption. These are the theme of the two Markan feeding miracles, which are recalled in the two questions that follow in Mark 8.19-20

How does the placement of this text before the miracle of healing blindness impact our interpretation?

FOURTH SECTION: On the Way: Blindness and Sight

Jesus Heals a blind man in Two stages (8.22-25)

The first half of Mark has been dominated by miracles. But in this section there are only three healing miracles, and in the remainder of the gospel there are none - until the resurrection (which is the biggest of them all.) But the three miracles that are present are significant. This section contains the only stories of the healing of blind people (8.22-26; 10.46-52) and these narratives frame the entire section, which is otherwise dominated by Jesus teaching.

This is not by coincidence. Throughout the section, Mark describes the disciples as "blind" - lacking understanding and insight to Jesus teaching and in need of illumination.

- They ask poor questions (9.10-11; 10.10)
- Male stupid remarks (9.5-6)
- Grasp for personal power (9.33-34; 10.35-40)
- Mistake the merciful nature of Jesus (9.38)

Yet, through Peter they demonstrate a knowledge that transcends human intellect. (although he immediately falls in to a satanic delusion about it.)

Beside the healing of the two blind men, we have one additional healing - that of the epileptic boy. This dramatic healing is ultimately linked to the issue of faith and unbelief.

Lesson 4: Jesus Heals a blind man in Two stages (8.22-25)

The first half of Mark has been dominated by miracles. But in this section there are only three healing miracles, and in the remainder of the gospel there are none - until the resurrection (which is the biggest of them all.) But the three miracles that are present are significant. This section contains the only stories of the healing of blind people (8.22-26; 10.46-52) and these narratives frame the entire section, which is otherwise dominated by Jesus teaching.

This is not by coincidence. Throughout the section, Mark describes the disciples as “blind” - lacking understanding and insight to Jesus teaching and in need of illumination.

- They ask poor questions (9.10-11; 10.10)
- Male stupid remarks (9.5-6)
- Grasp for personal power (9.33-34; 10.35-40)
- Mistake the merciful nature of Jesus (9.38)

Yet, through Peter they demonstrate a knowledge that transcends human intellect. (although he immediately falls in to a satanic delusion about it.)

Beside the healing of the two blind men, we have one additional healing - that of the epileptic boy. This dramatic healing is ultimately linked to the issue of faith and unbelief.

22 They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. 23 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?” 24 And the man looked up and said, “I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.” 25 Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 Then he sent him away to his home, saying, “Do not even go into the village.” Mark 8.22-26

The scene in which Jesus rebukes his disciples for their lack of spiritual insight (8.18) is immediately followed by this narrative of the healing of a blind man, whose healing is not immediate but is realized through stages. This passage is design to provide insight onthe disciples spiritual condition. Its connection to the disciples condition is heighten by the following narrative in which Peter displays genuine but faulty perception: he recognizes Jesus’ messianic identity (8.29) but fails to attain a clear insight into what that identity means (8.32-33)

Side Note on Traveling

It should be noted that from now on, Jesus will be traveling exclusively by foot, except for His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey (11.1-10). Walking is generally a slower and more difficult mode of transportation and seems to correspond to the increasing difficulty of Jesus’ mission, which is also indicated by the decline in the frequency of miracles in this section of the gospel.

When Will We See?

If the blind man's intermediate state of seeing-yet-not-seeing corresponds to the disciples position throughout the gospel, to what does the final state of clear vision correspond to? The conclusion of the passage points to the resurrection as the point of clear vision for the disciples. When Jesus sends the man home with instructions to tell no one, He points to resurrection and the way that secrecy will give way to public acknowledgement of Christ once it occurs. (9.9) This present age is one of of hiddenness and imperfect vision, but the age to come, inaugurated by the resurrection, will be one of openness and insight. Jesus forbids publicity about His healings and identity because those things can only be truly understood in the light of His resurrection - which is also the light that dispels human blindness.

Jesus Recognized as the Messiah (8.27-33)

27 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?" 28 And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." 30 And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Mark 8.27-33

The healing of the blind man is followed by a two part narrative. In the first section, Jesus solicits opinions about himself and hears Peter's declaration that he is the Messiah. Jesus tells (literally "rebukes") His disciples not to tell anyone. (8.27-30) When Jesus goes further to tell what kind of Messiah He will be, Peter responds by rebuking him, and Jesus in turns reprimands Peter as a "Satan", whose thoughts are operating on a human level rather than the divine one. (8.31-33)

Peters half-insightful, half-insensitive condition is similar to that of the half-seeing, half-blind sufferer in the previous narrative. The pervasive language of rebuking signals a struggle between divine revelation and demonic resistance.

As the previous passage is dominated by verbs of seeing, this one is dominated by verbs of speaking (ask, answer, rebuke, teach and three different verbs for "say"). This reflects the passage's character as a dramatic speaking dialogue of ideas which carefully links two significant concepts - Jesus messiahship (8.27-30) and his approaching passion, death, and resurrection (8.31-33).

More about Traveling

Note the passage begins with Jesus and his disciples movement from Bethsaida (8.22) to Caesarea Philippi. The association of this city with Caesar is probably significant in light of the rest of this passage, where the focus shifts to Peter's proclamation of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the Jewish leader whose advent was expected to terminate Roman rule.

Jesus asks for the opinions of the people regarding His identity, and gets responses which suggest that the people understand him as a prophet, and link Him to the prophetic tradition of the Israel, but they do not have the whole story. However, Mark has been prompting the reader with the right answer for some time now.

Mark 1.27 They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

Mark 4.41 And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Mark 6.2 On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands!

Peter responds with the right answer, and in doing so distinguishes himself from the other disciples for the first, but not the last time. (9.5-6; 10.28; 14.29-31, 37, 54, 66-72; 16.7). The distinctiveness of Peter has been anticipated by Mark as he was always listed first among the followers of Jesus (1.16, 29, 36; 3.16; 5.37), and he and his brother were the first people to be called by Jesus to the life of discipleship (1.16-18)

What Kind of Messiah will He be?

Jesus foretells the suffering that awaits him in the first of three predictions that He will make. (8.31; 9.31; 10.33-34) Of importance is the declaration here, in contrast the the two upcoming proclamations on His suffering, that His suffering is necessary. For Mark, it is of great importance that Jesus' suffering reflects the divine will. It implies that Jesus' death and resurrection have been prophesied in the scripture. OT texts such as the Suffering Servant from Isaiah, the Psalms of the Righteous Sufferer, and the prophecy of the resurrection "on the third day" in Hosea 6.2 probably lie in the background of this passage.

Natural Response

Peter's response to this Jesus' proclamation is natural. Intrinsic to the OT/Jewish idea of the Messiah was the notion of triumph, not suffering and death. Since the master's fate had direct consequences for his followers, the notion of a suffering Messiah conflicts with the disciples natural desire to share in the earthly Jesus' messianic glory. Instead they will be soon asked to participate in his crucifixion. (8.34-35; 10.35-45)

Jesus quickly rebukes Peter. For Jesus, it is the avoidance of suffering, not acceptance of it, that is the temptation from Satan which must be avoided. Notice, that both Jesus and Peter are in agreement that Jesus is the Messiah. The question central to this exchange is what type of Messiah will Jesus be and how will victory be accomplished over evil. Peter operates out of the traditional model of messiah found the life of David, in which the struggle is a fleshly one and the victory achieved through military might. In such a model, the premature death of Christ, the Messiah and thus captain of the armies of God. would be devastating. For Jesus, the messianic victory will cosmic, and not fleshly one. It will not be achieved by conventional battle but by death and resurrection. Any attempt to divert Him from this plan is the work of the enemy. It represents an attempt to substitute the plan of God for the narrowly understand plan of man. Such a move diminishes the power of God.

For Mark, Peter's objection to Jesus prophecy, natural through it might be, represents a fall from grace into the realm of demonic delusion. The first of the disciples seems to be teetering on the edge of doom. But, he does not fall into the abyss. Jesus does not command Peter, who has in this moment become Satan's mouthpiece, to go away from him (contrast Matt 7.23; 25.41) but rather to go behind Him.

Getting behind Jesus can be interpreted in one of three ways:

- An order for Peter to be off and get out of Jesus sight
- A command for Peter to get out of Jesus way, or to stop being an obstacle for Jesus
- A command to Peter to return to the path of discipleship rather than trying to lead Jesus.

Jesus is asking Peter to resume the path he has been on. Peter is a man in the middle and Satan is contending for Peters heart. Like the blind man with semi-sight, Peter sees but does not see. But Jesus is calling him to return to the path that will ultimately guarantee his sight will be fully restored.