



Reading notes for week Commencing 12th February 2012

Sermon next Sunday: Mark 8 "Who do you say I am?"

DAY 1: Read Mark 8:1-13

No you read correctly and yes, this is the second time Jesus fed a large group. Although there are similarities in the way Mark reports this, there are enough differences to indicate that this indeed happened a second time. The time the crowd had been with Jesus (*three days here, one in chapter 6*); the number of people present, the quantity of food available, the baskets of unused food collected. Interestingly, seeing how the second feeding occurred in a far more Gentile region, the type of basket used is different. (The word used translated 'basket' in the first had distinctly Jewish associations, where the word used in the second are large and associated with Gentiles.)

Some scholars doubt the historical credibility of the second feeding on the grounds of the disciples asking about where they were going to obtain sufficient food to feed the crowd. "*But this is to miss the very point Jesus is making. Due to their spiritual blindness, the Twelve 'had not understood about the loaves' (6:52). Because of their lack of insight, the feeding of the 5,000 remained ambiguous to them: had it really happened? Perhaps they had been mistaken about it?... Their question here shows that their unbelief is reaching new heights.*" Paul Barnett, *The Servant King*, p 149. Are YOU getting the picture of who Jesus is?

Vv11-13 show further escalation in the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees. Remember this Jesus claims to forgive sins (blasphemy), eats with sinners, breaks the Sabbath, he is the devil, he doesn't wash properly! Now they ask for a sign from him. If he was heralding the Kingdom of God, where were the dramatic signs expected to accompany the coming of such a kingdom? But of course, the casting out of demons, the restoration of the sick and even the dead, the opening of the deaf man's ears in the previous chapter, were all the signs needed - if only they had paid attention to the (Old Testament) Scriptures! So Jesus will do no other sign for them!

DAY 2: Read Mark 8:14-21

Note how the section finishes...? - with Jesus asking "do you still not understand?" If you're anything like me, you're thinking - "can't blame them! I don't get what Jesus is saying here either!"

So let me see if I can unpack it. Ever made bread? The yeast, though you use a relatively small amount, does an amazing work as it grows and spreads in the warm moist setting. Yeast is often used as a metaphor for the spread of evil. A small amount does great harm.

So as the disciples stress about not having bread for their dinner, Jesus picks up the bread theme to warn the disciples about the influence of both the Pharisees and Herod. The Pharisees - because they'd just asked for an unmistakable sign - and Herod - because they were near his home town and he wanted to be rid of Jesus.

But then Jesus asks why they are stressing about bread in any case, because the amount of food left over following the feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000 ought to have been sign enough that only having one loaf to share between him and the disciples was never going to be a problem. Did they still not understand who he is? Their unbelief is at a height – despite the signs they had witnessed! We too are being asked – ‘do you still not understand’?

DAY 3: Read Mark 822-26

The feeding of the 5,000 had occurred just a few kilometres south, so it is no surprise that some people recognised Jesus and brought the blind man to him. In Mark 7 we saw the healing of a deaf and mute man and now the healing of a blind man. The kingdom has come, and as we saw earlier, these miracles are a glimpse or promise or preview of the end time kingdom blessings. In the prophet Isaiah, in one of the many references to the end time Kingdom of God we read: “⁵ Then *will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.* ⁶ Then *will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.*” In both these miracles, Jesus’ spit is involved – though we are not sure why. Both seem to be tied to spiritual hearing and seeing. Both occurred in Gentile lands with a sign that Gentiles were more open to Jesus than were the Jews. In these two miracles of sight and hearing, Jesus demonstrates that Jesus is the Messiah and that the age of the Messiah has truly come! Up till now, Jesus’ disciples have not yet understood this, but that is all about to change in the next reading. As a final thought today, why do you think the healing of the blind man took place in two stages? Tuck that question away and we’ll revisit it in our next reading.

DAY 4: Read Mark 8:27-9:1

The opening verse of Mark’s gospel, if you recall, read: *The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, [or Christ] the Son of God.* From that point on, Mark sets out to show us why we should take such a claim seriously. Here in Mark 8 – approximately the middle of the story – is the first of two great moments of recognition – that Jesus is the *Messiah*. Right at the end – when Jesus dramatically draws his last breath, is the second powerful moment of recognition – that Jesus is the *Son of God*.

Jesus has moved 40 kms north of Bethsaida. He is in Gentile territory with few Jewish settlers. Beautiful snow-capped Mount Hermon towers about 3000 metres above the villages. *On the way* (a phrase used also at 9:33, 10:17, 32, 46, 52) Jesus asks the disciples the question we readers have been grappling with throughout the first half of the book. “Who do people say I am?” The same answers are given as were discussed when Herod felt under threat by Jesus – see ch 6:14-15. But what about you *Twelve*? – now that you have been with me along the way and seen what I’ve done and heard what I have to say and been out on mission for me; what do *you* make of me? The air must have been tense. Were they still blind? Or had the light began to dawn? And in the first dramatic climax of the book, Peter answers on behalf of the others, “You are the Messiah”. (Or “the Christ” which was the Greek form of the Hebrew “Messiah”, meaning, ‘the Anointed One’.) He is the King of God’s Kingdom. With his coming, the kingdom itself has come!

But the disciples had more to learn. For Jesus would not be the type of Messiah long awaited by Israel. Their hopes and expectations of the Messiah lay in the overturning of the Romans and the establishment of God’s kingdom right there in Israel. This idea of “Messiah” is immediately shattered as Jesus speaks plainly of his impending suffering and death. Peter won’t have a bar of it. Peter and Jesus rebuke one another! But in the last section here, we also learn the sobering reality, that Jesus’ disciples must also lay down *their* lives in concert with their King. Cling to your life as if it was your own and you’ll lose it. Give it over, lay it down for Jesus and you’ll gain it. It was one thing for the disciples to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah, it was another thing for them to realise all that would mean both for Jesus – and for themselves. Perhaps a two stage ‘seeing’ of who Jesus is?