

OpenTheo

Mark 8:1 - 8:26



Gospel of Mark - Steve Gregg

In Mark 8, Jesus engages in conflict with the Pharisees over Jewish law and shows compassion by healing a demon-possessed girl and feeding a crowd of 4,000. He warns his disciples against the teachings of the Pharisees and Herod and emphasizes stewardship and balancing trust in God with taking responsibility. The story of the blind man being healed in two stages encourages people to keep faith and illustrates how physical healings represent spiritual transformations.

Transcript

Turning to Mark 8, last time Jesus had a conflict with the Pharisees and it was over the disciples not properly washing their hands. And by properly we mean the way that the Jewish rabbis taught that it should be done. It was not something that the law of Moses required.

It was something that the Pharisees taught because the rabbis had taught it and the Pharisees believed that the Jews were obligated to keep the traditions of the ancestors of the rabbis. And so they had developed this elaborate system of washing and Jesus' disciples neglected to do it. And so they came under criticism from the Pharisees and Jesus, of course, defended his disciples and said that the Pharisees in bringing this criticism were showing their hypocrisy and that they were themselves guilty of breaking the word of God while enforcing their traditions.

And after all that, Jesus encountered a woman whose daughter was demon possessed. And she pestered him and initially he was not going to give her her request or maybe he intended to all along. We need to be aware that Jesus doesn't always show exactly what he's up to in advance.

And there's times, for example, when he almost walks by the boat and waits for the disciples to ask him in. You know, he's walking on the water. He says he would have walked past them, but they cried out and called him and got in.

Likewise, after his resurrection, he was on the road to Emmaus and the guys got to their house. Jesus acted like he was going to continue on until they invited him in. So

sometimes sometimes Jesus acts like he's going to do something else unless you, I guess, persist in asking him.

And this one persisted because the woman was saying, please help my daughter. He ignored her for the most part. The disciples said to Jesus, send her away.

And he said, I'm only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And he said, it's not right to give the children's bread to the dogs. And she accepted that she was a Gentile, a dog by the reckoning of the Jews.

And she said, yes, but even the dogs receive the scraps under the table, the children throw down there. And Jesus commended her for her faith and said, your daughter is better. So we find that Jesus not only was able to heal at a distance, as he did, for example, with the centurion servant and with the nobleman's son, the centurion servant in Matthew 8 and nobleman's son in the fourth chapter, I believe it is of John.

Jesus didn't have to be present to heal and even to cast out demons. He didn't have to be present because in this case, the girl was demon possessed and Jesus was not in her presence. He just said he said.

For this saying of yours, go your way, the demon has gone out of your daughter. And so she got home and found that this is true. So even demons can be cast out without a confrontation directly by Jesus in his presence, which is a good thing because his physical presence is with us in the same sense now as before, and therefore demons can be cast out nonetheless in his name.

Paul found that to be true after after Jesus had ascended. It says in Acts chapter 19 that Paul, when he was in Ephesus, worked special miracles, including ones where pieces of cloth, aprons and handkerchiefs had been in contact with Paul and they were taken to people who were sick and people who were demon possessed. And although Paul was not himself present, those who received these handkerchiefs and aprons from Paul were healed of their sicknesses and the demons came out of them.

So not only does Jesus not have to be physically present, even the Christian doesn't have to be physically present. Paul was able to cast out these demons from a distance. And so we see that there's no limitations on Jesus ability to do things for people, no limitations in terms of space.

He doesn't have to be physically present. And that's probably something that was good for him to teach the disciples, since they did not know at this point that he would be spending so much time absent from them. They didn't know he was soon going to die.

Actually, within a year of this time, he was going to die. And they don't hear about that plainly from him until later on in this chapter, chapter eight. And we have in chapter eight, verses one through ten, a miracle of feeding the multitudes.

It sounds very familiar because it wasn't very long earlier that we came across the feeding of the five thousand in chapter six. Chapter six, verses 30 through 44, talk about Jesus feeding five thousand on this occasion, he's feeding four thousand. And the story obviously is quite similar.

The details are different. And there are some things perhaps worthy of note that are not the same as the other story. In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat.

Jesus called his disciples to him and said to them, I have compassion on the multitude because they have now been with me for three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way, for some of them have come from afar. Then his disciples answered him, how can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness? And he asked them, how many loaves do you have? And they said seven.

And he commanded the multitudes to sit down on the ground and he took the seven loaves and gave thanks and broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before them. And they set them before the multitude and they had a few small fish and had him bless them. He said to set them also before them.

So they ate and were filled and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. Now, those who had eaten were about four thousand and he sent them away. And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and came to the region of Dominica.

Then something else happens. But we have this story, obviously very reminiscent of the feeding of the five thousand. But something's definitely different.

One is that there are four thousand, not five thousand. But the other thing to note, first of all, is that this was done in Gentile territory. The feeding of the five thousand was in Jewish territory.

In Galilee, he fed the five thousand. But now he is crossed over the lake and he's over in the region called Decapolis, which was Decapolis means ten cities. It was ten Greek cities that were in Jewish territory.

And the Bible says that he was now ministering in the Decapolis, which means that there were there were Gentile territory. Now, probably those that followed him were mostly Jews. After all, he had just said to the Gentile woman, it's not good to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs.

But she had said, well, the dogs can have what's left over when the kids have eaten all they're going to eat. And there may be a sense in which this miracle happening right after that is significant because he gives bread. As he had done to the children in the feeding of the five thousand to the Jews.

This may be a largely Gentile group, at least in Gentile territory. He couldn't be sure that there weren't any Gentiles present. These were Gentile cities.

And therefore, I'm sure Gentiles were just as eager as Jews to see miracles. And it may be that here we find him giving bread to the dogs as he had given to the children, so to speak, and that as the feeding of the five thousand illustrated Jesus to be the bread of life to Israel, because we know that when the feeding of the five thousand had taken place in John's gospel, it says in John chapter six that the next day Jesus gave a discourse about the bread of life. Actually, he gave it to the same people because they came looking for breakfast.

They'd had dinner with him the night before and they thought it's a good place to get a free breakfast. So they came looking him up. And that's when he said, well, you're you're you're just coming to me because your bellies were filled.

He said, you should not seek the food that perishes. You should seek the food that endures everlasting life, which the father will give you. And they said, well, Moses gave us manna from heaven.

What sign will you give us? And Jesus said, Moses didn't give you the bread from heaven. My father gave you the bread from heaven. I'm the bread from heaven that the father gives to feed you.

And as God had said Israel in the wilderness, Jesus had said these Israelites out on the hillside in the feeding of the five thousand. And so the children had been fed. But what you know what happened? They threw the bread out because in John chapter six, in that conversation he had with them the next day, it says they became offended by what he said.

He said, you have to eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood or you won't have any life in you. And they became very offended and they left him. And eventually, at the end of that conversation, there were only 12 disciples left.

And he said, will you go away also? And they said, well, to whom shall we go? Peter said, you alone have the words of eternal life. So we see him feeding the children, the children of Israel with bread, literally. Offering himself as the bread of life and they throw it on the floor to the dogs.

And so where does he go? He goes over to Decapolis where the dogs are. He goes over the Gentiles are. And now he gives them bread.

And it's interesting that one of the few things that happened between those is this conversation he had with the Syro-Phoenician woman who he said, it's not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs. But she said, Lord, but if the children won't eat it, the dogs will eat it. And so we have this story.

And I wonder, I suspect probably the majority of these people were probably Gentiles. And Jesus kind of breaking his normal policy of going first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Some people say that when these people left him after the feeding of the five thousand, that's what scholars sometimes call the Galilean crisis and that his ministry never rose again in Galilee as before.

There were still crowds that followed him on the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee on the other side of the Jordan. But that his ministry in Galilee had had crested. It had reached its climax at something like 15,000 people or more coming to him.

But they had all, for the most part, rejected him the next day. And so this would be a time for him to turn to the Gentiles if there ever was one. Now, Jesus didn't turn permanently to the Gentiles, but it may be that this was an act of saying, OK, the dogs, there is enough for the dogs.

If the children don't want it all, then there's enough to go around to the dogs, too, in the household. And so he goes over and does this with the with these Gentiles, probably Gentiles in a Gentile region anyway. Now, a few other things are different about this.

For one thing, Jesus said in verse two, I have compassion on the multitude. Now, this story, by the way, is found only in Matthew and Mark. Although the feeding of the five thousand on all four gospels, the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle of Jesus found in all four of the gospels.

Because usually Luke and Matthew and Mark have much similarity of material with each other. But John doesn't overlap very much in his coverage. But even John covers the feeding of the five thousand because it's significant.

And John alone gives us that discussion afterwards where Jesus talked about being the bread of life and they rejected him. But only Matthew and Mark give us this story, the feeding of four thousand. And in Matthew's gospel, it also has Jesus saying, I have compassion on the multitude.

The reason I mention that is that this is the only time we ever have Jesus saying that he has compassion, although the gospel writers often say it about him. In fact, in the feeding of the five thousand, we're told that he had compassion on the multitude because they were like sheep having no shepherd. That's what it says in Mark chapter six and the story of the feeding of the five thousand.

We are told that he had compassion, but he never says anywhere else in his whole ministry that we know of. I have compassion. I have compassion on these people.

And now in this case, it's not because they're like sheep without a shepherd. You see, the Jews were God's sheep and God intended for his sheep to have shepherds. He gave them shepherds.

He gave them priests and prophets and rulers that were supposed to be the shepherds of Israel. But as you pointed out in Ezekiel thirty four, the shepherds of Israel had looked out for themselves and not for the sheep. And in Ezekiel thirty four, God said, well, I will come and I'll be a shepherd of my people.

And of course, that was fulfilled when Jesus, the good shepherd, came. He saw that Israel were like sheep scattered without a shepherd. That was when he fed the five thousand here.

He doesn't mention their spiritual needs of the Gentiles so much as their physical needs. I have compassion on them because they don't have anything to eat. He says they've been with me three days.

Now, when Jesus fed the five thousand, the people gathered were preached to, were fed and dispersed all in one day. But here these people had been for three days, apparently away from home because he was out in kind of a... He said some of them have come from far away. It says that in verse three, for some of them have come from afar.

So they weren't close to their homes and there weren't many cities around there. He was probably not in the city of any of these ten cities. He's probably in the region between.

And so he didn't feel like they would even be able to get to places where they could buy food. Having fasted essentially for three days while they listened to him, he thought they might faint in the sun's heat if they were sent off hungry. So Jesus expresses his concern for their physical needs here.

And his disciples answered surprisingly in verse four. They answered and said, how can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness? Now, what's surprising is that they would say this after having seen him feed the five thousand. This is the same objection they raised at that time, but they should have been corrected by that event.

And Jesus later in this chapter complains that they haven't learned anything from either of these things, because we'll see here. Look down a little further. Verse 18 in the same chapter says, having eyes, do you not see having ears? Do you not hear? And do you not remember when I broke the five loaves in the fire for the five thousand? How many baskets full of fragments did you take up? They said twelve.

And when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up? They said seven. He said to them, how is it you still don't understand? And the reason that he was rebuking them on that later occasion in the chapter is because they had not brought enough food with them. And they thought Jesus might be angry because they hadn't brought enough food.

He says, don't you remember what we did with just a little bit of provision and fed five thousand, fed four thousand? So, I mean, he himself observes that they're dull. They're

not remembering this. But you know what? I really can't blame them.

The children of Israel in the wilderness soon forgot the miracles that were done for them. And so do we really. Whenever we are in a hard situation and we pray and the thing works out and we recognize it's the Lord, we give testimony to our friends, all the Lord really worked this out.

The Lord really answered these prayers and so forth. And we see our faith is suddenly very strong because we saw with our eyes the provision of God. How long does it take before the next time we're worried about it? The next time we forget that God does those kinds of things, it doesn't take me very long, frankly.

And I've seen the provision of God hundreds and hundreds of times, but still let me go a few weeks without any visible sign of, you know, provision and my needs mounting. And, you know, I get worried just like the rest. I can't really blame the disciples for this.

After all, even though they had seen him feed multitudes one time, they had spent probably two or three meals a day with him for years, and he'd only fed multitudes by breaking bread one time. Usually they had to go buy the food in town, and that's why they were embarrassed when he said, beware of eleven of the scribes and Pharisees, which we haven't gotten to yet. That's later in this chapter.

But they thought he said, oh, it's because we didn't bring bread. He's upset with us because we didn't bring bread. Well, obviously that was their responsibility.

Bring the food. And usually they brought enough. Jesus didn't usually multiply food by breaking it.

So, you know, they might be forgiven for looking at the situation and forgetting that Jesus did on one occasion do something in a situation like this and provided a miracle. He didn't always do that kind of thing. And so they asked the question, you know, how can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness? And he said, how many loaves do you have? They said seven.

And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. He took the seven loaves, he gave thanks, broke them, gave them to the disciples to set before them. And they set them before the multitudes.

This is essentially the same procedure as when he fed the five thousand. Had them all sit down in groups of fifties and hundreds and then had the disciples distribute the food as he broke it and multiplied it. It says they also had a few small fish.

And so he set them before the people, too. Now, verse eight says they all ate and were filled and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. Now, when he fed the five thousand, it says they gathered twelve baskets full of fragments left over.

But the word basket in that story is different than the word basket here. The word basket, the Greek word that's used in the feeding of five thousand is basically kind of a small basket that might hold maybe meals for two people. Just kind of an open, rather flat, round basket.

But the word that's used for basket here is it says large baskets. But when you say, well, how large this is the same word that was used in Acts chapter nine, verse twenty five, when Paul was led over the wall in a basket. From the city of Damascus to escape the persecutors that were waiting for him at the gates of the city.

These baskets were of a sort that were big enough to put a grown man in. And I don't know if he could be concealed in it. Maybe it was just up to up to his thighs or up to his knees, but he nonetheless was able to get in this basket and be lowered over a wall.

So these were large baskets and there were seven of them gathered up from the remnants of seven loaves of bread. And these loaves were not like what we think of loaves. We think of a loaf of bread as having enough bread for, you know, what, 15 sandwiches or something.

I don't know. These loaves were a little more like rolls, what we call rolls. A kind of flat bread, not really big loaves like like we have loaves of bread.

And so there's quite a lot of food was brought in. Now, we don't know where, how they, what they did with those seven big baskets full because they didn't take them with them. Because next thing we know, they're in a boat and they don't have any food with them.

So apparently they gave that food back to the multitudes, maybe to take home with them. Jesus did not like to see food go to waste. We know that because in the feeding of the 5,000, after everyone had eaten plenty, Jesus sent the disciples out to gather up the fragments.

He said that nothing be lost, that nothing be wasted. Isn't that interesting that he'd be concerned about that when, in fact, the bread was provided by a miracle. It's not like anyone went out and labored for that bread.

I mean, those five loaves and two fishes he broke in order to feed the 5,000. Those were, I mean, those cost somebody something. But by the time he fed thousands of people with them, you know, whatever fragments were there were miraculously provided, certainly.

And yet Jesus didn't want them wasted. Sometimes when things come easy, we don't steward them quite as diligently. But apparently stewardship is important no matter how God provides it.

Whatever we have may have come easy to us, may even come through a miracle. But we're still responsible to steward it. And Jesus didn't want anything to be wasted.

Now, those who had eaten were about 4,000. Now, Matthew's version says there are 4,000 men, not including women and children. So we're really looking at a much larger crowd.

If you add in the women and children, probably maybe 12,000 people, maybe more. And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and came to the region of Dalmanutha. Now, no one knows of any place named Dalmanutha.

Most of the cities and villages named in the Gospels are identified. Archaeologists have found them or there's even settlements still there. Dalmanutha, they have not yet been able to identify with anything.

But in Matthew's version, instead of Dalmanutha, it says Magdala in the region of Magdala. So Dalmanutha must have been in the same region as Magdala. Now, the only thing we care about Magdala is that that's where Mary Magdalene came from.

That's what Magdalene means. Magdalene means from Magdala. So Mary Magdalene was from this town.

We never find out when it was that she began to follow Jesus around. And I suppose it's possible that she began to follow him when he visited her town here or in the region of her town. But it's not necessary to assume that she could have met him anywhere because people from Magdala might find themselves in Capernaum or some other place where Jesus was ministering.

But this happens to be her hometown. And it's the only time we know of that Jesus went near there. And verse 11 says, And the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven, testing him.

But he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, Why does this generation seek a sign? As surely I say to you, no sign should be given to this generation. Now, they were asking for a sign from heaven. Jesus had been giving them signs, the Lord, I mean, his healings, the casting out of demons.

He had even raised one person from the dead by this time. He had fed the multitude just now, although the Pharisees may not have been there at the time. But the point is, he was continually giving what could be regarded as signs of the kingdom of God, signs that he was the Messiah.

But they wanted a sign from heaven. Apparently, they're thinking of something spectacular, like maybe what Elijah did, fire from heaven. I know the disciples once wanted to see that happen, too.

When the people of Samaria were not being hospitable to Jesus, the disciples, James and John said, Well, Lord, should we cast or should we call fire out of heaven on them like like Elijah did? You know, like seems like the obvious thing to do. Never done anything like that. No one's ever done anything like that except Elijah.

But, you know, if you give the word, I'll bet we could do it. And he said, You don't know what men are superior of. The man didn't come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

But I know that a lot of people would like to see a sign from heaven, fire fall from heaven or something. Unless you're living in Sodom and Gomorrah, then you wouldn't want to see it. But, you know, Lot's wife wanted to see it, you know, even that.

But her interest was fatal. God never has sent fire out of heaven except for one time. He has sent fire out of his presence elsewhere.

For example, out of the tabernacle, fire came out and consumed Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron. But the Pharisees were apparently wanting something that spectacular, something that's just a sign. Now, Jesus, all of Jesus' miracles served as signs, but they were also practical.

Jesus didn't do things just for show. He didn't do things just to inspire faith, although he did suggest that people should be able to have faith if they've seen what he did. But he didn't do it just for those reasons.

He did it to communicate something. As we've said, every one of his miracles, in one way or another, illustrates a spiritual lesson. Sometimes Jesus actually clarifies what that spiritual lesson is right after he does the miracle.

As in most cases in John's gospel, there's a miracle and then there's Jesus giving the spiritual application of it. Other times it's not given, but it seems obvious that there is. So he wasn't there just to give some kind of a sign to impress them.

He sighed, apparently getting tired of these people. He sighed deeply in his spirit and said, why does this generation seek a sign? Now, in Mark's gospel, he says, no sign shall be given to this generation. And he doesn't give any exceptions here.

But there was an exception in Matthew's parallel, which is found in Matthew chapter 12, Matthew 12, verses 38 through 40. It says, Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, Teacher, we want to see a sign from you. But he answered and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Now, here Jesus said the same thing he said in Mark. Only Mark, he doesn't give except for the sign of Jonah.

He just says no sign will be given to this generation. But in comparing these two passages, it's helpful to see exactly how the gospel writers covered the material of what they heard Jesus say. Certainly, Mark knew about that exception, except for the sign of the prophet Jonah.

But Mark left it out for whatever reason. And one reason I see that as interesting is that for whatever reasons, the gospel writers sometimes abbreviated things. And when you see one passage say that Jesus said something without giving the exception and the other parallel, he says it and gives the exception.

We have to assume that the exception is genuine. And whatever reason the other author had for leaving it out was not intended to conceal it, but simply to maybe just give the general rule without all the exceptions. But this is interesting, too, when you come to the issue of divorce as it's taught in the gospel.

Because only in Matthew's gospel does Jesus say except for the cause of fornication. When he says if a man divorces his wife and marries another, he commits adultery. Or if a man divorces his wife, he causes her to commit adultery.

In Matthew, he says that twice. Matthew 5.32 and Matthew 19.9. In both cases, Jesus says except for the cause of fornication. In other words, as Matthew records the saying of Jesus, the case of fornication is an exception to the general statement.

But in Mark chapter 10 and in Luke chapter 16, which also gives Jesus teaching about adultery, it doesn't give the exception. It just says whoever divorces his wife, marries another, commits adultery. And based on that shorter, that more abbreviated form, there are many Christians who say divorce or marriage are never, never permitted by Jesus.

But you see, it's the same kind of case as this. In Mark, he says there will be no sign given to this generation. But we know from Matthew that he actually did give an exception.

The sign of the prophet Jonah is an exception. Why Mark left the exception out, we don't know. But certainly the fact that he left it out doesn't mean that Matthew made it up.

And so also in the cases where, for example, the teaching about divorce does not mention any exception in Mark or Luke, but it does in Matthew. Well, we have to assume that the teaching that is fuller, the teaching that has the more detail, is supplementing what the others have left out. And so also with this, there will be no sign given to this generation.

Well, there will be one, the resurrection of Jesus, the sign of Jonah. Now, Mark 8, 13, and he left them and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. Now, the disciples had forgotten to take bread and they did not have more than one loaf with

them in the boat.

Then he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. So they reasoned among themselves, saying, It's because we have no bread. And Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not perceive yet nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? Having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand? How many baskets full of fragments did you take up? They said to him, Twelve.

And when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up? And they said, Seven. So he said to them, How is it you do not understand? Now, there's two things they didn't understand. The first thing they didn't understand was his words.

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. Now, what they didn't understand was that he's using the word leaven in a non-literal sense. Now, how would they possibly understand that to be a reference to bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod.

Well, immediately they thought, Leaven. Oh, he knows we don't have enough bread. He knows we're going to have to buy ingredients to bake some bread.

Maybe he tells us we shouldn't buy leaven from the Pharisees and Herod because they're bad guys. Maybe they'll poison us. Who knows? I mean, who knows how they're putting this together? But he said something about leaven and that made them think about bread.

And then their consciences smoked and said, Oh, we were supposed to get bread and we didn't get bread. He's alluding to that. He's being very subtle, but he's indicating that we're going to have to buy some bread somewhere.

We better beware of any bread that might have passed through the hands of the Pharisees or Herod because that might be tainted. I mean, it's not a very sensible thing for them to think. I wouldn't think that from the comment.

I wouldn't. I wouldn't imagine. But I guess they thought something.

They made the connection somehow. But Jesus didn't rebuke them for not understanding that he was using the word leaven figuratively. He rebuked them for thinking that he would be worried about them not having enough bread.

Now, it's not that they didn't have any bread. It says in verse 14, they didn't have more than one loaf. Now, for, you know, 13 men going to have lunch together.

Having only one of these little loafs was not really enough. Normally, they'd have to have probably at least one or more for each man. They were supposed to pick some up when they're in town, and they didn't buy it.

And they realized, oh, we're going to go hungry. This is going to be embarrassing, and we're going to have to admit to Jesus that we goofed up again here. And he doesn't care how many loaves they have.

How many does it take? With seven loaves, you can feed 4,000. With five loaves, you can feed 5,000. With one loaf, he could feed 13 men easily enough, and they should have known that, especially since they were just coming from the second instance of him multiplying loaves.

And when he says, don't you remember how much there was left over when we fed 5,000 and 4,000? Do you still not understand? And apparently what he's saying is, do you still not understand that I'm not worried about provisions? Haven't you learned yet that you don't have to worry about how much provision you have on hand if you're on Jesus's mission with him? Now, it's interesting that in general they were required to buy bread. That is, Jesus didn't just do miracles every meal. He didn't say, you know, scrounge around and try to get a crust of bread from somebody's lunch, and we'll just make a feast of it.

Generally speaking, they had to take responsibility. They had to shop for the bread. They had to work.

Probably not while they're walking around with Jesus they didn't do their work, but they had to do the normal things. They didn't just live with a magician. They didn't ride a magic carpet across the Sea of Galilee.

They had to row. Now, Jesus could get in the boat, and they'd find themselves immediately at the other shore, but most of the time they just had to row. And they must have really wondered, you know, if he can do this kind of stuff, why doesn't he do it all the time? And the reason is because they didn't need it all the time.

There are responsibilities we have that he expects us to do if we can, when we can. But when we can't, we don't have to worry that he can't take care of it. If we don't have enough on hand and we're going about his business, after all, he got them into the boat, he got them going across, they were going to need lunch sometime.

They were doing what he wanted to do. They should know that, okay, normally we're supposed to take care of this kind of thing, but we were just too busy. We just didn't do it.

We just forgot. But Jesus can handle it. You know, I mean, obviously, God can work miraculously.

Most of his provisions in our life are not intended to be miraculous. Most people work a regular job, and, you know, there's a cause and effect relationship between the work they do and the money they take home and so forth. But even if you work at a regular job most of the time, there are times when the money's short.

There's times when a special need comes up, a crisis, or a downturn in the income, for whatever reason. And then we worry. But see, even though the normal way that God has us provided for is through our working and our taking responsibility, when things beyond our control prevent that from being possible, well, Jesus is in the boat, too.

He can take care of everything necessary. And that's what he wants his disciples to learn. There's a balance between trusting God and doing the responsible thing.

If you say, I'm trusting God, but you're not doing the responsible thing, you're not trusting God, you're tempting God. What is the difference, by the way, between living by faith on one hand and tempting God on the other hand? For example, I don't have health insurance and don't want health insurance. Never have had it, never needed it.

And people sometimes say, well, you're tempting God. Well, I don't think so. I'm trying to live by the promises of God, not promises about healing or health, because I don't see those the way some people do.

I don't think God has promised that I won't get sick or that he'll supernaturally heal me if I do. But he has promised that he'll supply all my needs. And that if I seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all other things necessary will be added to me.

And if he leads me to get health insurance, then that's what I should do. If he doesn't, and I feel pretty strongly not to, then I figure that he can provide. And I've told you this story before, I only have had one time I needed medical care.

I've raised five kids to maturity. They're all grown up, and I was going to say gone, but one's back. But they're mostly independent.

And I spent 37 years raising kids and never needed to pay a medical bill anywhere and didn't have insurance. Because we didn't go to doctors, didn't need them. We would if we need them, but we didn't need them.

And the only time I ever had to go to a doctor was recently, I mean a couple years ago, when my younger son broke his arm and we got it fixed. We had to go to the hospital. It cost a couple thousand dollars, but God provided that.

He provided it the day before it was needed, actually. And because of that, I was glad I didn't have medical insurance on that occasion. I'm not saying you shouldn't.

You do what God wants you to do. I'll do what God wants me to do. But the thing is, my

son said to me, Don't you wish you had medical insurance now because you just paid \$2,000 to fix his arm? I said, if I'd been paying medical insurance, health insurance, for 37 years while I was raising kids, I would have spent \$200,000 for this arm, not \$2,000.

And, you know, I mean, there are times when God leads you to do something which is trusting him for things that he promised he can be trusted for. But that's not tempting God when you're following the promises of God. What's tempting God is when you're going off on your own, neglecting your own responsibilities that God may have given you and expecting God to miraculously come through for you.

Now, the disciples had forgotten to bring bread, but that doesn't mean that they were really negligent. How could 12 men who have that responsibility, all of them forget? They must have been extremely busy. They must have been very distracted with, you know, getting Jesus, you know, around and protecting him from the crowds and, you know, transporting.

They had a lot to remember. And in the course, they'd forgotten to take bread, but he wasn't worried about it. He wasn't scolding them for that.

He had something more important he wanted them to be concerned about, the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees and of Herod. Actually, in the parallel in Matthew 16, it's a little different because in Matthew 16, it's not the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod, but in chapter 16 and verse 12, it's... or verse 6, he says, take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. So the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees in Matthew is the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod in Mark.

And my guess is, he said, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and Herod. And Mark recorded two of those things, Matthew recorded two of them, but he said all three. But what is this leaven? Now, he doesn't ever explain that in this particular story here, not in Mark, but he does in Matthew.

It's not that he does, it's that the disciples actually got the message in Matthew. Because, as I said, the parallel is in Matthew chapter 16 and in verse 12, after he had scolded them, verse 11, actually in 12, Matthew 16, 11 and 12, he says, how is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread, but you should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread.

I guess they understand that he just spelled it out for them. But of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. So he's referring to the teachings, the word doctrine means teachings, the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

But that doesn't even exhaust the meaning of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, because over in Luke chapter 12, Jesus says in Luke chapter 12, verse 1,

beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Now, here he wasn't waiting on them to get it themselves. He told them the leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy.

So the teachings of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and their hypocrisy and the teachings of Herod. Now, Herod wasn't a rabbi. He wasn't a teacher.

But apparently the leaven of Herod was his just irreligious life, whereas the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees would be their hyper religious life. Now, by hyper religious, I don't mean to say that you can be too holy or too pious. You certainly can't love God too much.

But you can be more religious than God. You can you can mistake what matters to God. And what matters to God is not really religion, but righteousness.

Religion and righteousness are not the same thing. Righteousness has to do with your conduct, being fair, being just, being merciful, being faithful, being humble, being in character like Christ. That has very little to do with religiosity.

Religion has to do with the routines and rituals that go on in the course of a formal worship act, whether it's offering animal sacrifices, as it was in the Old Testament, whether it's remaining ceremonially clean from touching unclean things, whether it's avoiding unclean foods, whether it's making pilgrimages to the holy places on the holy days. These are religious actions. They have nothing to do with whether you're a good person or not.

You can be an evil person, do all those things. But God's looking for righteousness. Jesus said to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will in no wise enter the kingdom of God.

You have to be more righteous than they are. You couldn't possibly be more religious than they were. They were full time religionists.

That was their full time vocation, being religious, avoiding unclean things, keeping all the rules, the religious rules, not the moral rules, not the things that make a man a better man, the things that make a man a more religious hypocrite, really. That was the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They were hyper-religious and Herod was irreligious.

Herod had Jewish blood in him, not very much. He was part Edomite and part Jewish. But he had some obligation as the king in Israel, as a king in part of Israel, to observe the Jewish faith.

But he didn't. He lived with his brother's wife and things like that. So the leaven of the Pharisees was like the opposite of the leaven of Herod.

But both of them were leavens to beware of. Now, why does he call them leaven? Leaven, of course, means yeast. In one of the parables we encountered earlier in Mark, in Mark 4, I guess it was, it says that the kingdom of God is like leaven.

Or that might only be found in Matthew's list of parables in Matthew 13. I don't remember if Mark includes that one. Mark has a shorter group of parables than Matthew does.

But Jesus said, The kingdom of God is like leaven, which a woman put into three measures of meal until the whole was leavened. Now, how is the kingdom of God like leaven? Well, you put it into a certain element, society, like leaven put into a lump of dough, and it permeates it, it spreads, and it impacts it and transforms it. The kingdom of God transforms society into which it is introduced.

Now, there's other things that transform their environment, too. Not all of them for good. In fact, most of the things in the Bible that are called leaven are bad.

When Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5, a little leaven leavens the whole lump. He's talking about the toleration of sin in the church. If you tolerate sin in the church and don't require repentance, then that's going to leaven the whole church.

It's going to make the whole church corrupt. And so also the irreligiosity, such as Herod lived, and the hyper-religiosity, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees lived, both of them are attitudes that once they are allowed to take root, they do transform a person for the worse. They change a person.

They spread out and they infect and infiltrate every aspect of a person's life, like leaven does. And so he tells the disciples to beware of that. Now, in Mark 8, 22, we are introduced to the first and only, I guess the only miracle that Jesus did in two steps.

That is, his first action did not bring about complete healing, and so he did a second action and brought about the complete healing. It's a peculiar thing. Chapter 8, verse 22 says, Then he came to Bethsaida, and they brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him.

Now, Jesus had healed many blind people. He did it in various ways. Usually he touched them.

Sometimes he put mud in their eyes and told them to wash it out. Sometimes he just spit in their eyes. In this case, he used saliva also, as he had also used saliva in a healing of a deaf mute in chapter 7, verses 31 through 37, just at the end of the last chapter.

There was a deaf mute and Jesus used his saliva and applied it to the ears and the tongue also of the man to heal him. So, saliva is used here as well. So, he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town.

So, he was in town, but he didn't want to do the healing in the town. Apparently, Jesus was trying very hard to stay obscure and trying to keep people from getting all excited about the miracles. Because, well, I mean, if he wanted people to be excited about miracles, he could do that anytime he wanted to.

What he wanted was to find people who were interested in the kingdom of God. But he still wanted to help people. He wanted to do miraculous things to help people, but he didn't want to do it in such a way as to just make a big commotion and draw a bunch of curiosity seekers who didn't have any spiritual interest.

He'd already had that problem when he fed the 5,000. And so, he led him out of the town. And when he had spit on his eyes and put his hand on him, he asked him if he saw anything.

And he looked up and said, I see men like trees walking. And I'm not sure how a blind man knew what trees looked like, but perhaps he had felt them, you know. I think I can picture in my mind what a tree looks like.

And he probably felt humans too. So, he knew. You know, I've never been blind, obviously, but a blind person must make some kind of mental pictures in their eyes based on the other data they've taken from their other senses.

But he knew what a tree ought to look like. And the people he saw looked more like trees ought to look than people. You know, all green and stuff.

Not really probably green, but stiff and, you know, he could just see the vague images of upright beings moving about a little bit like trees were walking around. Couldn't make out human features. A little bit like I am when I don't have my glasses on now.

Then he put his hands on his eyes again and made him look up, and he was restored and saw everybody clearly. And Jesus sent him away to his house saying, neither go into the town nor tell anyone in the town. So, he had taken the man out of the town and instead of sending him back into town to advertise what Jesus had done, which would cause all kinds of crowds to come and, you know, restrict Jesus' movements, he said, you can just go to your house and you can tell the people at your home, but don't tell anyone in town.

Now, this story is told only in Mark's gospel, and so is the one of the deaf mute in the previous chapter. There aren't very many stories that are unique to Mark. Almost all the material in Mark is found also in either Matthew or Luke or both, but only a very rare selection are found in Mark alone.

And this is one of those parables, and it's a good thing that Mark included it since the others did not, because it tells us that Jesus, even when he healed miraculously, didn't always do it all at once. And sometimes we forget that, because we know he can heal all at once, and he had done so on many occasions, healed blind men and other kinds of

sicknesses all at once, even raised the dead all at once, just with a command. But perhaps he did it this way in order to show that it's not always all at once.

Sometimes you have to trust God for more than one touch. You have to trust God over maybe a protracted period of time, as little by little he causes your condition to improve. In this case, just two increments, but if two, there might be ten or twenty.

There might be a month or two or a year. Who knows? I mean, if Jesus doesn't always do it instantaneously, who can say how long he might stretch it out? The point here is that Jesus heals in other ways than just instantaneously. And that's important for us to know, because sometimes when we pray for the sick, they're not healed.

Or they might be seeming to get a little better, but then they're no better the next day or something. And we need to keep faith and keep asking God for, you know, another touch to heal them. And this is true also in other kinds of miracles, like demon possession.

I used to think that, you know, if we really had the authority of Christ, we'd just command the demons and they'd come all right out at once. I used to kind of mock people who would, you know, have protracted periods of trying to get the demons to come out of people. But I later learned that sometimes people have multiple demons and they don't all come out at once.

They do all come out eventually. Jesus does have the victory. And eventually, if the Christian's faith holds up, all the demons do come out, but not all at once.

And so this story indicates that the things, the kinds of things that Jesus did instantaneously many times, he on occasion would not do instantaneously, but do it in two stages. Now, some might think, well, it wasn't Jesus' choice to do it like this. It was the man's faith may have been weak.

That's possible. It is possible. I mean, obviously, Jesus often said to people when they received miraculous help, according to your faith be it unto you or your faith has made you well.

I'm willing to certainly consider that. The man may not have had complete faith that Jesus could heal him, but he had enough to let Jesus give him a little bit of encouraging progress, which no doubt made him feel more faith. Wow, I do see something.

Maybe you can heal me, you know. Try again. And it's possible that the man's faith had to be increased.

But that doesn't take away anything from what I just said a moment ago. That may be the very reason why God sometimes doesn't do things instantly, why he does things in stages, that our faith isn't all that great the first time, but he accommodates us. He gives little encouragements and little bits so that our faith can grow stronger and stronger.

And in a way, that's kind of the story of our lives with God. That's the story of how he builds us into people of great faith. Because the real miracle is for us to be totally spiritually transformed.

And the opening of the eyes of the blind is often in Scripture, sort of an analogy for spiritual awakening or spiritual awareness or spiritual improvement. After all, remember what Jesus said in verse 18 of this chapter to his disciples. Having eyes do you not see? Having ears do you not hear? Obviously, he's not talking about physical sight there, but he speaks about eyes and seeing, because sight is a metaphor for spiritual illumination.

And certainly, this man receiving his sight like this, it may be an image of even how God, as we grow, God illuminates us more and more until we see all things clearly. There's times early in our Christian life when we think we see a lot because we see more than we ever have before. But we don't realize that we're really only seeing men like trees walking.

We think we see more clearly everything. I would say that's my experience in my growth and my understanding of the things of God over the decades is that I'll see something more clearly than I did before. Now I think I see everything clearly.

But there's still bark on those people, still some leaves there, you know. And it's only as God makes, you know, gives incremental improvement that the light comes in greater clarity, and we grow in our knowledge of God that way. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3, 18, he said, we all with unveiled faces beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed from glory to glory into that same image.

And he says that when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we shall appear with him in glory in Colossians 4. And then in 1 John 3, John says, Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when he shows here, we shall be like him because we will see him as he is. Right now, even our vision of Christ might be like a tree walking.

We don't think of it that way. Maybe we do. Maybe we realize that we don't see Christ very clearly.

You know, I think of Jesus, and what am I picturing? Probably something that's no more really like him than a tree walking is like a man. But, that's okay. If I know that I'm only seeing a man like a tree walking.

What's really bad is when I think I'm seeing all things clearly, and I'm really just seeing a man as if he was a tree walking. And sometimes we get there. We think we see Jesus clearly.

But if we did, we would be like him. As John said, when he shall appear, we shall be like him because we will see him as he is. Not as we imagined him.

And so, as we behold, as in a glass of the glory of the Lord, we're changed from glory to glory into that same image, Paul said. And, so when Jesus did these miracles, they were physical miracles. But they were miracles to illustrate spiritual realities.

And I think that, I think those realities I've just been mentioning may be hinted at in this particular case. Well, it's gotten late enough that I'm going to have to close there. I was actually hoping to get through the whole chapter, but silly me.