

RTS Women's Study: The Gospel of Mark

#16: Mark 8:1-26: Learning to Fail

Intro: 50 First Dates

I. Sometimes We Are Forgetful (v.1-10)

A. Disciples Face the Same Problem as Before

- During the feeding of the 5000, there were many people with no food in a desolate place
- Now the feeding of the 4000 is a large crowd of people with no food in a desolate place
- The similarities between the two events are intentional! It makes us wonder if the disciples will do anything differently the second time around...

B. Jesus seems to prompt the disciples to remember

- In the feeding of the 5000, the *disciples* were the ones who raised the issue of people being hungry and without food
- But in the feeding of the 4000, *Jesus* is the one to bring up the problem of their hunger
- He seems to be prompting the disciples, as if to say, "Well, here we are again, what shall we do?"

C. But the disciples seem to have forgotten what happened before

- Notice the disciples' question: "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" (v.4)
- The reader is meant to notice the problem. How can the disciples ask this when they saw Jesus feed 5000 people before? What's wrong with them?
- Key lesson to learn: We are a forgetful people, making the same mistakes over and over
 - The Bible repeatedly calls God's people to remember!
"And you shall *remember* the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness . . . Take care, *lest you forget* the Lord your God." (Deut 8:2, 11)
 - Ever get frustrated when you fall into the same bad patterns again and again?
 - We need to work hard to remember our lessons from before and how God has blessed us in the past

II. Sometimes We Have Hard Hearts (v.11-21)

A. The Pharisees Had Hard Hearts

- They came and "argued" with Jesus (v.11)
- They insisted that Jesus give them a "sign" (v.11)
 - But they had already seen so many amazing miracles!
 - The Pharisees are like the Israelites in the desert—they had seen many amazing things but still did not believe
- Jesus is exasperated by their request: "he sighed deeply in his spirit" (v.12)

B. The Disciples Were Acting Like the Pharisees

- They had begun to argue about having no bread (v.14-17)
- But Jesus rebukes their lack of belief—did they not realize that Jesus always provides abundantly? He even forces them to remember the number of baskets left over during each feeding! (v.19-20)
- Be aware of the “leaven of the Pharisees” (v.15)
 - “Leaven” refers to the teaching or way of the Pharisees (Matt 16:12); in other words, beware of having a hard, unbelieving heart like the Pharisees that doubts the truths of God
 - Leaven is a fitting analogy because it spreads quickly and quietly—you don’t even know it’s there!
 - Key Application: Fight against periods of hardness and unbelief!

III. Sometimes We Lack Understanding (v.22-26)

A. Jesus heals a blind man in two “stages”

- At first, the man could see partially: “I see men but they look like trees” (v.24)
- Then, he could see fully: “he saw everything clearly” (v.25)

B. Jesus’ Miracle Was a Spiritual Lesson

- It wasn’t as if Jesus was unable to heal the man all at once
- The miracle was a lesson to his disciples that they see only partly—they have limited understanding—but at some point they will see more fully
- Notice he does the miracle right after v.21: “Do you not yet understand?”

C. Key Applications

- We all have blind spots and limited understanding
 - If Jesus’ own disciples didn’t “get it,” why should we think we always will?
 - This should lead to a humble self-awareness of our limitations
- Over time, God continues to grow us and change us
 - As we mature in Christ, we “see” more clearly
 - Be patient, realizing that you (and others) are a work in progress
 - Sometimes our growth comes in key moments (for the disciples it would be the resurrection that opened their eyes more fully)

Discussion Groups

1. Share some ways that God has blessed you or your family in the last year. Use this as a moment to “remember” God’s faithfulness.
2. Share a time when you felt like you had a hard/unbelieving heart about some issue in your life. How did it get resolved? How does this passage both warn and encourage you?
3. How does this passage help give you patience both for yourself and others when you just don’t “get it”? Can you look back and see how God has grown your understanding of certain truths over the years?